Exploring Leadership Identity Through Collaborative Learning in a Preparation Program

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Abstract

Educational leadership preparation and development has become a key educational reform strategy to provide more and better-prepared educational leaders (Hale & Moorman, 2003). This research answers the question, “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?” The researchers have developed a qualitative research template to locate individual respondents along a leadership identity (leader-centric to participative-centric) and problem framing (first order to second order change) continua. This paper describes the results of applying the research template to analyze writing samples submitted by five graduate students in a principalship program before participants began coursework and compares these results to a second writing sample collected after participants experienced an authentic problem-based course delivered through a cohort model. Results gathered at the end of the first summer’s coursework indicate shifts along the continuum of leader-centric identity and reveal an emphasis on second order change problem framing. To determine program impact, future research will analyze pre-program, end of course, and end of program writing samples to describe changes, if any, in leadership identity and problem framing perspectives.
The centrality of leadership to school improvement has been documented (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Although a leader’s influence on school outcomes is largely indirect, leaders influence school conditions and teachers’ work, which then affect school outcomes. After reviewing results from both qualitative and quantitative studies, Leithwood, Harris, and Hopkins (2008), came to the conclusion that “school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning” (p. 27). In recent years, how leaders are prepared has come under increased scrutiny. Policy makers, funders and educational experts strive to identify, and attempt to replicate, programs that effectively prepare future leaders who are able to lead school improvement resulting in enhanced student achievement (Levine, 2005; USDoE, 2005).

Increasingly, national attention on effective schools focuses on the issue of the quality of leadership preparation programs (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005). In response 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). State requirements, national accreditation recognition, and other factors, such as increased emphasis on school-university partnerships, have influenced program improvement and redesign work as well (Hale & Moorman, 2003). In order to engage in continuous improvement, it is essential for university preparation programs to critically examine the impact of the curriculum, learning experiences, and instructional delivery on the aspiring leaders enrolled in their programs (Murphy & Vriesenga, 2006) Such research contributes to the national debate surrounding leadership preparation effectiveness (Davis et al.; Orr & Pounder, 2007).
Purpose

In her research exploring the effects of structured learning experiences on the beliefs of pre-service educational leaders, Kathleen M. Brown states, “because beliefs can change as a result of experience, it is critical for preparation programs to examine the impact of their signature pedagogy of the cohort model, methods, the results of an analysis on a sample of participants as well as discussion and implications for further research, strategies on educational leaders’ attitudes, perceptions, and practices” (Brown, 2004a). The purpose of this study is to determine the nature of the impact, if any, of the first summer learning experiences of a leadership preparation program on pre-service leaders.

This paper represents the second phase of a broader research project. The first phase produced the research template that this study employs to determine the impact the university program has on the leadership identity and problem framing of program participants. Included in this paper are a brief explanation of the process used to develop the research template, description of key components of the discoveries reported in this paper will inform a larger, longitudinal study addressing the impact of the full program on successive pre-service students and will eventually offer comparison data between individuals and cohort groups served in four separate geographic areas. Anticipated expansion of this work will research the adopted leadership practices of graduates of the principalship program.

Leaders and Acts of Leadership

Arthur Levine’s (2005) critical report of the nation’s education leadership preparation programs generated a ripple of research examining the concepts central to educational leadership preparation. Indeed, scholars concerned with educational leadership preparation programs have
critically engaged these criticisms and given rise to theory and research that serves to undergird the work of this exploratory study.

The body of leadership research examining the context of educational leadership preparation programs indicates that the role of the principal has changed and evolved remarkably in the last two decades (Elmore & Fuhrman, 2001; Goldring & Schuermann, 2009; Murphy, 2002; Murphy, Hawley, & Young, 2006). The onset of standards-based learning and accountability has produced remarkable changes (Elmore & Fuhrman, 2001; Goldring & Schuermann, 2009; Murphy, 2002; Murphy, et al., 2006). Additionally, the failure of schools to address the alarming achievement gap has propelled an emphasis on campus leadership and a search for principals with the necessary skills and knowledge to meet accountability demands, (Banks, 1997; Brown, 2004b; Darling-Hammond & Friedlaender, 2008; Gooden, 2002; Jencks & Phillips, 1998). Effective principals must be able to lead campuses through data driven decision making processes, develop professional learning communities, facilitate community integration, articulate a common vision, and foster collaborative cultures of excellence (Copland, 2003; Knapp, Swinnerton, Copland, & Monpas, 2006; Wayman & Stringfield, 2006). Clearly, today’s principals are faced with mounting pressures that present a challenge for those charged with effectively preparing future leaders (Brown, 2004b; Darling-Hammond & Friedlaender, 2008; Murphy, et al., 2006).

For the purposes of this study, two primary streams of research are considered: 1) studies that examine the leadership styles, sensibilities, and identities, and, 2) research that examines leadership behaviors and practices designed to improve a school’s effectiveness. First, an overarching picture of what is considered to be effective leadership and effective leadership development in the evolving landscape of public education is presented as a backdrop.
Exploring Leadership

Analyzing literature which focuses on the school leader’s attributes, and self perception as agents of change and with a locus of control in relation to these mounting demands is the first stream of literature reviewed here and illuminates our study of instructional experiences that are geared to foster a more sophisticated leadership identity. While early leadership theory examined the notion of heroic leaders or “great men” who possessed personality traits and attributes that made them born to lead (Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002, p. 765) more current leadership theory accounts for the notion that effective leaders can be developed (Brown, 2004; Cowie & Crawford, 2007; Hall, 2006; Orr, 2007). The situational and relational aspects of leadership have been extensively examined in leadership theory (Engels, Hotton, Devos, Bouckenooghe, & Aelterman, 2008; Friedman, 2004; Goldring & Schuermann, 2009). Contemporary educational research accounts these elements through the contextual lens presented above. The literature further explores the impact of a campus leaders’ attitudes and beliefs on school improvement efforts (Brown, 2004; Engels, et al., 2008; Theoharis, 2008). The work of these researchers has served to provide evolving empirical models that operationalize the attitudes and beliefs of highly effective leaders while delineating specific leadership behaviors in a situational, relational, and political context.

Contemporary research casts a panoramic lens on effective leadership by encompassing issues relative to these attitudes and behaviors, while considering the situational and relational context (Brown, 2004a; Friedman, 2004; Theoharis, 2008). Understood as beliefs, values, and judgments, a leader’s disposition influences behavior and are thus of concern for scholars examining the challenges of leadership preparation (Brown, 2004b; Browne-Ferrigno & Johnson Fusarelli, 2005). Building on the work of researchers in the field of teacher preparation as well as the theoretical and methodological framework of critical political science (Bandura, 2001; Banks,
1997; Shields, 2004) leadership scholars have engaged a critical paradigm to examine the impact of leadership preparation (Brown, 2004b). The literature suggests that effective leaders are individuals who are deeply committed to notions of social justice and cultural awareness (Brown, 2004b; Theoharis, 2008). Preparations programs are grappling with the pedagogical challenge of fostering the expansion of aspiring leaders’ values, attitudes, beliefs, and dispositions (Brown, 2004a; Browne-Ferrigno & Johnson Fusarelli, 2005; Grogan, 2000). As the study of school leadership develops, the influence of leadership dispositions and attitudes emerges as a key element in leadership preparation programs (Jacobson, Brooks, Giles, Johnson, & Ylimaki, 2007; Marks & Printy, 2003; Theoharis, 2008).

Additionally, current research examines the role of critical reflection that is anchored in the collaborative coupling of scholarly inquiry and authentic learning (Brown, 2004b; Byrne-Jimenez & Orr, 2007; Jacobson, et al., 2007). The body of literature examining the practice of self-reflection relative to the cultivation of beliefs and values links to studies exploring the notion of leadership identity (Bandura, 2001; Brown, 2004b; Byrne-Jimenez & Orr, 2007). Through the experiences of collaborative critical inquiry, emerging school leaders expand their worldview and cultivate more sophisticated dispositions and identities (Brown, 2005; Byrne-Jimenez & Orr, 2007).

While a growing body of literature is exploring notions of leadership dispositions relative to the tenets of social justice (Brown, 2004; Theoharis, 2009) another strand of literature provides insight into the self-perception of emerging leader identity relative to personality factors including self-efficacy and locus of control (Engels, Hotton, Devos, Bouckenooghe, & Aelterman, 2008; Jacobson, et al., 2007; Judge, et al., 2002). Specifically, in a study of collaborative undergraduate student leaders Komives (2005) expands on the concept of the
development of leadership identity. Komives (2005) states, “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). 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). The intersection between the literature examining culturally responsive leadership dispositions and collaborative leadership identity serves as one theoretical underpinning of this study.

The second strand of literature that illuminates the research offered in this paper emerges from studies examining effective campus leadership practices, the development of flexibility in framing problems, and the implementation of collective action efforts designed to result in improved educational outcomes (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Edmonds, 1979; Elmore, 2000; Fullan, 2001; Hallinger, 2003). These theories of action rest on a conceptual triad that accounts for leadership traits, the relationship between leaders and followers, and situational conditions (Friedman, 2004; Stewart, 2006). Common to this body of research are the notions of first order and second order change. Leadership practices and behaviors that are geared toward first order change are characterized as “bounded, focused, linear, incremental, and problem and solution oriented,” (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003, p. 7). Second order change practices are characterized as “emergent, unbounded, complex, nonlinear,” and are “neither problem-nor solution oriented,” (Waters, et al., 2003, p. 7). The theory of Transformational Leadership is geared at attaining second order rather than first order effects (Hallinger, 2003, p. 338). In other words, leaders who engage in this theory focus efforts on changing the climate and culture of the campus by calling on shared values and beliefs of the followers rather than focusing efforts on the behavior of the followers.
Effective leadership practices have been offered by a wide array of researchers and span dimensional characteristics such as instructional leadership (Blase & Blase, 1998, 2003) distributed leadership (Brooks, Jean-Marie, Normore, & Hodgins, 2007; Harris & Spillane, 2008) and balanced leadership practices (Waters, et al., 2003). The literature thus offers an array of leadership perspectives and ways of framing issues that bring about varying magnitudes of second order change effects.

Developing leaders who have the ability to harness the collective vision of the faculty and implement democratic and transformational practices is a strong current in the literature (Brooks, et al., 2007; Browne-Ferrigno & Johnson Fusarelli, 2005; Cowie & Crawford, 2007; Darling-Hammond & Friedlaender, 2008). Leadership preparation programs are engaging innovative pedagogical methods designed to increase the flexibility of aspiring leaders to frame issues through second order change effects by implementing authentic learning experiences and reflective practice (Browne-Ferrigno & Johnson Fusarelli, 2005; Byrne-Jimenez & Orr, 2007). Scholars emphasize the need to implement such practices as case studies, internships, and collaborative learning experiences as instructional methods that promote the ability of future campus leaders to frame issues and lead school improvement efforts through collaborative second order interventions. As illustrated above, the literature regarding the cultivation of collaborative leadership identity and transformational leadership practices informs the work of researchers and scholars examining and implementing the reform of leadership preparation programs. These two streams of research provide the conceptual framework for this current study.
Description of the Signature Model

The signature model of the university program that is the subject of this study includes several key components associated with exemplary preparation programs: 1) the rigorous recruitment and careful selection of participants, 2) a cohort structure, and 3) an emphasis on powerful authentic learning experiences (Orr, 2006). Programmatic aspects of the model include Transition Camp, Foundations of Educational Administration (FEA) as well as additional coursework, and completion of a yearlong internship and participation in a two-semester reflective seminar. Components related to participant selection, the cohort delivery model, and FEA are discussed below.

Selection. The university principal preparation model actively recruits teacher leaders who have demonstrated abilities to apply informed practice with students as well as facilitate collaborative processes with peers. Candidates nominated by educational leaders, or self-nominated, submit a portfolio documenting evidence of current leadership accomplishments at the campus and/or district level and respond to a school data set from the perspective of an incoming principal.

University faculty members analyze portfolio artifacts for evidence of strong leadership potential and select candidates for site visits. The site visit team, consisting of a university professor, current student, and school district representative, interview and observe the candidate conducting his or her class, or serving in another job function. The results of the site visit combined with GPA, GRE, letters of reference and other application materials inform the final selection of the cohort members. Of the more than 100 nominations received, only 15-20 candidates are offered admission each year.
**Cohort development.** About a month before classes begin, the accepted students attend Transition Camp participating in activities intentionally designed to emphasize community building within the cohort. The students begin the one and a half day transition camp as strangers, but quickly begin to form relationships with each other. Key elements include discussion of readings, sharing of personal artifacts, and participation in a whole group scavenger hunt in order to locate useful campus buildings and other landmarks. The cohort model continues throughout the two-year program and is an integral part of the learning experienced during the first summer.

*Foundations of Educational Administration (FEA).* Though shown on transcripts as two separate courses, in practice, FEA is delivered as a single, cohesive class. FEA learning experiences have been intentionally designed so that cohort members 1) explore their own leadership identity; 2) confront and challenge their own assumptions regarding issues of equity and social justice (Brown, 2004b; Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2004); 3) examine schools and learning organizations through different frames (Bolman & Deal, 2002; Bolman & Deal, 2003); 4) investigate the myriad of roles that principals serve (Matthews & Crow, 2002; The Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008); and 5) explore alternative perspectives held by a variety of stakeholders served by schools (Bolman & Deal, 2002).

Group processes and barriers to collaborative productivity are surfaced and examined. Students are required to frame and re-frame their thinking through intentionally designed “active learning strategies” (Orr, 2006, p. 495) that include written reflections, responses to published case studies, debates, speakers’ panels, and journal article reviews that require critical examination of research studies. The role of the cohort is emphasized through team building activities as well as academic assignments that require everyone’s contributions. Through this
process, cohort members transition from a group of graduate students into a dynamic learning
team that works interdependently toward a common goal.

The second half of the summer program is devoted to collaboratively conducting a study of an area school (Garcia & Donmoyer, 2005). Acting as researchers, cohort members conduct an equity audit of the selected campus (Skrla, et al., 2004). Next, members generate qualitative data that includes an observation of the campus site, semi-structured interviews with staff, parents, administrators and community members and a neighborhood walk that includes gathering information from local residents and business providers.

Through the school study process, cohort members must navigate the technical and human issues involved in collaboratively completing a scholarly written and oral report of quantitative and qualitative findings supported by peer-reviewed research. Research-based suggestions for improvement are delivered through both the oral presentation to the principal, district supervisors, superintendent, staff, and community members as well as the final written report. Previous recipients of the school study have used the information provided to plan for improvement, thus the project serves an authentic purpose for both the cohort members and the studied school.

Over the next twenty months, cohort students engage in a series of prescribed courses delivered through the departments of educational administration, special education, and curriculum and instruction. During the final two semesters of the two-year program, cohort students complete a yearlong internship and participate in a two-semester reflective seminar. Though this university program has participated in a previous impact evaluation, the results were based on self-reports of graduates. While preparation programs have been urged to evaluate their
graduates, as well as evaluate the effect these graduates have on individual schools, few instruments exist to measure program impact.

**Method**

For the past several years, graduates and current students of the university principal preparation program have shared that the cohort model and school study were instrumental in their development as school leaders; however, systematic research had not yet been conducted to confirm these participant perceptions. The research design described here evolved out of our desire to discover ways to capture, catalogue, and analyze participant perceptions expressed prior to beginning the program and at the conclusion FEA. In order to identify perspectives, it was necessary to deeply examine individual written responses, therefore a qualitative methodology was selected in order to identify and study participants’ perceptions (Patton, 2002, p. 227).

**Research Questions**

In order to examine this area, two research questions emerged:

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?

The initial phase of this study, conducted in February 2009, addressed the first question and resulted in the development of a research template used to categorize leadership identity and problem-framing perspectives of participants prior to entering the program. A description of the process used to develop the template and definition of the components are included below. The second phase of the study, represented by this paper, addresses the second research question. In this paper we report the preliminary results of analysis of student writing and compare
perspectives expressed in a sample collected prior to entering the program with one composed after experiencing FEA as member of a cohort. The next phase of this research will be conducted in May 2011 and will include analysis of written responses collected at the conclusion of the program. The final phase of this multi-year research project will examine the actual leadership behaviors adopted by graduates after assuming a principalship.

Research Template

In the first phase of the study, researchers employed a grounded theory approach to develop the research template. Data sources were read line by line with discussion of possible start codes (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Enlisting a recursive process of analysis and ongoing meaning making between cases, (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) researchers noted patterns within the data and began to cluster the codes along two main themes: perception of leadership identity and platforms for problem framing. A research template (Crabtree and Miller, 1999) was developed and the initial data sources were re-coded according to the research template. The current version of the research template (Appendix A) used in this study, including definitions and examples associated with leadership identity (x axis) and problem framing (y axis) are included below.

Leadership Identity. As supported in the review of literature above, leadership identity concerns locus of control and is understood as the intersection of leadership dispositions and agency positionality. In other words, leadership identity surfaces the perceptions of the leader relative to power and influence. The spectrum of leadership identity described in this research includes five categories with the first three of these categories illustrating leader-centric aspects: leader in solitude, leader-dictated, and leader-driven, and two participative-centric categories: collaborative leader, and transformative leader.
In leadership identity theory, the stage *leader identified* supports a positional view of leadership as in the leader is the one that leads and gets things done (Komives, et al., 2006). As a group, the leader-centric categories in our research template all represent a locus of control that begins and ends with the leader. Even the label of the category begins with the word leader further emphasizing that the leader maintains control. On the continuum of the research template, the leader-centric categories move from the most leader-intensive, leader in solitude through leader-dictated and finally to leader-driven.

The first leader-centric category, leader in solitude, may be viewed as an oxymoron. One could argue that leaders, by definition, need followers; however, some leaders approach problems and/or enact processes in complete isolation. In our research, we categorized descriptions of making decisions, developing plans, setting goals, and/or executing processes in the absence of others as leader in solitude.

Unlike leader in solitude identity, where the leader works alone, in leader-dictated identity the leader determines the direction for improvement, or set goals, but then assigns others to complete tasks the leader has identified. This form of leadership is supported by the principles of bureaucratic administration that includes among other characteristics hierarchical structure, division of labor, control by rules, and impersonal relationships (Hanson, 2003).

The third category of “leader-centric” identity, leader-driven identity is used to categorize descriptions where the leader determines the initial task, process, or goal, but then works alongside others to collaboratively address the issue. Unlike leader-dictated, the leader-driven examples indicate active solicitation of input from stakeholder groups.

Two categories of leadership identity fall in the participative-centric area of the continuum, collaborative leader and transformative leader identity. Collaborative leader identity
is defined as leaders who share power and influence by working alongside parents, staff, students, central office, and community members to develop decisions, set goals, plan, execute and evaluation processes. While both the leader-driven and collaborative leader work with groups of people, the difference between the categories hinges on the magnitude of control the leader asserts during the process. If working with a group, the leader retains power and influence by pre-determining the goals, process and/or outcomes we categorize it as leader-driven – if the leader works as a member of the group – and the group determines the goals, process and/or outcomes – we categorize it as collaborative leader.

Transformative leader identity is the second category of “participative-centric” leadership on the research template. In educational literature, a transformative leader has been defined as one who “focuses on developing the organization’s capacity to innovate” (Hallinger, 2003, p. 330) In our research, we defined transformative leader identity as those responses demonstrating a synergistic or organic process that included commitment to achieving a shared goal, not dependent on the leader, which can actually exist outside the leader and without the leader’s direct influence.

An example of quotes from the study illuminates the differences between the leader identity categories. The full spectrum of leadership identity has been illustrated below (Table 1) beginning at one end of the continuum with leader in solitude where the leader, alone, establishes the campus goals and continues through an example of transformative leader identity that describes implementing programs that are both “created and led by staff”.

Exploring Leadership
Table 1: Leadership Identity Continuum Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<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>“As an administrator, I would establish four specific goals that address the needs of the school.”</td>
<td>“I will require teachers to make phone calls to each of their student’s parents regarding school events and programs.”</td>
<td>“I will facilitate a discussion by which staff will identify the importance of continued professional growth.”</td>
<td>“Together we will devise a plan for the first week of staff development and the first week of school.”</td>
<td>“Implementing programs that are created and led by staff, researched based, and having an increased focus on professional development opportunities are the means to increasing student achievement”</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Problem Framing. The second continuum represented on the research template along the y-axis, concerns the interventions, strategies and/or actions selected by the respondent to address low student achievement found in the school’s data. These categories of recommended actions and changes can be described in the context of either first order (student and family, teacher and classroom, administrator and administration, campus, or district) or second order (culture or capacity building) change.

First order change, described as “incremental” (Marzano, et al., 2005, p. 66), does not require cultural shifts and can often be accomplished within the existing structures of the organization. In schools, examples of first order change include setting goals, monitoring instruction, and providing interventions to students or families (Hallinger, 2003). The following includes a definition and examples of the five categories we note as first order change, student and family, teacher and classroom, administrator and administration, campus, or district.

Student-level factors are defined by Marzano et al. as “home environment, learned intelligence and background knowledge, and motivation” (2005, p. 82). Problem framing located in the student and family category appear to assume that the problem lies in either the students or parents. Intervention examples include instituting mandatory after school tutorials, reward and
punishment systems for behavior, grades, and/or attendance and parent nights to teach parents how to help with homework.

Actions associated with the second problem framing category, teacher and classroom frame, include strategies that directly impact teachers or instruction such as lesson planning and design; purchase and distribution of vendor products; monitoring of lesson planning, lesson delivery, assessment results and proscribed professional development. While educational research supports that the number one predictor of student achievement is the quality of instruction (Marzano, Gaddy, & Dean, 2000), it should be noted that actions associated with this category are first order change strategies that are unlikely to increase the capacity of teachers to improve student learning.

For the purposes of this research, the administrator and administration frame includes strategies that required changes in administrator behavior in the areas of supervision, monitoring and communicating expectations. The role of the principal is complex (Matthews & Crow, 2002; The Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008) and has been linked to both student achievement (Cotton, 2003) and school success (Leithwood, Harris, Hopkins, 2008; Marzano, et al., 2005); however, the first order change strategies coded administrator and administration represent compliance rather than innovation.

Two additional categories were added to the research template during this phase of our study, campus and district problem framing. The campus problem frame category describes first order change interventions that impact the entire school such as schedule changes, implementing a school wide vocabulary program, or other campus level interventions that do not represent culture or capacity building. The final category, district problem frame describes interventions
that appear to be outside of the control of the campus such as reduction in enrollment to address overcrowding or requesting revision of district requirements.

The two categories of second order change are culture and capacity building. In contrast to the first order change categories depicted above, which may only result in re-arrangement or augmentation of existing structures and systems, the second order change categories describe new patterns of thinking and behavior (Leithwood, 1992). Changes in organizational culture as well as increased capacity of members within the organization to adopt and lead the change effort can occur “without direction from above” (Hanson, 2003, p. 338).

An organization’s culture includes the operating norms and mental maps that members use to make decisions and select behaviors (Deal & Peterson, 1999). Culture has a profound impact on the way schools do business and it has been suggested that “efforts to reform education are actually efforts to change the culture of districts, schools, and classrooms” (Finnan & Meza, 2003, p. 85). Culture problem framing examples include focusing on vision, mission, commitments, culture of shared accountability and/or creating new structures to foster collaboration or organizational learning.

The final second order change category is capacity building. Like culture, capacity building has been connected to improved educational outcomes (Lambert, 1995, 2005). In this study, capacity building has been defined as those actions or strategies designed to increase the ability of the members of the school community to respond to its own needs. Examples coded as capacity building include developing professional learning communities, teacher designed network groups, job embedded professional development, engaging in lesson study cycles, building student capacity through meta-cognition and habits of mind. The capacity category requires active engagement and not merely passive participation.
The research categories described above serve as a framework to analyze a participant’s written responses and locate examples of leadership identity and problem framing. By arranging the categories along two continua, researchers use a preponderance of evidence to establish a location of leadership identity as either within the leader-centric or participative centric range and determine problem framing as concentrated in either first order or second order change.

Data Collection and Analysis

For the purposes of this paper, researchers conducted a document analysis on two data sources (sample one and sample two) employing the research template described above. Sample one: As part of the portfolio admission process, candidates to the principalship program are required to submit a narrative from the perspective of an incoming principal in response to a school’s state achievement data, Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), and parent/student/teacher survey results. The data set indicates that the sample school received a state rating of Academically Unacceptable and has also failed to meet AYP. Sample two: After completing FEA, a two-session summer course that represents twelve (12) class hours, students submitted write a response to the school study developed by the cohort as though they were the incoming principal. Both sample one and sample two required the student to describe the processes employed to determine and address campus needs through a plan of action.

Prior to beginning analysis of the samples, all personally identifying participant information was removed and each sample was assigned a code. Two researchers worked together and analyzed a single sample using HyperResearch software and collaboratively assigned codes from the research template. To further calibrate results, each researcher coded a sample one source separately and then compared results. This process continued for three additional samples. Once inter-rater reliability had been established, the researchers proceeded to
code the remaining sample one responses. After all 15 sample one responses were coded, the researchers compared their results and discussed any differences noted and came to agreement on coding sections of text. This same collaborative process was repeated for the sample two files. Once all sample one and sample two sources had been coded by both researchers, the researchers discussed the results and assigned a leadership identity and problem framing category based on a preponderance of evidence contained in each sample. This paper outlines the results of analysis for five (5) of the 15 students included in the 2009 cohort. The four of the participants selected presented a strong representation of both leadership identity and problem framing thus enabling a deep and thorough examination of both the students’ changing perspectives as well as the robustness of the research template. The fifth participant was selected due to an absence of leadership identity and problem framing presented in sample one. The analysis of the remaining ten (10) students will be included in a future paper.

Assumptions

The researchers acknowledge a constructivist view of leadership and leadership research that assumes that identity, agency, self-efficacy and perceptions are socially constructed, and are changed and influenced through interaction, experience, and self-reflection (Bandura, 2001, Brown, 2005). Further assumptions include that the written products of student responses to authentic school data sets can be used to interpret an individual’s perception of leadership identity and platform for problem framing and that these perceptions and platforms may change as a result of exposure to purposefully designed learning experiences delivered through a cohort structure.
Research Findings

In this section, we explore the findings related to a subsample of five (5) members of the 2009 principalship cohort students, referred to in this paper as Participants 001 - 005.

To answer the first research question, “What perspectives do pre-service leadership participants bring into a principalship program?” we analyzed the entry problem based submission of five (5) participants. We applied the research template, relying on a preponderance of evidence to locate each participant’s leadership identity and problem framing prior to entering the principalship program. The result of this initial analysis located three of the five participants (001, 002, 004) as strongly leader-centric, one as leader-centric moving toward participative-centric (003), and one participant (005) whose entry submission lacked the quantity of information needed to make a leadership identity determination.

In the area of problem framing, application of the research template on sample one, located two of the participants’ responses (001, 002) as strongly situated in first-order change, one participant (004) whose submission had evenly addressed both first and second order change, one participant (003) whose response supported a preponderance of second order change problem-framing, and one participant (005) whose submission did not include enough information to allow researchers to make a problem-framing determination.

To address the second research question, “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?” we analyzed responses from these same five (5) participants submitted after completing FEA. The results of this analysis revealed that examples of leader-centric leadership identity had shifted from higher concentrations of leader-dictated responses to a
heavier representation of leader-driven descriptions and substantive examples of collaborative leadership identity. Researchers also noted the majority of problem framing for all five (5) participants in the sample two indicated a strong emphasis on second order change.

Results for each individual participant that include sub-areas of leadership identity and problem framing are outlined below. Note: due to the desire to maintain confidentiality within the small sample, information related to participant demographics (gender, ethnicity, job role, years in education) will not be available at this stage of the research.

**Participant 001**

In the entry problem-based sample, Participant 001 was found to exhibit a preponderance of leader-dictated leadership identity and first order change problem framing. Analysis of the second sample indicated a shift to an even divide between leader-driven and collaborative leader identity and problem framing with an emphasis on second order change. The following includes excerpts from both writing pieces.

Entry examples of leader-dictated identity included how to address discipline, develop the school’s mission, “I would work to establish both a mission statement and to set a school climate that screams education matters and everyone can succeed”; as well as the approach adopted for instructional leadership that describes a passive role for teachers:

the administrative team would divide among departments and periodically go in and perform “snap-shots” looking for effective teaching practices… The administrative team would share these results with teachers, when appropriate with the entire faculty, in order that as a collective whole areas of excellence and areas needing improvements are identified. Administrators would be asked to be prepared to share findings. Administrators will present graphs of data results and other visuals with each department.

In the second 001 sample, researchers noted a shift toward more leader-driven and collaborative leadership as in this example of instructional leadership that, while still leader-centric, involves teachers as participants in the observation process, “I will require teachers to
observe other teachers implementing more innovative lesson designs and then to partake in a
debriefing of the observations exploring ways that he/she could incorporate new ideas into their
own teaching.” The participant’s approach to discipline has also moved from being solely
worked on by the assistant principals to “I will continue to hold teachers accountable for
handling their own behavioral issues with students.” Finally, the following quote,

Understanding that I can only do so much and that as a team we can accomplish much more together and knowing that I have a voice and agenda of my own, I will seek to merge both my ideas and the other leaders’ ideas for an outcome far greater than any I could design alone

is followed by deep descriptions of collaborative processes that include teacher leaders organized
in leadership teams to develop campus goals, professional development, and design the
beginning of the year meetings. In this second sample, Participant 001 acknowledges not only the need to work collaboratively, but also addresses issues of trust, “I feel I need to earn trust and work alongside the faculty as much as possible as early as possible”.

In the area of problem framing, while Participant 001’s entry sample included some processes related to culture and capacity building, the majority of interventions addressed first order change related to 1) administrators: more consistency in addressing discipline, increased visibility in hallways and classrooms; 2) teachers: serving before school duty, standing by classroom doors during passing periods, passive receipt of both professional development and feedback on instruction; and 3) students: identification of students who had failed achievement tests, creation of tutorials, and providing rewards for good behavior.

The second sample for Participant 001 includes far fewer references to first order change, and a profusion of second order change examples. This second sample approached changing the school culture in a variety of ways and addressed how the vision would link campus improvements together, “Everything we do or present will tie back to the established vision
adhering to norms and agreements”. Capacity building examples included increasing teachers’ ability to lead professional development, “empower and train them to help facilitate the activities for the whole group staff meeting”; facilitate team meetings; mentor new teachers; and set personal goals supported by plans to meet these goals. These efforts to build capacity also support collaborative leadership systems as seen in this quote:

These campus improvement committees would be charged with reviewing the data associated with their topic, designing and administering a method, possibly in the format of survey(s) to gather more information and data and finally after reviewing results and findings submitting specific recommendations for a course of action to address the identified areas of need which includes a timeline and clear attainable goals.

A comparison of analysis results for Participant 001 supports shifts in both leadership identity and problem framing. Similar shifts were noted for Participant 002.

**Participant 002**

The analysis of the entry sample for Participant 002 indicated a leadership identity of leader in solitude and an emphasis on first order change problem framing. Leadership descriptions typically included “I” as in the following examples, “I researched the standards to ensure appropriate planning”; “I chose to focus on one area that has stayed consistent in regards to the achievement gap”; and “my focus will be Math participation and performance”.

It is interesting to note that while the specific leadership descriptions are from a leader in solitude perspective, this entry sample ends with the following quote, “It will take full effort from the principal, administrative team, and teachers to provide rigorous curriculum, instruction, and assessment to ensure all students have academic success”.

Participant 002’s problem framing before entering the program focused almost exclusively on first order change. Administrators were to examine lesson plans and teacher designed assessments, conduct walk-throughs and distribute feedback, share data, “provide
meaningful staff development” and “create a system to increase participation on TAKS testing day”. According to the entry sample submitted, teachers were expected to comply with directives and turn in lesson plans, utilize district benchmarks and learning guides, follow the scope and sequence, attend meetings and trainings, etc. While teachers are expected to meet in grade level teams and “turn in minutes” there is limited evidence of processes associated with capacity building and no mention of developing a common vision or mission, or working to establish team norms or other areas related to developing campus culture.

The second sample, revealed continued descriptions of leader in solitude, a preponderance of examples of both leader-dictated and leader-driven identity and limited descriptions associated with collaborative leadership. Thus, researchers determined Participant 002’s end of the summer sample continued to represent a leader-centric identity. Problem framing in the second sample focused on “creating a vision statement, accountability for collaboration and resources, systems, and community outreach” and developing processes for conducting equity audits. These descriptions directly addressed culture as well as capacity building.

While researchers note a shift in leader identity for Participant 002, the shift is only from the leader-centric category of leader in solitude to a combination of leader-dictated and leader-driven. The problem framing shifted from first order change without any mention of factors associated with culture and capacity building, to second order change represented by a plan mostly predicated on developing vision, mission, norms and conducting an equity audit.

Participant 003

In the sample submitted prior to program entry, Participant 003 states,
As the new principal…I have a goal to transform this struggling school into a learning community. In this learning community, failure is not an option. Through our collaborative efforts, we will create systems that will help every student achieve success.

The rest of this participant’s initial plan includes evidence of both leader-driven and collaborative leader descriptions, hence the researchers determined an initial leadership identity of leader-driven traveling toward collaborative leader. While problem framing in the initial sample included both first order and second order examples, it was heavily weighted toward capacity building. Capacity building references often appeared hand in hand with culture as in these two examples: “work on the campus environment, including communication from administration, opportunities to collaborate, meaningful staff development, and instructional use of data will strengthen morale and instructional practices” and “share benchmark data in team meetings so all teachers can share accountability”.

In sample two, researchers noted evidence of leader-driven as well as collaborative leadership identity. An example of leader-driven identity included the process to address the campus vision:

I will continue to share my vision of Linder. I will also solicit other ideas for visions of Linder to help me identify areas for professional development. As I talk with faculty and staff members, I will attempt to find out what insights they can offer concerning current programs and current systems.

While this passage includes seeking input from faculty and staff, in order to be considered an example of collaborative leadership, the leader would need to work side by side with others to develop the vision, and not merely seek input after the principal has shared his/her vision.

The second sample continued to primarily address second order change and included the need to develop trust through transparent leadership, “I must start building trust between myself and my staff. This trust can only be built after I have opened myself up to my staff so that they
know who I am and what I believe”. Examples of capacity building relied on teacher leaders and included specific resources to develop facilitation skills:

Team leaders could work together to create sample agenda items that they could then use throughout the year to assist them when creating agendas. While this list would be general, team leaders can be more specific on their actual agendas. To help the team leaders develop their leadership skills, I will provide them with a copy of Facilitation Skills for Team Leaders.

Though the second sample still includes several examples of collaborative leadership, the results for Participant 003 demonstrate a shift away from collaborative leader toward descriptions associated with leader-driven identity. Participant 003 was found to have entered the program already with an emphasis on second order change problem framing and after FEA continued to focus on culture and capacity building.

*Participant 004*

After analyzing the entry sample for Participant 004, we determined a strong leader-dictated identity and problem framing that referenced both first order and second order change with an emphasis on first order change. Participant 004 expressed the desire to build trust and develop a collaborative community of learners, “Honesty, respect and trust must be earned, and this first meeting is crucial to starting off on the right path to building the campus into a collaborative community of learners”; however, the initial plan he/she submitted emphasized a top down approach. In the following example,

In an effort to build a positive and professional work environment and demonstrate to the staff that their time is valuable, I would allow staff members to leave early on the last day of a work week, and not require lesson plans to be completed until the first day back of a new week. This would allow teachers to rest after a long week, and regroup for the upcoming week.

Participant 004 states he/she wants to build a “positive and professional work environment” (second order change - culture), but then describes a leader-dictated system to “allow” staff to
leave early and delay turning in required lesson plans until after the weekend (first order change – teacher/classroom frame). Researchers noted this pattern of misalignment between a stated desire for improved culture or capacity building combined with a leader-dictated approach emphasizing first order change strategies throughout the initial sample.

In contrast, Participant 004’s second sample describes leader-driven and collaborative leader identity. Problem framing shifts to a stronger emphasis on second order change as well. This combination of a stated desire for collaborative leadership with an emphasis on capacity building associated with second order change is illustrated in this example:

In order to promote trust, administration will utilize a collaborative effort for budgeting (Matthews & Crow, 2003). With representatives from each grade level, special areas, support staff, and parent teacher association, the allocation of the resources available will become a discussion where all stakeholders have a voice.

It should be noted that researchers did not locate any examples of leader-dictated identity in the second sample submitted by Participant 004. Therefore, it was determined there had been a shift in both leader identity from leader-dictated to leader-driven/collaborative leader as well as a shift in problem framing from first order to second order change.

Participant 005

Participant 005 submitted an entry sample that detailed a thorough analysis of the data set and included specific and measurable goals, but did not provide a plan to address the goals. While the final paragraph of sample one reads, “Addressing the issue with faculty and staff, empowering the entire campus/village to model, and providing effective and inviting interventions will lend to the academic success of the student population at Anywhere Elementary School” there is not enough information included in the piece to make a determination of initial leadership identity or problem framing.
Analysis of sample two revealed nearly equivalent evidence of leader-driven, “I will assist teachers in their transition from good to great with regard to increasing rigor for our learners,” and collaborative leader identity, “Collaboration will continue through efforts of deprivatization throughout the school year, such as the sharing of: planning, generating assessments, and student and class achievement data”.

While there were examples of both first order and second order change, the sample two plan emphasized culture and capacity building and even addressed capacity building with students as demonstrated in this excerpt, “Students need to be empowered to take responsibility for their own learning. Our school needs to ensure that this occurs by making the necessary resources available to all”.

With Participant 005, we will not be able to develop a full analysis from pre-program to post-program but in the next phase of the study will compare the leader identity (leader-driven and collaborative leader) and problem framing (second order change) demonstrated in the second sample with the one received at the end of the program.

The findings represent a range of leadership identity and problem framing within both the samples submitted before participants enrolled in the principalship program and those submitted after completing FEA. A discussion of the findings follows this section.

Discussion

The website of the principal preparation program included in this study declares:

Creating successful schools takes more than the efforts of a single leader. Deep, lasting success results when a leader harnesses the collective capacity of students, staff, parents, central office support and community members to develop a shared vision and design, implement, and sustain effective, collaborative systems. Our program participants learn how to accomplish this.

This statement represents the intention of the principalship program to develop graduates with participative-centric leadership identity focused on second order change problem framing. In this
study, researchers examined writing samples submitted prior to beginning the program with those received at the conclusion of the first summer’s coursework. While leader identity remained primarily in the leader-centric area of the continuum, in three of the five participants, leader identity traveled from leader in solitude and leader-dictated categories toward a greater emphasis on leader-driven and collaborative leader identity. Researchers noted that all participants included at least some mention of both first order and second order problem framing in samples submitted before entering the program; however, the second samples all emphasized culture through strategies to develop a coherent vision and mission and provided multiple examples of capacity building with stronger reliance on teachers as leaders. These findings suggest shifts in leadership identity and problem framing did occur after participants experienced purposefully designed, learning experiences delivered through a cohort model.

While the research template developed for this study includes separate continua for leadership identity and problem framing, it can be postulated that there is a relationship between these two concepts. By its nature, second order change appears dependent on collective rather than solitary effort. The leaders’ locus of control is distributed, and shared throughout the organization (DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005) and provides a wider lens or frame for implementing change. To produce second order change, effective leaders emphasize collaboration in all aspects of the system resulting in the cultural transformation of the organization (Hallinger, 2003; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Kenneth Leithwood, et al., 2008; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Sergiovanni, 1998). Interestingly, developing a strong collaborative culture on a campus is often connected to leadership behaviors and interventions that emphasize culturally responsive pedagogy and instructional methods, reflective practice and transformative interventions (Friedman, 2004; Nieto, 1999).
Though these are early findings developed from a subsample of participants, this stage of our research is supported by previous studies of how leader identity develops as well as the ability of intentionally designed learning experiences to impact leadership growth. Previous research has concluded leadership is not a fixed, inherent trait and can be developed. Furthermore, Komives’s (2005) study suggests that early leadership identity is consistent with the understanding of a solitary locus of control, which our research categorizes as leader in solitude. After just the first 12 hours of coursework, three of the five participants included in this study appeared to move from leader in solitude and leader-dictated identities toward leader-driven and collaborative leader identity. Other researchers have also concluded that shifts in leadership identity occur through experience and reflection, to an emerging understanding of leadership as collaborative - contingent on systemic, relational, and cultural conditions (Edmonds, 1979; Engels, et al., 2008; Friedman, 2004; Fullan, 2001; Leithwood, et al., 2008).

Not all shifts in leadership identity traveled in the direction of participative-centric leadership. The second sample for Participant 003 suggested movement away from collaborative leader toward leader-driven identity. This backward shift conforms to leadership identity development (LID), which describes stages of leadership development that are both linear and cyclical. “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). It will be interesting to determine if any changes are noted in leadership identity after participants complete the full two-year program.

While the results of leadership identity remained within the leader-centric area of the continuum problem framing appeared to swing from first order to second order change. In the
second sample, participants revealed a significant drop in first order change examples and a preponderance of second order change problem framing. This is good news for a principal preparation program as changes in culture and capacity building are considered essential in closing achievement gaps and turning around low performing schools (Portin, et al., 2009).

What might account for this dramatic shift in problem framing perspective? We offer three possible explanations: 1) actual change in problem framing perspective as a result of intentionally designed FEA coursework; 2) findings identified in the collaboratively completed school study influenced individual responses in the second sample; or 3) student participants may have adopted a second order problem frame to comply with grading expectations. We will review each of these possible explanations below.

FEA coursework has been intentionally designed so that students critically examine and confront their personal beliefs associated with equity and student achievement. For both sample one and sample two, participants received data sets indicating inequities in student achievement. In our research, we note that what a person focuses on changing may indicate what he/she believes is the source of the problem. If the majority of interventions described were at the student and family level, (tutoring, rewards and punishment, parent information nights) this implies the participant has determined that the students and family are the cause of low achievement and must be remediated. Similarly, if the participant’s interventions were centered on first order teacher or classroom changes, such as mandatory submission of lesson plans, increased monitoring of instruction – then it may be inferred that he/she thinks teachers are the source of the low achievement. Learning experiences included in FEA have been intentionally designed to cause participants to question these deficit-thinking models (Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2004) and begin to understand the impact of low expectations on student
achievement. Throughout the summer coursework, students are expected to comprehend the transformative power of developing common visions, cultivating beliefs and attitudes relative to social justice, viewing problems from a capacity building frame rather than a deficit frame, and fostering second order change through structures and systems that promote a positive school culture. These learning experiences in FEA could account for the increase in descriptions found in the second sample that concentrated on developing the school’s culture through changes in attitudes and beliefs supported by systems that built both individual and group capacity.

We acknowledge there may be alternate explanations for both the shift in leader identity and problem framing. Embedded in the school study results, which served as the sample two data set, are research-based recommendations developed collectively by the cohort members. These recommendations emphasized concepts essential to participative leadership and second order change and may have influenced the individual products that served as sample two. Thus, the second order change focus in sample two may be attributed to the group outcome devised by the cohort as a whole rather than an individual outcome formed by each participant. In future research, the second sample will not be related to the school study developed by the cohort.

Finally, it is possible that as students gain a clearer understanding of program expectations they will craft their products to fulfill these expectations – thereby pleasing the professor in order to gain a better grade. The final paper in FEA, which served as the second data source for this study, is a graded assignment challenging the students to place themselves in the role of the principal of the school the cohort has studied together. To reduce the influence that grades may have on the research, in the future the second sample will not be a graded assignment.
While the results of this study are encouraging, we acknowledge several limitations to this research. First and foremost, all of the researchers have a direct connection to the principalship program and have contributed to the creation and delivery of the learning experiences included in FEA. Since all members of the research team have direct knowledge of the students in the program, an attempt has been made to mask the identity of individual participants during analysis. These potential sources of bias will be addressed in later phases of the study by inviting other researchers who do not have direct contact with the program or participants to analyze and categorize samples.

Further, we acknowledge the small sample size analyzed for the purpose of this paper represents the findings from only five of fifteen participants in the 2009 cohort. The next stage of research, which we expect to conduct in May 2011 will include all cohort members and compare the results of at least three data sources. Finally, the research template developed for this study is still evolving. Through successive application of the categories to increasing numbers of written samples, it is likely this instrument will continue to be modified. Typically, each sample analyzed includes descriptions associated with more than one leadership identity and problem framing platform. While exact measures are not expected in qualitative research, to increase the utility of the template, we will continue to refine how to determine each individual’s leadership identity and problem framing location on the continua.

The literature examining effective principal preparation programs emphasizes research-based content relative to effective school leadership, the Cohort Model, and problem-based learning experiences (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005). FEA has been intentionally developed to align with these components. The data suggests that the combination of the cohort model, school study project and other FEA learning experiences contributed to
shifting the perspectives of the sampled participants in both leader identity and cultivating second-order change problem-framing.

**Implications**

Previous research has concluded that leadership can be developed (Komives, 2005) and principal preparation is enhanced through challenging and reflective content (Orr, 2006). While the principal preparation program in this study already exhibits components associated with effective preparation practices such as rigorous selection, a cohort delivery model, and coursework that includes the intentional development of learning activities that build both individual and group capacity, the results of this research will be used to further refine and enhance the university’s signature pedagogy model.

The results of this phase of the research project suggest the cohort delivery model combined with the school study project and other learning experiences present in FEA have contributed to shifts in both leadership identity and problem framing in a small sample of participants. These results may inform the practice of other principal preparation programs seeking ways to increase participative-centric leadership identity and second order change problem framing in their students. Other preparation programs that already include powerful learning experiences similar to FEA may wish to adopt the research template, or other instruments, to analyze the impact their program is having on participants attitudes, beliefs, and more importantly leadership behaviors.

Finally, this study illuminates areas for future research that include the following questions: How do perspectives expressed in students’ class work inform actual leadership practices during and after completion of a principalship program? How are a principal’s
leadership identity and problem framing perspectives related to student achievement, teacher quality and retention, and community building?

Conclusion

The university involved in this research study has developed a signature pedagogy delivered through a cohort model that requires aspiring leaders to be both self-reflective and to collaboratively engage in deep dialogue and problem-solving around issues of equity and student achievement. Though the signature pedagogy exhibits several characteristics associated with exemplary leadership preparation programs (Orr, 2006) this model has not been directly evaluated for effectiveness. While some programs have used self-reports to determine impact (Brown, 2004a) researchers chose to analyze individual narrative responses to problem-based activities required in the selection and admission process and at the close of the first summer semester to determine what shifts, if any, were present in leadership identity and problem framing. Results gathered at the end of the first summer’s coursework indicate shifts along the continuum of leader-centric identity and reveal an emphasis on second order change problem framing. To determine program impact, future research will analyze pre-program, end of course, and end of program writing samples to further describe changes, if any, in leadership identity and problem framing perspectives.
References


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