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EXPLORING SCHOLAR–PRACTITIONER

LEADERSHIP: SUPERINTENDENTS' APPLICATION OF THEORY TO

PRACTICE IN TEXAS PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS

by

Michael D. Jones, B.B.A., M.Ed.

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

Stephen F. Austin State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Doctor of Education

STEPHEN F. AUSTIN STATE UNIVERSITY
(May 2018)

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study was designed to investigate the methods of practice employed by Texas school superintendents who have completed a doctoral program centered on scholar–practitioner leadership. The purpose of this study was to explore and describe how serving superintendents apply their prior learning and knowledge to the articulation and translation of their district's mission/vision. The study described how six serving superintendents translate theory to practice by inquiring how each participant articulates the district's mission/vision. Through the analysis of face-to-face interviews, phone conversations, emails, and informal observations recorded in a researcher's journal, four common elements of scholar–practitioner leadership practice were identified by the researcher. The four common elements of practice were: ensuring the district's vision, mission, core values, guiding statements, and strategic plan is aligned from top to bottom throughout the district; creating trust and vision alignment with the school board; leadership team relationships and modeling; and inviting community input and creating partnerships. In addition, four common themes emerged as to how scholar–practitioner leaders apply theory to practice The four emergent themes were: creating programs and practices which support student success; reimagining roles and responsibilities across the educational system; change, inquiry, and research as a part of practice; and defining readiness.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

chair this study.

I would like to thank the members of my cohort for their support throughout this journey of individual and collective betterment. The collegiality and depth of our collaborations and conservations with one another cannot be understated, nor fully understood by non-cohort members. I appreciate you all, and the role you played in making me who I am today. Thank you for your support, challenges, and care.

Finally, I want to give my heartfelt thanks to my wife, Mary, for sticking beside me during my arduous affair with life-long learning. She deserves the title of Doctor of Education beside her name as much as I do. I also want to express gratitude to my children, Jordan, Rebekah, and Michael Scott for their consistent support and encouragement during the course of my studies.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction to the Study

Overview

In 2007, the Texas State Legislature created and made into law House Bill 2563 (HB 2563), which supplemented the Texas Education Code. This Act more clearly set forth the expectations for local school boards and the relationship between the board and the district superintendent (House Bill 2563, 2007). Even though some highly functioning districts already enjoyed a collaborative environment between the school board and the district superintendent, HB 2563 cited specific duties, expectations, and functions that all districts were required to follow. For the first time in Texas Education history, a planned district vision and improvement plan were required and included in the law under HB 2563. Understanding and acknowledging the legal standard for improvement of Texas schools is an important element when conducting research centered on the dynamics of school leadership, especially when the participants focused upon are educators who are at the height of educational leadership in the public school system. Whereas it is important school board members act as both community advocates and district leaders, it is of utmost importance the superintendent as a leader is able to digest, support, implement, and put into programmatic frameworks the policy as handed

down by the board of trustees. This articulation of policy by the superintendent should be directly linked to the district's mission and vision. The Texas Association of School Boards (TASB) stated a vision statement should articulate not only district goals, but look to the future development of students and the community (TASB, 2017). The current study will seek to explore and describe how scholar–practitioners, as superintendents, translate their district's mission/vision into practice.

Constructing the Research Problem

In America, public education has been an ever-changing landscape. Providing a quality and appropriate education for children has been an important discussion in America for much of the nation's history. The public school and the emergent public-school system has undergone many changes, but none more impactful than the addition of campus administrators and subsequently, as growth demanded it, central office administrators. The school principal first became the local school board's arm of authority at the campus level. Rousmaniere (2007) posited, "The introduction of the principal's office radically changed the overall machinery of how public education was delivered from central authorities to the classroom . . ." (p. 2). Accordingly, as K-12 schools gave way to multiple school campuses for within the same town or district, another level of governing authority was created with the formation of a school superintendent. Consequently, the creation of a school superintendent relocated and redistributed roles and responsibilities within the educational environment (Kowalski, 2005). Kowalski further reported, "Normative role expectations for school district superintendents have evolved over the past 150 years, incrementally becoming more

extensive, complex, and demanding" (2005, p. 1). The roles, responsibilities, and

qualifications for superintendents today are dictated by both the administrative law and

policies created by local school boards as well as the state education agencies. In Texas,

the Texas Education Agency (TEA) has designated qualifications for superintendents

which include advanced degrees (or experience alternatives) and passing a proscribed

examination (TEA, 2017a).

Whereas principals supervised the teachers in their buildings, superintendents

supervised the multiple principals, and became ultimately responsible for ensuring the

district's mission and vision effectively matriculated across the district. While principals

were responsible for promoting the district goals at their individual campuses, the

superintendent was tasked with communicating the district mission and vision both inside

and outside the school buildings. Superintendents and principals had different roles to

carry out, but all administrators were responsible for implementing the policy directed by

the local, and later federal, boards of education. Ultimately, the success or failure of

schools fell under the superintendent's scope of responsibility.

Federal and State Governmental agencies create educational law. Local school

boards set district policy based upon the laws handed down from the aforementioned

entities. Superintendents are tasked with the job of translating the policy given them into

coherent programs of learning and implementing said programs throughout the district.

Ultimately, the responsibility for district success or failure rests with the superintendent.

A significant role of the superintendent is to create a multi-directional, highly

communicative collaborative dynamic, which collects input from both inside and outside the school system and ensures educational needs are met at each campus.

Possessing the ability to take the theoretical model or idea(s) formed by others, and create effective solutions, which serve students at the campus level is a monumental task. Success demands cooperative administrative teams and a determined focus upon the district's mission and vision. The translation, articulation, and implementation of new programs in conjunction with the ongoing improvement of existing programs create the need for high levels of scholarship and practical administration. It is the job of the superintendent to get this done. Federal Policy mandates, such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2002), have exerted enormous strains on the art of educating students, and subsequently challenged school administrators in creating learning environments where policy has been followed, and students have been well served (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002). Dewey (1916) indicated three topics in education that described the nature of method: " . . . subject matter, methods, and administration . . ." (p. 145). Simplified, the three topics Dewey presents with regard to the nature of methods can easily be applied to the whole of education; each element can exist in isolation, but are more fully and effectively developed when used in concert.

The landscape of education and the definition of its function have changed over time. However, since the creation of the position, superintendents have been held accountable to both the community in which their schools reside, and the students they serve (Kowalski, 2005). Consequently, superintendents have always been charged with

ensuring the directives provided to them by local school authorities have been

satisfactorily implemented, and actively pursued throughout district schools.

When considering such a high level of responsibility associated to the

monumental task of leading a school district, it is apparent how important a

superintendent's leadership is to district success. However, the rate of superintendent

turnover across Texas and the rest of the United States is alarming. Russell (2014)

reported the average length of service for a superintendent in Texas is between 2.5 and

4.8 years depending upon the time frame one used as a reference point. Different sources

have related varying superintendent tenure, some indicating average turnovers in large

urban districts in less than 2.5 years. Across the United States, the short tenure of school

superintendents has brought into question how effectively superintendents translate and

communicate a district's mission and vision to their administrative team and district staff

members.

Stating the Problem

In modern times, the authorization of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2002)

portion of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act centered discussions about

education not only on student achievement as represented by performance, but generated

an accountability piece for schools tied to federal funding. Superintendents along with

other district administrators have been confronted with a mandated demand to improve

student achievement while also maintaining safe learning environments and positive

cultures. With school funding formulas tied to NCLB (2002) and the demand for

improved student achievement, school districts and administrators across the nation have

been continually challenged with a quest to effectively improve their schools. Both

educational mandates and the educational philosophies used to accommodate the required

mandates have been in a constant state of flux. In Texas, House Bill 2563, passed in

2007, created a legal requirement for school boards to formulate a district vision and set

performance goals for student achievement. Consequently, superintendents were faced

with not only satisfying local school board and community wishes, but tasked with

ensuring compliance with state and federally mandated initiatives. This included

ensuring their districts provided vision statements and written documentation of a plan to

improve learning in their schools. These tasks created the need for serving

superintendents to facilitate collaboration across district employee and community

member lines as well as formulate creative recipes in to articulating the district's

mission/vision to district employees and the larger educational community.

The current state of education with respect to accountability brings into question

not only how schools become successful, but also what leaders employ in practice in

order to reach district goals, and what might be sacrificed in pursuit of said goals. One

would expect these goals should not be centered entirely on meeting the accountability

demands brought forth by state legislatures, but also formulated to equip the next

generation with the tools needed to be successful citizens and promote a democratic

nation. John Dewey (1916), in his seminal work, *Democracy and Education,* provided a

timeless thought when he wrote:

Particularly is it true that a society which not only changes but which has the ideal

of such change as will improve it, will have different standards and methods of

education from one which aims simply at the perpetuation of its own customs. To

make the general ideas set forth applicable to our own educational practice, it is,

therefore, necessary to come to closer quarters with the nature of present social

life. (p. 75)

In his discourse, Dewey spells out the challenge of a school district superintendent. In

leading a district, the superintendent must consider both the challenges of student

improvement, and the position the school occupies in the forwarding of society.

Applying his/her determination, the superintendent must sew the district's mission and

vision into the fabric of the educational community.

Since the National Commission on Excellence in Education publication of *A

Nation at Risk* (Gardner, 1983) claimed mediocre student achievement was a symptom of

economic and cultural decline, pressure to adopt standards has intensified in the United

States. The Commission's report focused on the academic portion of education as it

relates to producing skilled employees who can be productive in a global marketplace.

The other piece related to the environment where educating occurs, but received little

acknowledgement. The pressure of accountability challenged how school districts

maintained the balance between serving society and creating positive learning

environments. The pressure for school improvement has consistently raised the stakes

for school leaders. Pickering commented, ". . . frameworks built out of concepts that

speak directly to practice . . ." are needed to properly investigate the work practice of

leaders (1992, p. 9).

However, few frameworks have been created which directly link to superintendent practice, thus making analysis difficult. Waters and Marzano (2006) conducted a study focused on the meta-analysis of student achievement as it related to leadership practice:

From the analysis, the researchers have created what they call "a balanced leadership framework." This framework describes the knowledge, skills, strategies, resources, and tools educational leaders need to improve student achievement. The framework is predicated on the notion that effective leadership means more than simply knowing what to do; it means knowing when, how, and why to do it. The data from the meta-analysis demonstrate that there is, in fact, a substantial relationship between leadership and student achievement. (np)

The study indicated positive relationships exist between effective leadership and student achievement, but reveals little about how these effective leaders translate theory into practice.

Current day superintendents must not only acquire specific knowledge in order to navigate the many state, federal, and local administrative laws, but construct systems within their districts which address a myriad of day-to-day challenges associated with providing efficient, productive, and effective learning environments for students. As Waters and Marzano indicate, the superintendent's application of practice can directly affect student performance (2006). Superintendents must not only acquire specific knowledge directly related to the accountability components associated with their jobs,

but they also need to successfully apply their experience and the learning gleaned from their superintendent certification program into their practices.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe how serving superintendents apply their prior learning and knowledge to the articulation and translation of their district's mission/vision. This study focused on the perceptions of serving Texas superintendents who have completed a preparation course centered on scholar–practitioner leadership. The study has described how six serving superintendents translate theory to practice by inquiring how each participant articulates the district's mission/vision to their campus administrative teams. Using the interview as a research tool, this study set out to explore and describe superintendents' perspectives regarding how they digest educational theory and how they personally apply theoretical knowledge to their practice. The participant perceptions were derived from their own words and through field observations by the researcher. Each serving superintendent completed a doctoral program in educational leadership centered on scholar–practitioner leadership.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

1. How do scholar–practitioner leaders, as superintendents, translate the district's mission/vision into practice at the district level?

2. How do scholar–practitioner leaders, as superintendents, translate their own vision for the district to support the district's mission/vision?

Definitions

There are several key terms readers need to have a level of understanding of while reviewing this qualitative study. Definitions for these concepts are provided below to enhance quality and understanding for readers.

Scholar–practitioner.

Schultz (2010) stated, **"**Scholar-practitioners utilize core values of community, democracy, social justice, caring, and equity, to critically guide their daily practice and restructure schooling practice to reflect them. Theory and practice become indelibly linked" (p. 62).

Articulate.

Miriam Webster Dictionary defines articulate as: expressing oneself readily, clearly, and effectively. The intended use of articulate in this study is to indicate ideas, concepts, and verbiage are readily, clearly, and effectively transmitted to others by the participant.

Translate.

Miriam Webster Dictionary defines the transitive verb form of *translate* as: to bear, remove, or change from one place, state, form, or appearance to another. The example provided is: translate ideas into action. This is the definition being conveyed when the word translate is used in this study. For the purpose of this study translate is meant to create movement in others; it is an action verb. Moreover, translate should be considered connected to an individual participant's application of knowledge or theory into practice.

School superintendent.

According to the Texas Education Agency, a person must meet the following criteria in order to become a superintendent in Texas: must hold a master's degree from a university that is accredited by an accrediting agency recognized by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board or the US Department of Education Database for Accredited Colleges and Universities, hold a principal certificate or the equivalent issued by the TEA, another state, or country, completed the superintendent certificate application and been approved by the TEA to substitute managerial experience in lieu of a principal certificate, successfully complete an approved superintendent educator preparation program, and successfully completed the required state examination. For the purpose of this study, when superintendent is used, it is to indicate the top employee leadership position in a school district and indicate the person has completed the Texas Education Agency's requirements for earning a superintendent certificate in Texas (TEA, 2017a). At particular times in the history of the superintendency, there were jobs at different levels of administration, namely state, county, and local superintendents; however, this study will only include superintendents who serve single districts (Kowalski, 2005).

School board.

The local school board is the elected governing body of a school district (TEA, 2017b). Each board is comprised of trustees who are elected by the local community.

Professional Learning Communities (PLC).

A PLC is composed of collaborative teams whose members work interdependently to achieve common goals linked to the purpose of learning for all (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Many, 2006, p. 3).

STAAR.

State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness; Current State of Texas standardized test(s) students must pass in order to graduate in an accredited Texas high school (TEA, 2017c).

Vision.

According to the Texas Association of School Boards, a vision statement should articulate not only district goals, but look to the future development of students and the community. "A vision statement outlines an ideal picture of what is desired for the district in the long term. It should be attainable and cause the district to reach beyond where it is currently. A well-formed vision statement is written and usually speaks to what is desired for the students, their learning environment, and the community" (TASB, 2017, np).

Significance of the Research

Many challenges face schools in the age of accountability. Government oversight, both state and federal, creates conditions that are often vague and wide in scope. Superintendents are tasked with digesting mandates and finding solutions that satisfy requirements while also assuring the needs are met for the students and communities they serve. The current study sought to gain an understanding of how

scholar–practitioners, serving as school superintendents, apply theory to practice in their jobs. The study includes rich descriptions of applications of practice by superintendent scholar–practitioners. The exploration and descriptions examined and presented as a result of the study will supply valuable insight to the field of educational leadership and practice. The findings are relevant to university-based education preparation programs, and provide insight to the educational community, especially to practitioners at multiple levels of education. The study can inform active superintendents with information regarding how peers navigate the gap between theory and practice. In addition, the current study provides an explanation of superintendent application of theory to practice using a scholar–practitioner lens.

Assumptions

The following set of assumptions were held by the researcher throughout the study:

1. All participants will respond openly and honestly to the researcher's questions.
2. All participants will remain in their current or a similar position for the duration of the study.
3. The researcher will have frequent access to the participants involved in the study.

Limitations/Delimitations

The study was limited by the following factors:

1. Participants are currently serving as a superintendent in a Texas public school district.

2. All participants are graduates of a university-based scholar–practitioner preparation program.

3. All participants are former students who have completed a scholar–practitioner program while enrolled at Stephen F. Austin State University.

4. The participants completed their course of study during different years.

5. The researcher is currently enrolled at Stephen F. Austin State University and in pursuit of a doctorate in Educational Leadership.

Organization of the Study

Investigating how scholar–practitioners, as superintendents, bridge the theory to practice gap is the focus of this study. Effective educational leadership must be a focus for university based preparation programs, communities, lawmakers, and practitioners alike. The landscape of education and its purpose is in perpetual motion, fueled by perpetual change. Studies that explore the practice and perceptions of top educational leaders must be conducted in order to enable subsequent leaders to have the best opportunities to serve well. As an introduction to this qualitative study, Chapter I presented an overview of the problem, the problem statement, the statement of purpose, research questions, and the definition of key terminology which will be used during the course of the study. In addition, Chapter I provided a foundation to the study including information regarding the challenges faced by school superintendents. These challenges

range from student achievement accountability, both state and federally mandated, to expectations for short tenures associated to the superintendent position.

Chapter II informs the reader through a review of literature relating to the research problem and purpose. Chapter II reviews the evolution of the superintendent and his roles in American education, as well as provide background for school superintendent and school board relations. Consequently, a review of the literature surrounding superintendent turnover, or tenure is explored. In addition, a review of public school mission and vision statements will be provided. A recent history of educational leadership, including scholar–practitioner leadership, is presented.

Chapter III sets the framework for the method of study. This qualitative study utilized a survey methodology with the interview as the central data gathering tool. In addition to interviews, the researcher ensured the quality of collected data through member checks, and each interview session was recorded. The researcher maintained a reflective journal during the course of the research and data disaggregation. The study design gave the participants the opportunity to put into their own words their lived experiences and how they traverse the gap between theory and practice in their leadership positions. The interview technique of gathering information allowed for the voice of the participants to flow through the research.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

Conceptual Framework

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and describe how serving superintendents apply their prior learning and knowledge to the articulation and translation of their district's mission/vision; in essence, the study investigated how scholar–practitioners, serving as superintendents, translate theory into practice as a part of their job function. Superintendents must not only acquire specific knowledge directly related to the accountability components associated with their jobs, but they also need to successfully apply their experience and the learning gleaned from their superintendent certification program into their practices. Several variables emerge from existing literature with respect to the superintendent position and practice.

First, the roles and responsibilities associated with the job have been ever changing over the history of the job, and these elements of the school superintendent position differ from one locale to another. Second, superintendent tenure is relatively short. Literature suggests this is directly related to the roles and responsibilities assigned to superintendents from their local boards, and to the manner in which decisions, and the resulting actions, are made. Third, the leadership framework a superintendent chooses to

employ can affect not only their relationship to the board of trustees, but can define the manner in which superintendents articulate conceptual frameworks, as in policy and school vision statements, into practice. Fourth, a sample of Texas school district vision/mission statements is provided. Vision statements are required in Texas by law (HB 2563, 2007).

In order to provide a thorough review of literature, Chapter II presents the variables closely connected to the superintendent and his/her practice. These variables include a brief history of the school superintendent position, the roles and responsibilities associated to the position, educational leadership theory and frameworks, and an overview of Texas school districts' vision and/or mission statements. This study focuses on the perceptions of serving Texas superintendents who have completed a preparation course centered on scholar–practitioner leadership. In this chapter I reviewed the extant literature regarding the formation of the superintendent position and related issues, leadership practice development, the scholar–practitioner leadership profile, and Texas school districts' existing mission/vision statements. References to a variety of sources in differing formats and genres were reviewed in order to glean a balanced, time-temporal view of the subject matter.

Educational Leadership Theory and Practice

Leadership practice in America has evolved based upon the needs and demands imposed by society. As society transformed, so did the models from which leadership theory and management, sprung. Leadership theory has not been a stagnant model. One could argue leadership theory could be applied across a broad spectrum. The football

captain was selected because he/she can build positive relationships among fellow participants, and motivate his fellow players to achieve at a high level. The best equipped teachers build positive, caring relationships with their students and have motivated them to achieve at a high level.

Successful business people have built positive relationships with key companies or individuals both inside and outside their organizations in promoting success. These are examples of leadership theory in practice. Over time, leadership and the practice have been considered as ideals and acts, not positions or labels. The difference between leadership in business, on the gridiron, or in education has been in the practice and application, not the theory itself. It has been important to understand theoretical models and ideals, such as leadership, have not been considered specific to the task, but formed to the task.

John Dewey, Frederick Taylor, Kurt Lewin, and Abraham Maslow's work connect management, leadership, philosophy, and education to the human condition. Even though this passage will focus on educational leadership over the past twenty-five years, it is important to note these forefathers of progressive thought each impacted leadership theory and practice; evidence of their design and purpose are still present in today's practice. Frederick Taylor's *The Principles of Scientific Management* (1911) places an importance on the system in which people function while at work.

From the end of the 19th Century through the 1930s, Taylorism dominated management practice in industry and influenced how American schools were run (Callahan, 1962; Cuban, 1976). Fairman and Mclean related, "Educational leadership

was shaped by the Scientific Management movement and the military management systems because educational policy makers and policy implementers–school administrators–came primarily from the business and military establishments . . .” (2011, p. 6). John Dewey's publication of *Democracy and Education* turned thoughts toward education being part of the renewal paradigm necessary for human advancement and survival (1916).

In 1939, Lewin, Lippit, and White constructed leadership profiles that defined basic leadership styles still recognizable today (1939). The leadership profiles were the result of leadership decision experiments performed by Lewin and his colleagues (Lewin, et al., 1939). Lewin coined the three styles of leadership decision-making as autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire. Each of these three styles of leadership are used in current leadership practice. The autocratic leadership profile is marked by decision-making by a leader without the consultation of others. The democratic style is punctuated by the involvement of other stakeholders and can differ from the leader taking a stance of informed decision-making, while continuing to hold the decision authority to decision-making by consensus. The laissez-faire decision-making paradigm is typically considered a hands-off type of management style.

Each of these styles or profiles has merit across different leadership practice in certain situations. Simple decisions that required little thought and affected little with respect to personnel or operations could be made autocratically. However, when a higher level of importance was attached to the decision, an autocratic leadership style caused the most discontent according to Lewin (Lewin, et al., 1939). Consequently, a Laissez-Faire

style could be appropriate when a leader was supervising highly skilled and motivated people who were capable of making solid decisions. However, if a leader adopts this Laissez-Faire style when workers are not capable or well motivated, disaster can strike.

The Democratic decision-making process is most appropriate when employees are of varying skill level but are motivated towards a common vision or end. The Democratic leadership style can cause unrest and problems if an organization is splintered or rife with disparate opinions of the right decision. Whereas different styles of managers were defined prior to the industrial revolution in America, leadership practice was swayed by the formation of factories and manufacturing (Fairman & McLean, 2011). The industrialization and management influences on leadership practice during the 1930s through the 1950s centered on productivity. As America moved into becoming a highly industrialized nation, theories associated with productivity and the management of workers in manufacturing positions became prevalent and the influences of this theory moved into many areas of leadership, including education. Behavior theory also became prevalent during this era.

Abraham Maslow's social research on the hierarchy of needs brought a new level of understanding about how people are motivated (Maslow, 1943, 1954). Maslow postulated if a person was hungry and did not have adequate shelter they could not perform at their optimum level. Obviously, this had great implications for the working class and the poor, but when applied to school children and the motivation to learn, the understanding took on new meaning. Maslow's hierarchy of needs and taxonomy of learning have influenced leadership theory, and have been present in both the planning

and execution of educational needs, since their introduction (1943, 1954). Educational

teaching pedagogy and current leadership theory and practice remain firmly attached to

Maslow's work (McLeod, 2007). With the increased pressures associated to student

achievement in public schools, current leadership theory and practice has evolved into

methodologies and models geared towards optimizing learning.

One of the first conceptual impacts upon current leadership practice was the

advent of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) (Dufour & Eaker, 1998). The PLC

model of educational leadership practice focused on the increased pressure for student

achievement and led progressive leaders to begin operationalizing their concepts of best

practice into models, which promoted collaboration between stakeholders, especially

instructional staff, and translated the collaborative process into student success. Simply

managing a district and the personnel was not adequate to ensure student learning in the

new millennium. Administrators needed teachers willing to employ learning strategies

designed to engage learners through utilizing problem solving and critical thinking. The

challenge set forth to all administrators was that of continuous improvement for their

educational community, especially the inclusion of targeted professional development for

administrators and teachers. Emerging from this way of thinking was the concept of a

continuous learning community. Conceptually, the learning affected multiple

stakeholders and pulled together all learners into a collaborative, supportive community.

Many districts adopted the model of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

as a part of a continuous improvement effort on their campuses. According to DuFour,

Eaker, and Burnette (2002), professional learning communities fostered learning for all

stakeholders. These educators believed educational leaders should be focused upon student learning and the continuous improvement of their schools, which can benefit both students and the community (2002). Whether successful models emerged as a result of progressive thinking in schools or as an answer to high-stakes testing remained uncertain, but these collaborative efforts began to be considered as a potential educational solution for higher-order learning and as an answer to accountability.

Leadership practice centered around continuous improvement and learning communities began to shape the leadership practice of the middle 1990's through present day. Little (1982), Bryk and Driscoll (1988), and Rozenholz (1989) researched the role professionally enriching workgroups played in highly effective schools. They found these workgroups to be major facilitators in promoting increased student learning. These workgroups were the forerunners to professional learning communities. In addition, Marks and Printy (2003) reported many teachers valued professional collaboration because they were able to use these networks to increase their content knowledge and instructional skills, which enhanced student engagement and achievement.

The first PLC model was introduced to educators as a result of DuFour and Eaker's (1998) research presented in *Professional Learning Communities at Work: Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement*. Adding to the body of PLC theory, DuFour, Eaker, and Burnette followed with the subsequent publication of *Getting Started: Reculturing Schools to Become Professional Learning Communities* (2002), which provided educators with a more solid theoretical stance for practice and implementation. Since the inception of PLCs, school leaders have adapted models and

implemented these models at districts and campuses across the nation. According to a

report by the School Redesign Network at Stanford University, one of the problems

contributing to poor student performance was the lack of high-quality PLCs, which

focused on student learning and high-quality professional development (Wei, Darling-

Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). A significant amount of studies has

investigated different aspects of professional learning communities; however, there has

been little data regarding how effective a leader's practice might be at operationalizing

the PLC model.

One operational concept of curriculum and lesson design termed backward

design, ran parallel to the PLC concept (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998). The backward

design concept promoted a highly collaborative planning atmosphere where teachers

deconstruct and then reconstruct learning objectives and form them into effective lesson

packages for students (1998). Wiggins and McTighe (1998) posited taking a backward

design approach created a practical framework for students to uncover meaning, which

lead to a deeper understanding of subject matter. In his book *Shaking up the School*

House, Phillip Schlechty (2000) presented five concepts of engagement related to how

students may respond to tasks. His presentation of the five tasks, ". . . authentic

engagement, ritual engagement, passive compliance, retreatism, and rebellion . . ." (2000,

p. 65) were also applicable to school leaders when related to personnel. Schlechty

followed up his earlier work with *Working on the Work: An Action Plan for Teachers,*

Principals, and Superintendents in which he provided a framework for action planning in

schools (Schlechty, 2002). The action planning presented by Schlechty, like PLCs and

backward design, focused objectives on improving student success and achievement through the application of theoretical and practical frameworks.

In *Failure is not an Option: Six Principles That Guide Student Achievement in High-Performing Schools*, Alan Blankstein (2004) presented educators with a structured framework separated into six critical areas of focus. The framework combined PLC culture with building trusting relationships throughout the organization. The six principles presented were: 1) Common Mission, Vision, and Goals; 2) Ensuring Achievement for All Students: Systems for Prevention and Intervention; 3) Collaborative Teaming Focused on Teaching and Learning; 4) Using Data to Guide Decision Making and Continuous Improvement; 5) Gaining Active Engagement From Family and Community; and 6) Building Sustainable Leadership Capacity. Blankstein's work combined many concepts from both leadership theory and practice. Catherine Marshall and Cynthia Gerstl-Pepin called for educators to create personal political platforms, which included being advocates for social justice (Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005). Educational leaders must consider the implications associated to gender, race, sexuality, impoverishment, marginalization, and culture as they relate to policy and politics and in the advocacy of social justice (Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005).

Bolman and Deal (2008) created four frames in an examination of organizations, how they operate, and how they should operate. The structural frame, human resources frame, political frame, and symbolic frame are analogized to factories, family, jungles and theaters providing leaders with a deeper understanding of leadership practice and existing dynamics within all organizations (2008). *Reframing Organizations: Artistry,*

Choice, and Leadership provided leaders with practical examples of practice, which can

be applied to many different situations in the workplace and community (Bolman & Deal,

2008). The frameworks presented have encouraged leaders to stretch traditional

understandings of leadership theory and armed them with additional perspectives for

application and purpose.

One of the challenges to reframing organizations has been the bureaucracy

inherent in many of these organizations, including education. Schlechty (2009) insisted

the reclaiming and reframing of schools from bureaucracy was imperative to reform

efforts. The research above has indicated school reform to be challenging. Reframing or

redefining the system with new ideas have been difficult. The creative process involved

with designing new alternatives has presented roadblocks for leaders across America

(Darling-Hammond, 1997). As discussed earlier, much of the leadership practice in

education could be associated with efforts to increase student achievement, especially

with the required accountability standards ties to district funding formulas.

Between 2007 and 2012, several authors produced conceptual models based on

the production, collection, disaggregation of, and dissemination of data (Bambrick-

Santoya, 2010, 2012; Fairman & McLean, 2007; Schlechty, 2009). Each of these authors

has included suggestions for leadership in action, but each has also created lanes of focus

on data and goal setting. Within the educational leadership genre, several authors have

provided texts updating PLC models along with providing case studies, which

supplement the theoretical backgrounds (Fairman & McLean, 2011; Gorton & Alston,

2009). With complexity of district management, student advocacy, and breadth of

knowledge needed by today's educational leaders, especially school superintendents, many educators began to believe no one leadership theory or practice was all inclusive, and the idea of scholar–practitioner leadership formed.

Scholar–Practitioner Leadership

Today, many educational institutions advertise programs of study for advanced degrees reportedly aligned to the application, or practice, of different fields. The fields have transcended different disciplines. The application of theoretical constructs, inquiry associated to transformation of method, social development and proliferation of democracy, and leading with an ethical and moral lens have created a basis for scholar–practitioner leadership (Bailey, 2014; Jenlink, 2010; Schultz, 2010).

University programs.

Several Universities across the nation have begun preparing educators as scholar–practitioners. Stephen F. Austin State University (2017), Florida State University (2017), and University of Arizona (2017) among others, have promoted scholar–practitioner programs in the graduate programs in the college of Education at each institution.

At the University of Arizona, the Doctor of Educational Leadership and Policy program is described as ". . . preparing leaders to achieve results in the nation's schools by translating knowledge and theory into practice . . . and is designed for practicing and aspiring administrators who wish to expand their skills as scholar practitioners . . ." (University of Arizona, 2017, np). The scholar–practitioner leadership programs at other universities are similar in content and context.

The scholar–practitioner leadership program at Stephen F. Austin State University (SFA) was designed, "to create a new doctoral program in education to prepare next-generation leaders" (Jenlink, 2016, p. 2). The Annual Report for Educational Leadership at SFA (Jenlink, 2016) stated,

> A scholar–practitioner is viewed as an individual who recognizes the importance of informing his/her practice with inquiry and examining leadership practice in the day-to-day activity of the educational setting. The ideals of social justice, community, democracy and critical consciousness have an integral place in the conceptualizing of scholar–practitioner leadership. (p. 2)

The common link in the university-based programs has been preparing practitioners to successfully navigate the theory to practice gap. Scholar–practitioners use a variety of sources, theory, and knowledge to inform their practice. As the complexity of running school districts as well as serving in university environments has become more difficult, the ability to translate theory to practice will become of utmost importance. Leaders will consistently be asked to create innovative solutions to a myriad of challenges while also maintaining positive, safe, and temporal learning environments.

Dewey's influence.

Centered on John Dewey's (1916, 1938) ideas of social justice and educational purpose, scholar–practitioner leadership programs began creating a new lens for the theory to practice gap. John Dewey contended schools should be constructivist, or experiential, in nature and were critical to the promotion of the local community and to

the continued renewal of democracy (Dewey, 1916; 1938). Dewey (1916) posited four

elements were necessary for the sustainability of democracy through education. These

four elements were: (1) Education as a Necessity of Life; (2) Education as a Social

Function; (3) Education as Direction; and (4) Education as Growth (1916). Dewey

(1916) believed these elements, or functions, should be present in any educational

system. Embedded in each of these four elements were elaborations regarding both the

necessity and desired outcomes. Dewey (1938) posited subject matter must be

contextualized through experience or simulation and connected to the community's

needs. Dewey (1916) summarized his philosophy of needed educational reform,

> The reconstruction of philosophy, of education, and of social ideals and
>
> methods thus go hand in hand. If there is especial need of educational
>
> reconstruction at the present time, if this need makes urgent a
>
> reconsideration of the basic ideas of traditional philosophic systems, it is
>
> because of the thoroughgoing change in social life accompanying the
>
> advance of science, the industrial revolution, and the development of
>
> democracy. Such practical changes cannot take place without demanding
>
> an educational reformation to meet them, and without leading men to ask
>
> what ideas and ideals are implicit in these social changes, and what
>
> revisions they require of the ideas and ideals which are inherited from
>
> older and unlike cultures. (p. 285)

The passage above connected Dewey's philosophy of educational reformation across time and set a lens for leaders to acknowledge historical educational and societal constructs but to also look forward in designing temporal educational experiences.

The construct of a scholar–practitioner leadership dynamic filled the void between current societal advancement/needs and previous leadership theory. Dewey's influence is still prominent among educational thought today. Describing the scholar–practitioner leadership dynamic, Hampton (2010) related,

> The scholar focuses on the importance of social justice while the
> practitioner examines how to identify the existence of social justice. The
> work of the scholar–practitioner seeks to combine the efforts of the
> scholar and the practitioner in an effort to implement true change
> throughout the educational system and society as a whole. (p. 188)

Patrick M. Jenlink (2010) posited about the concept of scholarly practitioners within the context of preparing the next generation of educational leaders:

> Leadership education serves many functions in contemporary democratic society,
> but perhaps most importantly is the function of leadership education in preparing
> leaders to consider how schools play into facilitating an alternative discourse
> grounded in a critique of war, terrorism, oppression, and abuse to focus on the
> elements of society we would choose not to pass on to the next generations.
> Concomitantly, leadership education must necessarily facilitate this alternative
> discourse by preparing leaders who, as citizens, are socially engaged in the

pedagogical work of democracy; leadership must become a public pedagogy. (p. 307)

The scholar–practitioner leadership model was not intended to replace nor supplant other leadership models or theory.

While implementing programs to benefit student success, scholar–practitioner leaders have been encouraged consider multiple theoretical constructs. Bailey (2014) explained,

> For the purposes of this discussion, scholar-practitioner leadership, rather than being abstracted from educational leadership, will be treated as a particular form of educational leadership. Like any educational leader, the primary goal of the scholar-practitioner leader is to effectively transition the school to ever greater levels of student achievement and stakeholder satisfaction. The primary difference between the scholar-practitioner leader and other leaders, however, is the way the scholar-practitioner accomplishes that task. (p. 48)

Bailey elaborated,

> In a few schools and places, though, a different pattern is emerging: these schools are raising test scores and improving the overall quality of their students' educations. The key to success for these schools lies in their ability to engage in school-wide inquiry and formulate beneficial derivatives from and within the mandates placed before them. (p. 48)

Educational leaders have been charged with maintaining high levels of student achievement and have been accountable to multiple federal and state mandates. Phillip Schlechty (2009) commented,

> Those who advocate more state and federal control of schools seem oblivious to the fact that such a reform does not solve the problem of America's schools. Rather, it moves the means of solving the problem further from the reach of precisely the people who must solve it if it is to be solved at all: the local educational leaders and the citizens of the local communities the schools are intended to serve. (p. xi)

Schlechty represents through his philosophy Dewey's influence on the purpose of education. In addition, posited educational reform needed to be addressed at the local educational environment.

Gregory M. Bouck, with Caddo Parish Schools in Louisiana, described the scholar–practitioner as, "Scholar–practitioners conjoin the strategies and knowledge gained through meticulous academic endeavors with experiences and knowledge inherent to membership in their craft to form the basis of effective, change-centered practices . . ." (2011, p. 203).

In addition to Bouck's description, scholar–practitioner leaders have maintained a close tie to community and to social justice. Another educator related, "Scholar-practitioners utilize core values of community, democracy, social justice, caring, and equity, to critically guide their daily practice and restructure schooling practice to reflect them. Theory and practice become indelibly linked . . ." (Schultz, 2010, p. 62). Both of

these educators have captured the essence of scholar–practitioner leadership on parallel although different levels.

Summary.

Scholar–practitioner leadership models have become more available in university-based graduate programs. The models share the construct of bridging the theory to practice gap. The tenets of scholar–practitioner programs can be associated to John Dewey's (1916, 1938) philosophy of education. Dewey's ideas of social responsibility and necessity within the educational system have helped set the lens for scholar–practitioner leaders.

Brief History of the School Superintendent Position

The school superintendent position was created during the 1830's during the years " . . . free, public, common . . ." schools were being formed (Callahan, 1966, p. 11). The first superintendents were hired in the large cities because the scope of the day-to-day oversight was more than school board trustees could properly oversee (Sharp & Walter, 2004). During the 1830's and up until the early twentieth century, superintendents were responsible for implementing curriculum while also supervising teachers. (Callahan, 1966; Kowalski, 1998, 2001). These school superintendents served as scholar-teachers who also performed administrative duties (Kowalski, 2005). The growth of schools was slow until shortly after the Civil War when business and industrialization began to increase significantly, and many laborers moved to towns and cities in order to find work (Callahan, 1966). Some smaller schools combined to form school districts and the boards

responsible for these schools also began hiring superintendents to manage them (Sharp &
Walter, 2004).

As the urban population rose, more schools were built in urban areas, and by
1850, thirteen of America's cities employed school superintendents as district
administrators (Kowalski, 2005). During the first two decades of the twentieth century,
industrialization in America was growing more rapidly than ever before, and Frederick
Taylor published *The Principles of Scientific Management*, which described a method of
efficiently completing manufacturing tasks, specifically in an industrial setting (1911).
Taylor's theory of management was soon adapted into educational thought and practice
when the public and local school boards desired their superintendents to manage schools
in an efficient, task-oriented manner (Callahan, 1962; Cuban, 1976). The more efficient
the school district, the less personnel and funding needed.

School superintendents during the whole of the twentieth century have had to
fight for state, and later federal, funding (Kowalski, 2005). During the 1900's, tasked
with school fiscal management responsibilities, successful superintendents incorporated
an understanding of legislation and politics into their acumen, thus filling a statesmanship
role in order to better advocate for their school districts (2005). It can be argued the
position of school superintendent has changed little since the middle of the twentieth
century (Kowalski, 2001). However, even though the roles assigned to today's school
superintendents by their local school boards may have similar descriptions, in Texas,
there is not a state prescribed set of roles for school superintendents (TEA, 2017b).

Role of the Superintendent in Schools

Naturally, the roles and/or responsibilities associated to different professions and positions can change over time as the dynamics and environments of performance change. This element of change in roles and responsibilities has been true with the school superintendent position. Researchers have reported a myriad of roles performed by superintendents over the history of the position. A bevy of researchers have reported superintendent roles have included descriptors such as master teacher, teacher-scholar, instructional leader, manager, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), democratic leader, communicator, social scientist, and fiscal manager (Bjork, 1993; Bresden, 1996; Brunner, Grogan, Bjork, 2002; Callahan, 1966, 1962; Cressman, 1995; Davis, 1993; Jackson, 2013; Kowalski, 2005; Keedy & Bjork, 2002; Grunert, 1994; Kinn, 1980; Quigley, 1993).

Two academic authors have narrowed the categories to four major roles associated to the superintendent position (Callahan, 1966; Kowalski, 2001). The roles included in their research were: scholar-teacher, manager, democratic leader, and applied social scientist (2001, 1966). Kowalski (1998) added the role of communicator to the list along with the argument communication is an essential role, which the superintendent must master in order to successfully run a school district. It should be mentioned the roles reported above by Kowalski and Callahan and the roles other researchers presented represent broad categories of functions, which have been associated to the job of school superintendent.

Superintendent preparation programs across the United States incorporate a set of standards and competencies into the learned curriculum. In order to be accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), educator preparation coursework must include adherence to the proscribed standards, namely Professional Standards for the Accreditation of Schools, Colleges, and Departments of Education (NCATE, 2006). In addition to these standards, states may employ a separate set of standards and competencies for superintendent certification. In Texas, eight standards and ten competencies are tested on the state certification exam (TEA, 2017d). For the purpose of this study, the standards and competencies proscribed by the Texas Education Agency and covered on the required certification exam are provided in Tables 1 and 2. Even though this review of literature included research from different states across the United States, all study participants were serving in Texas school districts at the time of the study. The standards and competencies proscribed for Texas superintendents include common themes. Both standards and competencies have been provided for comparison for readers' convenience.

Table 1.

Superintendent Standards Tested in Texas

Standard Tested	Standard Content
Superintendent Standard I	Learner-Centered Values and Ethics of Leadership
Superintendent Standard II	Learner-Centered Leadership and School District Culture
Superintendent Standard III	Learner-Centered Human Resources Leadership and Management

Superintendent Standard IV	Learner-Centered Policy and Governance
Superintendent Standard V	Learner-Centered Communications and Community Relations
Superintendent Standard VI	Learner-Centered Organizational Leadership and Management
Superintendent Standard VII	Learner-Centered Curriculum Planning and Development
Superintendent Standard VIII	Learner-Centered Instructional Leadership and Management

Note: TExAS Superintendent (195) Test at a Glance (TEA, 2017d)

In addition, the Texas Education Code specifically directs local school boards to define the roles and responsibilities of the superintendent and others in the district's decision-making processes, but these roles are very general in the code (TEA, 2017b). Additional remarks as to what these roles and responsibilities may encompass, like standards and competencies, are not addressed in the administrative code. As the Education Code indicates, the assignment of roles and responsibilities lies exclusively with the school board. Even though this duty to define roles has been clearly assigned to local school board trustees by the Texas Education Agency in the Texas Administrative Code (TAC), researchers report angst between superintendents and local school boards regarding the scope of the superintendent's role(s) and responsibilities (Berryhill, 2009; Chingos, Whitehurst, & Lindquist, 2014; Jackson, 2013; Russell, 2014). The Texas Association of School Boards (TASB) has created and provided a rubric for assessing superintendent performance (TASB, 2006).

The commissioner for the Texas Education Agency recommend a standard assessment for the superintendent performance, however, the standard was withdrawn only to be replaced by an instrument of individual district design which only included a mandatory domain on student achievement (TEA, 2016). The new performance appraisal was first sent as a recommendation to districts, and subsequently added to the TAC (TEA, 2017b). Both the initial recommendation and law in the administrative code that followed have been written in very general terms. This may account for some of the misunderstandings in local interpretations regarding roles and responsibilities. The TEA has made the recommendation to school districts an annual performance evaluation should be completed for superintendents which included a domain centered on student performance as well as other domains determined by the school board (TEA, 2017b). A summary of TASB's superintendent performance appraisal is provided in Table 3.

When considering the scope of the responsibilities outlined in the TASB sample performance rubric, the complexity of roles, responsibilities, and tasks a superintendent must attend to are extensive. The extent of responsibilities addressed and broad range of expectations for superintendents set forth in performance appraisals are worth note. In addition, the power the TAC grants to local school boards over the assignment of duties to school superintendents in Texas have made it clear the importance given this relationship, and the imperative for districts to set clear goals and priorities (TEA, 2017b). In a qualitative study based in and around Chicago, Illinois, Jackson found the most strife between school superintendents and local school boards centered on the roles associated to the decision-making processes at each district (2013). Consistent with the

themes Jackson uncovered, in Texas, Russell found long serving superintendents indicated positive relationships with the school board and clear expectations for roles and responsibilities known by both the board and superintendent were central causes for their longevity (Russell, 2014).

Table 2

Superintendent Competencies Tested in Texas.

Competencies Assessed	Competency Content
Competency 001	The superintendent knows how to act with integrity, fairness and in an ethical manner in order to promote the success of all students.
Competency 002	The superintendent knows how to shape district culture by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the educational community.
Competency 003	The superintendent knows how to communicate and collaborate with families and community members, respond to diverse community interests and needs and mobilize community resources to ensure educational success for all students.
Competency 004	The superintendent knows how to respond to and influence the larger political, social, economic, legal and cultural context, including working with the board of trustees, to achieve the district's educational vision.
Competency 005	The superintendent knows how to facilitate the planning and implementation of strategic plans that enhance teaching and learning; ensure alignment among curriculum, curriculum resources and assessment; use the current accountability system; and promote the use of varied assessments to measure student performance.

Competency 006	The superintendent knows how to advocate, promote and sustain an instructional program and a district culture that are conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.
Competency 007	The superintendent knows how to implement a staff evaluation and development system and select appropriate models for supervision and staff development to improve the performance of all staff members.
Competency 008	The superintendent knows how to apply principles of effective leadership and management in relation to district budgeting, personnel, resource utilization, financial management and technology applications.
Competency 009	The superintendent knows how to apply principles of leadership and management to the district's physical plant and support systems to ensure a safe and effective learning environment.
Competency 010	The superintendent knows how to apply organizational, decision making and problem-solving skills to comply with federal and state requirements and facilitate positive change in varied contexts.

Note: TExAS Superintendent (195) Test at a Glance (TEA, 2017d)

In the survey findings, superintendents stressed relations between the school board and the superintendent as one of the most important factors related to tenure (Russell, 2014). Several themes, including turnover, emerged from a review of literature pertaining to superintendent and board relationships.

The most frequently recurring themes centered on district roles, including those of school board members, and who was involved in decision-making process at both the district and campus level. Over the last several decades, many researchers have reported a lack of agreement between superintendents and school boards regarding the counterpart

roles of district leadership. In Minnesota school districts, Kinn (1980) reported a

consistent lack of agreement existed between superintendents and the boards they worked

with regarding for what role each should be responsible. Interestingly, Quigley (1993)

found superintendents and school boards alike, believed running the district was a shared

responsibility. Other researchers reported school boards felt the superintendent should

mostly be responsible for the choosing of qualified personnel and with the administration

of the school, which included district public relations and communications, while the

board should be primarily responsible for making policy (Day, 1988; Davis, 1993).

In a Texas study comparing different superintendents' experiences working with

the school board president, Grunert found participants did not agree on the roles the

board should play in decision-making for the district (1994). However, parties on both

sides of the leadership dynamic agreed the superintendent should be at the top of the

decision-making totem pole (Grunert, 1994). Additionally, school board presidents,

when polled separately from superintendents, thought they should have a larger role in

deciding financial matters for the district (1994). Cressman (1995) reported similar

disparate perceptions regarding roles in Pennsylvania.

Table 3

Summary of Sample Superintendent Appraisal from TASB

Section 1. Priority Performance Goals	Descriptors
	The board, in discussion with the superintendent, established the following priority performance goals for the year:

District Goal or Board Priority (can be multiple)	Determined by the district.
Superintendent Priority Performance Goal (can be multiple)	Determined by the district.
Section 2. Assessment of Ongoing Responsibilities	Descriptors
Educational Leadership	The superintendent provides leadership and direction for an educational system that is based on desired student achievement.
A. Instructional Management	The superintendent manages an assessment and improvement system for student learning in the major academic subjects that results in the ongoing improvement in student achievement.
B. Student Services Management	The superintendent oversees a program of student services, tied to defined goals and objectives.
C. Staff Development and Professional Growth	The superintendent oversees a program of staff development designed to improve district performance.
District Management	The superintendent demonstrates effective planning and management of the district administration, finances, operations, and personnel.
A. Facilities and Operations Management	The superintendent maintains a management system designed to produce ongoing efficiencies in major district operations, including transportation, food services, and building maintenance and operations.
B. Fiscal Management	The superintendent manages a budget development, implementation, and monitoring process that reflects sound

	business and fiscal practices and that supports district goals.
C. Human Resources Management	The superintendent oversees a comprehensive human resources program (recruitment, retention, staffing organization, compensation and benefits, staff recognition and support), tied to defined goals and targets developed by administration for board review.
Board and Community Relations	The superintendent maintains a positive and productive working relationship with the board of trustees and the community.
A. Board Relations	The superintendent maintains a positive and productive working relationship with the board of trustees.
B. Community Relations	The superintendent maintains a positive and productive working relationship with the community.

Note: This performance rubric has been condensed from the original (TASB, 2006).

In studies conducted in Texas, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, California, Virginia, and Illinois, over nearly a twenty-year period, disagreement in roles and the competencies associated to the superintendency, as well as the role of the local school board, were prevalent (Armbruster, 2011; Curry, 2016; Geivett, 2010; Mextorf, 2003; Meyer, 2007; Pinkham, 1999, Prezas, 2013). The differing opinions associated to the roles top district leaders should assume has provided illumination for the complexity of running a public-school district. The disagreement surrounding the roles and responsibilities of district leadership suggest further research regarding the superintendent and his/her relationship with the school board is needed. A topic that easily connects to the dynamic of district

leadership is concern for the frequent superintendent turnover reported in many school districts.

Superintendent Turnover

The Midcontinent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) has been a non-profit education and research entity that has conducted educational studies and provided resources to educators and the public for the past forty years. One McREL report presented the results of a meta-analysis of superintendent practice as it related to student achievement (Waters & Marzano, 2006). Waters and Marzano, the researchers for the McREL study found a " . . . statistically significant correlation between student achievement and superintendent tenure . . ." (p. 3).

Conversely, The Brookings Institute, who conducted a recent study, claimed superintendents had little effect on student academic performance (Chingos, Whitehurst, & Lindquist, 2014). The Brookings report sampled school districts in North Carolina and Florida over a decade, from 2000-2010, and reported superintendent tenure averaged between three (Chingos, et al., 2014). One difference between the McREL and Brookings studies were the McREL analysis centered on superintendent practices, whereas the Brookings data was centered on superintendent characteristics. The McREL report indicated student achievement improvements were noticeable as soon as two years when the superintendent implemented sound practices (Waters & Marzano, 2006).

The comparison of these two studies should shed light on the importance of considering what the research was focused on when analyzing the findings. In addition, research results, have often revealed unexpected themes which add to the overall value

and understanding of the research results, but care should be taken when placing the findings in context.

Several studies have cited superintendent tenure averages across America as being as short as two and a half years, and as long as seven years (Berryhill, 2009; Russell, 2014; National School Boards Association. Council of Urban Boards of Education (CUBE), 2001). A recurring theme in superintendent turnover has been board relations (Fusarelli, 2006, 2005; Mountford, 2004). Reasons provided through different studies and research included political conflict (board relations), superintendent's desire to go to a larger district, poor communication between the superintendent and the board, short tenure of trustees on the board, long tenure of trustees on the board, and short tenure of the board president (Alsbury, 2008; Goodman, 2012; Fusarelli, 2006, 2005; Prezas, 2013; Sherz, 2004; Escalante, 2002).

Consistent with other findings, this group also found superintendent and board relations to be the foremost factor to superintendent longevity. Many factors affecting the operation and success of school districts face current superintendents in Texas and across the nation. The complexity of the superintendent position extends beyond educational programs and enters into a realm of relationship building and leadership practice. According to research past and present, tenure is short if the superintendent does not apply himself or herself in multiple disciplines of thought and action.

Educational leadership preparation programs supply aspiring leaders with examples of different vehicles and pathways of thought and action. In Texas, school boards along with their serving superintendents have been tasked with the creation of

their school district's mission and vision. This vision statement was to be focused on

goals and priorities for students and consideration for long term district improvement.

Vision/Mission Statements for Texas School Districts

In Texas, all districts are required to develop and maintain a vision. The

education code specifically requires every district to, ". . . adopt a vision

statement and comprehensive goals for the district and the superintendent and

monitor progress toward those goals . . ." (TEA, 2017b). TASB has developed

multiple guidelines for vision statements as well as student performance goals and

has provided them as resources for districts to draw from should they so desire

(TASB, 2017). Both vision statements and performance goals are required by the

state. In a sampling of vision statements from all regions in Texas, many varieties

exist.

The length, scope, and complexity do not necessarily relate to the size or

location of the district. Regardless of the length or scope of a district's

statement(s), the TEA requirement is for districts to envision and act upon a

collaboratively created ideal (TEA, 2017b). In order to receive funding allocated

to specific educational programs, districts must develop a Campus Needs

Assessment (CAN) and a subsequent Campus Improvement Plan (CIP) in order to

center campus educational efforts, and to obtain designated funding for specific

programming (TEA, 2017b). With the mandated requirement of a district vision

statement, the improvement plans for each individual campus should be

coherently aligned to the district's vision and priority goals. It should be noted

the district's vision statement, performance goals, needs assessments, and improvement plans should be collaboratively formed and executed.

Summary

Chapter II has presented a review literature regarding educational leadership theory and practice, the scholar–practitioner leadership profile, the formation of the superintendent position and related issues, and Texas school districts' existing mission/vision statements. Many forms of leadership theory and practice have been applied to education including the relatively new theoretical model of scholar–practitioner leaders. The formation of the school superintendent position in America was created in the 1830s (Callahan, 1966; Kowalski, 2005). The roles and responsibilities of the superintendent are designated and assigned by the individual local school boards in Texas.

Literature suggests the angst between school superintendents and their counterpart school boards is prevalent across the nation. One symptom of this dissatisfaction may be the short tenure associated with the superintendent position in recent years. In addition to the literature associated to the superintendency, a brief discussion regarding school districts' vision and mission statements has been included. In Chapter III, the methodology for the research techniques to be used in this qualitative study are provided. Chapter X will present the data and Chapter XI will present the results including recommendations for areas of future study.

CHAPTER III

Research Method

Research Design Overview

This study utilized a qualitative survey methodology using interviews as the primary research vehicle. The qualitative survey interview research design was selected because it allowed participants to use their own words while situated in their regular work setting. Field research is appropriate when researchers wish to examine groups who are representative of a larger population (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010) and want to observe and record respondent answers in order to learn their opinions, beliefs, and attitudes. Bailey stated:

> Researchers usually decide to conduct field research because they believe it is the best way to examine a particular setting, group, and social processes and structures that are of interest to them theoretically, personally, or academically. Fieldwork allows them to effectively seek in-depth answers, based upon the perspectives of those in the setting . . . (2007, p. 33)

Primarily face-to-face interviews were utilized to conduct the research because meeting with superintendents in their natural work setting provided the best vehicle for participants to offer candid responses within the educational setting.

Conducting interviews on site added a level of comfort for participants and also

allow the researcher opportunities to observe respondents in their natural setting.

The following research questions were utilized to guide the study.

1. How do scholar–practitioner leaders, as superintendents, translate the district's

   mission/vision into practice at the district level?

2. How do scholar–practitioner leaders, as superintendents, translate their own

   vision for the district to support the district's mission/vision?

Field Research

The traditionalist view of field research centers on the research as an observer.

The traditionalist stance emphasizes observation, informal interviews, and reading both

formal and informal documents. Adler and Adler (1987) cite two different philosophies

in the United States regarding the researcher's role within a studied group. These two

philosophies are mostly separated by membership role concepts. Members are the people

in the group being studied. The University of Chicago Department of Sociology,

hereafter referred to as the Chicago School, began viewing field research as a viable

social research methodology during the 1920's (Neuman, 2011). Robert Park and Ernest

Burgess, professors at the Chicago School, directed their students to venture out into the

streets of Chicago and use the urban setting as a laboratory to study people and their

surrounding social constructs (Neuman, 2011).

Many sociologists consider Park and Burgess' rudimentary social experiments

and techniques foundational for field research. The Chicago School experiments used a

variety of sources including observations of specific societal groups to glean information

about these groups of people. During the 1930's Park retired from teaching, and field research declined with his exit until a second generation of Chicago School professors took an interest in field research methodology and a resurgence occurred during the 1940-1960's. It was during this resurgence the concept "participant observer" was coined. Some argue the first generation of Chicago School researchers created the participant observer ideal while second generation researchers perfected the technique. Second generation Chicago School scholars created three principles in developing the participant observation technique: "(1) Study people in their natural settings, or *in situ;* (2) study people by directly interacting with them repeatedly and over time; and (3) develop broad theoretical insights based upon an in-depth understanding of members' perspectives of the social world" (Neuman, 2011).

The second generation of researchers also developed codification techniques for both qualitative and quantitative research still used today (Adler & Adler, 1987). The progression of field research techniques from first to second generation Chicago School researchers progressed from observing members, to interacting with members, and culminated with participating with members (1987). Adler and Adler suggest there exist three-member roles excluding pure observation of members (1987). They present membership roles in three categories: 1) peripheral member, 2) active member, and 3) complete member. Each of these roles will intensify with assimilation into the studied group (1987). To summarize, the two different types of member roles are separated by the ideal of participation and interaction with the studied group. The first (traditionalist) mostly observes the group with limited contact, while the second school of thought joins

the group in some fashion. Consequently, researchers can witness transformations due to stress or fulfillment. Typically, field observations have accepted a chronological ordering because field notes, interviews, and interactions occur in a specific time and place. Setting a chronological format can also help field researchers deconstruct perspective through their participation and the changes, emotional and physical, they themselves may experience.

Catherine Kohler Riesman (2008) presented three levels of inquiry and analysis: 1) stories told by research participants; 2) interpretive accounts by investigator (narrative of narrative); and 3) readers' reconstruction (narrative of narrative of narrative). Within the technique and procedures associated with interviews or observations it is the duty of the researcher to capture the voice of the studied group. Sometimes this voice is evident in the native language while other times voice must be observed holistically. Voice does not specifically mean language, but signifies the spirit of the culture. This also indicates the importance of conducting interviews in face-to-face format.

Survey Interview Research

The researcher utilized an interview style research framework while utilizing a qualitative survey methodology. This method of research was appropriate because it was effective in exploring and describing the practice of the participants and created an opportunity for respondents to speak freely to open-ended interview questions. Consequently, both structured and non-structured interview questions were employed in order to fully investigate emergent themes, which added a structural control aiding to the

triangulation of results. Allowing participants to relate their own thoughts, actions, and experiences through their own words provided an authentic voice to each respondent.

Babbie (1989), stated survey research ". . . is chiefly used in studies that have individual people as the units of analysis . . ." (p. 237). Babbie also posited appropriate uses of survey research are for descriptive and exploratory purposes (Babbie, 1989). Survey research can be used to collect original data from individuals who represent a larger group of people who may be difficult to observe (1989). McMillan and Schumacher (2010) defined survey research as, ". . . the use of a questionnaire or interview to assess the current opinions, beliefs, and attitudes of members of a known population . . ." (p. 491). McMillan and Schumacher described the process of survey research in further detail:

> In survey research, the investigator selects a sample of respondents from a target population and administers a questionnaire or conducts interviews to collect information on variables of interest. Questionnaires are distributed by mail, in person to a captive group of subjects, or via the Internet. Surveys are used to learn about people's attitudes, beliefs, values, demographics, behavior, opinions, habits, desires, ideas, and other types of information. They are used frequently in business, politics, government, sociology, public health, psychology, and education because accurate information can be obtained for large numbers of people with a small sample. (p. 235)

This study utilized a survey framework in which common (structured) questions were used in first round interviews with all participants; however, second round interviews

were semi-structured, and some questions were based on the responses provided by individual participants in first round interviews. This structure allowed for both apriori and open coding of responses, and allowed the researcher to create questions as themes emerged.

Participant Selection

Since this study sought to describe and explore themes, which relate directly to the application of theory to practice, participants were purposefully chosen from superintendents who have completed a preparation program centered on scholar–practitioner leadership. In addition, participants were chosen from the pool of graduates who had previously completed the scholar–practitioner leadership program at Stephen F. Austin State University. Participants were chosen from this pool for several reasons: (1) access to participants; (2) participants all completed the same program; (3) the researcher desired a pool of candidates who currently served as superintendents in Texas; and (4) the program was in place for over twenty years prior to the start of the study.

As school systems, mandated accountability, and the challenges of educating the next generation of citizens becomes more complex, the need for leaders who can successfully navigate through the myriad of policy and create the educational environment which provides the best opportunities for learners and their communities is paramount. Jenlink (2006) posited, " . . . learning to lead for the scholar–practitioner is concerned less with transitional orientations of knowledge and inquiry and more with engaging in a 'new epistemology' of knowledge and practice articulated through the inquiry as praxis . . ." (p. 57). The researcher procured a list of superintendents who have

completed a scholar–practitioner preparation program at SFA and contacted those serving

as school superintendents via email, phone, or mail and provided potential candidates

with an invitation to participate (see Appendix A). Babbie (1989) posited purposive

sampling was appropriate:

> Occasionally it may be appropriate for you to select your sample on the basis of
>
> your own knowledge of the population, its elements, and the nature of your
>
> research aims: in short, based on your judgment and the purpose of the study. (p.
>
> 204)

An informed consent contained in the invitation letter was provided along with

the title of the study and the protocols and safeguards associated to the study. Related

materials such as meeting agendas, district newsletters, and other correspondence were

requested from each participant, but were not required for participation. The participants

were recruited from a list of school superintendents who have completed a scholar–

practitioner leadership program at Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches,

Texas. All participants met the following criteria:

- All participant superintendents successfully completed a scholar–practitioner
  leadership program.

- All participants were serving as a school superintendent in Texas during the
  study.

- All participants served as a campus administrator or central office administrator
  prior to being hired as a superintendent.

- All participants agreed to the informed consent form provided.

Participants were also purposively chosen in order to create diversity with respect to gender, experience as superintendent, district size, and geographic regions in Texas. The resulting participants included: one female participant, five male participants, experience as superintendent ranged from 3.5 to 15 years, district size varied from 350 to 25,000 student enrollment, participants represented districts from east Texas, west Texas, central Texas and south-central Texas.

Data Collection

Multiple data collection methods were utilized with multiple data sources. The researcher employed triangulation to add validity to multiple sourced data. Catherine Kohler Riessman (2008) presents three levels of inquiry and analysis: 1) stories told by research participants; 2) interpretive accounts by investigator (narrative of narrative); and 3) readers' reconstruction (narrative of narrative of narrative). Within the technique and procedures associated with interviews or observations was the duty of the researcher to capture the voice of the participant. This study utilized both structured and semi-structured (or non-structured interviews), artifacts such as meeting agendas, and direct observations recorded in a researcher's journal to collect data.

Interviews.

Interviews were used as a primary source of data collection. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Participants were asked to participate in at least two face-to-face interviews and one follow up inquiry via phone call or email. Member checks were performed via telephone or face-to-face after the first two interviews and at the end of the study. Selected superintendents, after agreeing to participate, were interviewed during

two separate face-to-face meetings and made themselves available for one additional follow up inquiry subsequent to second round interviews. The researcher traveled to each participant's school district in order to conduct interviews. The research was conducted in two interview sessions, through reflections and observations recorded in a researcher's journal, and by one follow up inquiry. The first two interviews were face-to-face and approximately one hour in length. First round interviews followed a structured questionnaire (see Appendix B) and the same instrument was used for each respondent. A member check was conducted via telephone or in person after the first and second interviews in order to check for accuracy. Informal observations were recorded in the researcher's journal, and the collecting of artifacts was done after each face-to-face interview. Second round interviews were guided by semi-structured questionnaires allowing the researcher to ask clarifying questions and follow up questions based upon participant responses.

The superintendent information sheet was used to establish a level of comfort between the researcher and participant. During the first round interview the researcher administered a common set of questions to all participants and set protocols for future meetings. The results from the first interview guided some of the questions for the second interview; however, some questions were preselected and common to all interviews (see Appendix C). The second interview sought to increase data points and provide the researcher with thematic connections. Follow-up questions were asked of each participant, creating a third level of inquiry for increased data saturation. After follow-up questions, the same two tier-three questions were formulated as a result of the aggregate

emergent data (see Appendix D). Over the course of the study, member checks were used to verify participant responses and add integrity to the researcher's recording process. Six superintendents currently serving in Texas public school districts were interviewed. Each of the participating superintendents successfully completed a graduate program centered on the scholar–practitioner profile. The participants were chosen using purposive sampling (Babbie, 1989).

Documents.

Meeting agendas, PLC agendas, and other documents were requested for data collection, but not all participants provided documents of this type. The collected documents were coded for thematic elements which supported or conflicted with participant responses.

Reflective journal.

The researcher kept a reflective journal for the duration of the study to provide another level of data triangulation. Journal entries were recorded immediately after interviews and was utilized to record researcher impressions, observations, and thoughts.

Data Analysis

All interview data was transcribed prior to analysis. Individual interview analysis was coded for themes in advance of subsequent interviews in order to inform future interview questions. All documents procured from participants including agendas from leadership and team meetings were checked for thematic elements consistent, or inconsistent, with participant responses. The third and final inquiry was conducted via phone or through email when participants were not available. Tier-three questions were

formulated as a result of the aggregate data compiled from prior interviews, documents, and reflections recorded in the researcher's journal in order to ensure data saturation.

Validity.

The validity of this study is centered upon ensuring the researcher accurately reported the analysis of participant responses. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) explained: "Validity, in qualitative research, refers to the degree of congruence between the explanations of the phenomena and the realities of the world . . ." (p. 330). Great care was taken in the recording, transcription, and analysis of data with embedded reviews by the participants. McMillan and Schumacher stated:

> Validity addresses these questions: Do researchers actually observe what they
> think they see? Do inquirers actually hear the meanings that they think they hear?
> In other words, *validity of qualitative designs* is the degree to which the
> interpretations have *mutual meanings* between the participants and the researcher.
> Thus, the researcher and participants agree on the description of composition of
> events and especially on the meanings of these events. (p. 330)

The current study utilized mechanical recorded data, participant reviews, member checking, and low-inference descriptors to strengthen validity.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher becomes " . . . immersed in the situation and phenomenon being studied . . ." (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 12). McMillan and Schumacher also stated, " . . . qualitative researchers may assume interactive social roles

in which they record observations and interviews with participants in a range of contexts .
. .” (p. 12).

The researcher has served as a campus principal and fulfilled district-level administrative functions, which have provided the researcher insight and contextual understanding of educational terminology, processes, and procedures. In this study, the researcher was also used as a research instrument. The researcher was able to contextualize participant responses, and evaluate criterion based upon prior administrative experience. The researcher's knowledge of state and local mandates and legislation provided for a deeper understanding of respondent dialogue. In addition, a clarification of acronyms and terms was not needed. Participant responses were more open and conversational knowing the researcher had served in several administrative roles. Explanations of educational concepts, programs, and practices were easily understood by the researcher thus providing an additional lens of experience to the research's role. In addition, the researcher's role included the accurate recording and transcription of all interview responses. The researcher was also responsible for conducting all interviews and member checks as well as keeping a researcher's journal during the course of the study.

Trustworthiness

Measures were taken during the course of the study in order to create a framework and structure, which strengthened trustworthiness. Audio recording and transcription of interviews, member checks, acknowledging researcher bias, and triangulation of data were included in the tools utilized (Creswell, 2012). In addition, participant reviews of

transcriptions and field notes were employed. The researcher also maintained a research journal during the course of the study to strengthen triangulation of data.

Mechanically recorded data.

The researcher recorded all interviews using a high definition audio recording device. All recorded material was transcribed by the researcher and confirmed as accurate by the participant.

Member checks and participant review

Member checks, Creswell stated "This approach *writ large* in most qualitative studies involves taking data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account" (Creswell, 2012, p. 252). Member checks allow the participants multiple chances to corroborate or correct the researcher's accounting of participant responses and artifacts associated to the study. Member checks will also be employed during interviews to clarify responses.

The researcher contacted participants at different intervals and provided them with researcher accounts of responses for review. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) indicated:

> Researchers who interview each person in depth or conduct a series of
> interviews with the same person may ask the person to review a transcript
> of synthesis of the data obtained from him or her. The participant is asked
> to modify any information from the interview data for accuracy. Then the
> data obtained from each interviewee are analyzed for a comprehensive
> integration of findings. (p. 332)

Any misunderstandings or misrepresented responses were clarified and corrected before final analysis.

Researcher bias.

The researcher was a doctoral student enrolled in the Secondary Education and Educational Leadership department at Stephen F. Austin State University at the time of the current study. The researcher acknowledged and was aware of the potential for bias related to this enrollment. In addition, the researcher has served as a campus and district administrator. This experience was used to deconstruct understanding, but the researcher took great care not to impose personal beliefs or allow elements of personal professional practice to influence study participants' perceptions or responses. Creswell (2012) noted researchers should include commentaries regarding personal experiences in their analysis in order to acknowledge potential biases.

Coding of data.

Data was coded from multiple sources. Both apriori and open coding techniques were employed. Coding followed a systematic pattern. Coding was undertaken after each interview and procurement of documents. Coding was performed on transcripts, field notes, and district artifacts. Apriori codes were codes directly related to the research questions and review of literature. Open coding was used as emergent themes became apparent. A list of apriori codes are provided below.

1. District Vision – DV

2. Superintendent Vision – SV

3. Scholar-practitioner – SP

4. Team Meeting – TM

5. Professional Learning Community meeting – PLC

6. Superintendent Practice – SPR

7. School Board Support – SBS

8. Leadership Support – LS

9. Community Support – CS

10. Faculty/Staff Support – FSS

Triangulation of data.

The triangulation of data typically utilizes a variety of data sources and techniques in order to provide the study multiple checks for accuracy. Creswell commented:

> Typically, this process involves corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective. When qualitative researchers locate evidence to document a code or theme in different sources of data, they are triangulating information and providing validity to their findings. (2012, p. 251)

Coding participant responses along with cataloging document artifacts and checking accounts from study participants created a triangulation of data in the current study.

Summary

This study utilized a qualitative methodology using a survey research design with interviews conducted primarily in the field. The survey interview research design was selected because allowed participants to use their own words while situated in their regular work setting. Qualitative techniques such as member checking, interview transcription and verification, collecting artifacts, and triangulation of data will be

utilized. Chapters IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, and IX will present the data gathered during

participant interviews during the course of the study. Chapter X will present study

findings. Chapter XI presents conclusions, implications, recommendations for further

research, and the researcher's comments related to the study and its implications.

CHAPTER IV

Dr. Allen

Overview

This chapter underscores the emergent data from the first of six participant interviews. In the following six chapters, participant responses and the researcher's coding of emergent themes provide readers with insight to how the methods and strategies utilized by scholar–practitioner leaders, serving as superintendents in Texas public schools, bridge the theory to practice gap. The research questions were used as an over-arching framework and lens, while common, emergent themes will provide detailed descriptions of participant views and practices in their individual voices.

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe how serving superintendents apply their prior learning and knowledge to the articulation and translation of their district's mission/vision. The following two research questions guided the study.

1. How do scholar–practitioner leaders, as superintendents, translate the district's mission/vision into practice at the district level?

2. How do scholar–practitioner leaders, as superintendents, translate their own vision for the district to support the district's mission/vision?

In addition, interview questions were derived utilizing the two research questions as a framework for research. During the course of interviews, researcher reflections recorded in a journal, informal researcher observations, and access to district documents, several areas of superintendent focus became apparent: ensuring the district's vision, mission, core values, guiding statements, and strategic plan is aligned from top to bottom throughout the district; creating trust and vision alignment with the school board; team leadership and modeling; and inviting community input and creating partnerships.

Consequently, four themes emerged directly related to bridging the theory to practice gap with actionable constructs: creating programs or practices which support student success; reimagining roles and responsibilities across the educational system; change, inquiry, and research as a part of practice; and defining readiness. This chapter relates the gathered data from the first of six participants. Chapters V through IX present the findings for the remaining five superintendents.

Introduction

Dr. Allen (pseudonym) is the superintendent at Midville ISD (pseudonym) and has been in his current position for five years. Midville ISD is a relatively large suburban district with a student enrollment in excess of twenty-five thousand students. Dr. Allen has served as a public-school educator for over thirty-five years. All of Dr. Allen's experience prior to working in a central office role has been in secondary schools. Dr. Allen grew up in Texas, and this educator has served exclusively in Texas schools. Dr. Allen felt his high school educational experience was the reason he matriculated into education.

I was a marginal student, didn't really apply myself as much as I should

have, but I think that's part of growing up. But you know, coaches. . . . I

can remember in high school, it was the first time I was ever called a

leader. It was the first time I was given leadership roles. It was first time

educators told me I had potential. Educators challenged me to be more

than I thought that I could be, and so I just had such a positive experience

that It was a natural thing to want to teach and coach because I had such

strong teachers and coaches. I went to university, and it really changed

my life. Again, I went in as a marginal student but got a wake-up call, and

toward the end really started applying myself more. I matured; I grew up

again. I had people who challenged me and held me accountable and they

were all educators. And so, it was just a very natural thing for me . . . And

so, I got into teaching and coaching. (Interview one)

After completing college, Dr. Allen began his career as an educator at a rural district

where he taught high school classes and coached. After twenty years in the classroom,

Dr. Allen pursued a principal certification and ultimately served as an assistant principal

and principal for four years before obtaining an assistant superintendent position in a

larger suburban district. During service as a principal, Dr. Allen began his scholar–

practitioner doctoral program.

The scholar–practitioner program at Stephen F. Austin transformed my

life, as an educator. It was a transformative experience . . . people ask me

sometimes, you know, what's the, what's the one thing that, if they think

I'm a successful superintendent, they'll ask me sometimes . . . What is the

one thing that you feel has made an incredible difference in your life and

that prepared you to be successful in the superintendency? And I will tell

them every time it's the literature on change that I read in my doctoral

program. You know, how to facilitate change, how to monitor, how to

involve people. I mean that has been the most remarkable thing . . .

understanding the scholarly part of educational change, but also

understanding the practitioner side to the implementation, or

understanding the research behind it, but really drilling down into how you

implement it. But when I saw the scholar practitioner program, I just

thought, that's it. That appeals to me, and so it was really good. I loved it.

And so, I wouldn't be sitting here without it; there's no way. (Interview

one)

Vision

As the first interview progressed from initial introductions and background to

questions regarding district vision, I began to explore how scholar–practitioners, serving

as superintendents, translate district vision into practice. Dr. Allen related his views

regarding the alignment of the district's vision across the educational landscape and the

collaboration of stakeholders in the formation of the vision.

When I became the Superintendent of schools here, our strategic plan was

78 pages long. When I first got the job, about a year into my job, I gave

my principals directors, coordinators, kind of the key leadership team in

our district, which is about a 125 people, a pop quiz. And I asked them,

"what's our mission statement, our vision statement, what are two of our

core values, what's two of our goals?" And we went through just things

that were in our strategic plan, and the highest out of a 125 people, thirteen

knew our mission statement, thirteen. Nobody knew our vision; less than

twenty could name two core values, less than ten, fewer than ten, could

name our academic or financial goals. And if you don't, if your leadership

team can't articulate what your mission is, what your vision is, what your

function is, then nobody knows. And so, we made a real commitment to

get the strategic plan down to one page.

Dr. Allen continued his discussion about vision alignment with an example of taking a

theoretical construct and putting into practice by relating an experience stemming from

his participation in becoming a nationally certified superintendent.

Another really transformative experience that I've had is since I became a

superintendent, I've gone through the National Superintendent

Certification with AASA, which is the American Association of School

Administrators. There were three of us sitting around, one from New

York, a young principal, an older principal from Virginia, and me. And

this guy, his name was Michael, asked the questions. He said, "If you can

only measure one thing in elementary school, what would it be? Only one

thing. What would it be?" And we all agreed that reading literacy would

be that one thing. And then he asked this key question. He goes, "so, is

that in your strategic plan?" because it was a session on strategic planning,

and I laughed out loud and said, "no." . . . And I said, we have a 78-page

strategic plan, and the most important things are not in there.

Subsequent to this conference where he earned his national superintendent certification,

Dr. Allen returned to his district and began a transformation of the district's vision.

And so, after that I came back, and I assigned people, key leaders in our

district, to put together committees to come up with our mission statement,

to come up with our core values, to come up with our vision statement, to

come up with our motto. And then we collectively as a group ask our, our

elementary principals and our secondary principals, what's the one thing

that if you fix it on your campus, it will make everything else easier and

better. And, of course, it became literacy, Algebra, extra and co-curricular

activities. And so those became our guiding statements. And our guiding

statements are that: our students will be reading on grade level or higher

and will remain on grade level or higher by the time they enter the third

grade; our students will be successful in Algebra I by the end of their

ninth-grade year; our students will participate in extracurricular or co-

curricular activities; our students will have 24 college hours, an industry

standard certificate, or one of our district level certificates that we issue,

and then our parents will have choice.

Dr. Allen was extremely passionate as he articulated how the district's vision was

formulated, and how the stakeholders were involved in the formulation. He continued to

explain how the ideas learned at the conference were translated into practice at his district.

> So, once each committee came back, the mission statement and vision statement, the motto, the core values, and the guiding statements . . . Once those were rough drafts we took them to our leadership team, which represents principals, coordinators, assistant/associate superintendents, the key leaders in our district, and we let all of them give us feedback. Then we took it to key business leaders in our community.

Dr. Allen created an atypical situation for local community members to provide input for the creation of the district's mission/vision and core values.

> Instead of inviting business men and women to miss 3 days of work to sit through an incredible complex strategic plan, we created the rough draft based on what we as educators know to be critical to the success of our communities. And then we gave everybody an opportunity to feedback. And our core values changed. Initially, we had a couple of different core values that were not included in the original list that were included in the final list based on feedback from our board and based on feedback from the community. And the cool thing about it is they got to give us feedback in an hour lunch meeting as opposed to three days of sitting around the table.

From this collaborative process, Dr. Allen was able to facilitate feedback from multiple sources, multiple stakeholders, and present a concrete rough draft to the school board.

The school board then created guiding statements as a result of the collaborative process tying directly back to the formulated vision and core values. These actions are in agreement with Kowalski (2006) regarding school vision:

> Frequently, vision is a manifestation of organizational culture, a representation of shared values and beliefs about teaching, learning, citizenship democracy, and life. As a context for adopting change strategies, vision is more effective when it is broad enough to integrate the personal visions of many, reflects the needs of individuals and community, is congruous with the existing knowledge base in education, and is compatible with the personal vision of those who lead the organizations (p. 205).

Dr. Allen also implemented local accountability which served to align all campuses to the district vision, core values, and guiding statements. Each district campus was required to be aligned to the district's vision by incorporating at one of the district's guiding statements into the Campus Improvement Plan (CIP). An incorporation of the district's guiding statements not only help to consistently align the district from top to bottom, it also added a local accountability element which is actionable and part of the ongoing improvement plan for each campus. Kowalski also stated, "In essence, a school district vision provides a foundation for planning for the future . . . the vision becomes a daily guide for employees" (p. 205).

Alignment to school board

The superintendent's alignment to the school board is of utmost importance (Berryhill, 2009; Russell, 2014; National School Boards Association. Council of Urban Boards of Education (CUBE), 2001). A recurring theme in superintendent turnover has been board relations (Fusarelli, 2006, 2005; Mountford, 2004). Consequently, studies centered on superintendent tenure have linked both student academic performance and district success to superintendent stability (Russell, 2014; Waters & Marzano, 2006). Russell (2014) reported the average length of service for a superintendent in Texas is between 2.5 and 4.8 years depending upon the time frame one used as a reference point. Different sources have related varying superintendent tenure, some indicating average turnovers in large urban districts in less than 2.5 years. Alignment between the superintendent and their local school boards has been shown to be an important, if not critical part of both district and superintendent success.

When queried by the researcher about the superintendent's alignment to the school board, Dr. Allen indicated the district vision and his vision were consistent, and he felt 100% in alignment with the school board at Midville ISD. Dr. Allen indicated he was aligned with the board

> A hundred percent. You know, the board, the guiding statements are
> what's really driving improved instruction in our district. And the board is
> aligned, and they've had a voice and they've also been fully informed and
> updated as we work through vision goals. We're talking about college,

career, and life ready. So, I would say that we're perfectly aligned. I

mean, it's been really fun. (Interview one)

Examples of Dr. Allen's alignment to the school board were threaded throughout

multiple interviews with the researcher.

I think a couple of things that have made a real difference in the

relationship that we have with our board is I've tried to communicate to

them their greatest, greatest, power is policy, and if they want to see

something changed, if they put it in board policy, then it carries the weight

of being a requirement of our district. (Interview two)

Dr. Allen not only allowed his assistant superintendents to communicate with individual

school board members, but he encouraged it. Dr. Allen offered,

So, I think I'm very different than most superintendents that I know. My

previous superintendent did not want any of us talking, the assistant

superintendents, associate superintendents, talking to the board. He didn't

want the board talking to us. Every question came from him. He would

delegate it to us. We would get him the answer and he would get it back to

the board. Um, and so as I became the superintendent, what I learned

really more than anything is my strength is hiring really good people and

getting out of the way. (Interview two)

Dr. Allen continued with a more specific example of how he facilitates

communication between board members and his leadership team.

I know just enough about human resources to function. I know more about

curriculum and instruction because that's kind of where I came up. You

know, just enough about business to understand that you can't spend more

than you take in. I know just enough about buildings to ask a few key

questions . . . For example, our board president right now is a general

manager for a law firm and so he looks at the disbursement report and you

know, he knows to the penny how much money that law firm has, who's

billing, who's 30 days late, who's 60 days late. Who is getting the

bonuses, you know, all of those types of things. And so that's his world.

And so, what he loves more than anything is reading our disbursement

reports. And so, his relationship with our CFO is really good because they

share the exact same lens and focus and enjoy getting into the details. I

mean if you asked me to look at it this fiscal report, I'll look at it, but I

won't enjoy it, and I won't want to talk about it. (Interview two)

In addition to Dr. Allen's duties at Midville ISD, he has also been invited to speak

with different groups about his practice and his experience as a superintendent. He

recently spoke with a group of less experienced superintendents. Dr. Allen offered

particular insight into how he employs different strategies to maintain good relationships

with the school board in his practice.

But another thing that I think is really important, and I'm meeting with

some superintendents on Monday, some young superintendents, and we

are going to go through a little exercise that we do, um, and we are

constantly talking about, which is, we ask our leadership teams, we look at

our individual board members and we go . . . what is it he or she does for a

living? So, what is your Lens? What are his or her lens . . . And then we

talk about where does that board member get his or her information? . . .

And I mean that just wires in to their information and so we work real

hard and try to see their lens and how they get their information and then

we try to try to make sure that we're communicating in those areas. So. it's

kind of a political mapping process, which is one of the most beneficial

things I think any superintendent can learn is how to political map. I mean

how do you sit down and really look at people, in general, and what is the

political map? What do they do for a living? What's their lens?

(Interview two)

Dr. Allen indicated other superintendents may avoid the type of open communication he

encourages between his leadership team and the board because they may be concerned

about what one of those leaders might say behind his back, or who might be trying to get

his job. He further expressed complete trust in his leadership team and indicated he did

not feel threatened about someone else taking his job.

Team Leadership and Modeling

Positive role models have been common themes in leadership mantra across

multiple disciplines. Robertson (2008) reported on a study of two successful principals,

The role models they were portraying to their staff, and their belief in the

value that openness to professional development and lifelong learning

would have for improving education in their schools, paved the way for

increased collegial and collaborative interactions between individual

members of their staff (p. 50).

Consistent with Robertson (2008), Dr. Allen believed modeling from the top down is

important and powerful. Midville ISD employs a local accountability piece where the

supervisors of each department or school develop goals consistent with the district's

strategic plan and/or guiding statements and then develop metrics which will monitor

progress toward each individual goal. Maintenance supervisors and campus principals

alike are connected to the overall district goals.

There's not a formal process where our principals sit down to collaborate

on their campus improvement plans, but through the accountability

process, they know whether their kids are improving or not and when they

don't, they're getting together with those who are showing improvements.

Each campus has to sit down and show us their data four times a year.

And there's a huge audience that comes in and watches, and what they're

doing is: they're watching other elementary principals that they know are

good give their presentation, so it can be a model for them. It's a very

open process. And that has driven more collaboration than anything I've

ever done in my life. It's the most powerful thing we've ever done.

(Interview two)

Consequently, Dr. Allen also requires each department, including the district

leadership team, to provide progress monitoring toward the district's goals. Each

department is aligned to the district strategic plan, and each department must prepare

fidelity metrics. Dr. Allen continues his description of modeling

> So, I think the most important thing that we do as a leadership team to
>
> support the mission, vision, values of that is that we model it. We have an
>
> accountability process just like our campuses do. The other piece to that is
>
> . . . I'll just give you another example. We're going through the budget
>
> process right now. On the wall in my conference room, we write the
>
> guiding statements and the core values that our board has adopted into
>
> policy, and for example, somebody asked for a new personnel unit; the
>
> person who's presenting that to us has to show where it will impact one of
>
> our core values or one of our guiding statements. And if it doesn't, the
>
> answer's no. And if it does, then it moves forward for consideration.
>
> (Interview two)

In addition to modeling the strategic plan at the central office, Dr. Allen also

models servant leadership and encourages flexibility with autonomy at the campus and

departmental level. He believes in providing employees with the tools they need and

then stepping aside.

> I have to give them the tools necessary to be successful in those things.
>
> And then, I have to model servant leadership. So, that's what I try to do.
>
> I'm not telling you, any of our principals, that they have to teach reading
>
> on their campus, but they understand that students must be reading on

grade level or higher by the time they end the third grade. And so, I let

them figure that out. (Interview one)

Dr. Allen also believed building positive relationships with his associate

superintendents was part of the success formula. Dr. Allen stated,

If one of my associate superintendents goes to the mid-winter conference

and they are gone Sunday night, Monday night, Tuesday night, and they

get back on Wednesday, you know, I just tell them, "Hey, take your kid to

school on Thursday, come in at nine, or go have lunch with your husband.

You know, family first, just giving them time to go to events and see their

kids or grandkids. (Interview two)

One of the other things Dr. Allen related about building true relationships was one of the

most caring things a person could do was to give another individual their undivided

attention. He commented, "Your presence, your actual presence is the greatest gift you

can give" (Interview two).

At Midville ISD, the strategic plan is based upon the district's vision and mission.

The core values and guiding statements are threaded through the district in literature and

in practice. In addition, the practice of basing decisions upon the district's vision is

modeled throughout the district infrastructure.

Community

Dr. Allen presented the researcher with multiple district documents including the

single paged strategic plan, and representations of the scorecards each school and

department maintains as a part of progress monitoring. In addition to departments and

schools, each individual student has scorecards as well. This is one example of how the

district builds community. Parents are invited to conference with teachers and to meet

with counselors in order to review their children's scorecard(s).

> And so, when we have a parent conference, every student will call up her
>
> or his scorecard and we'll show mom, OK, so you want me to go to
>
> college? I haven't done the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student
>
> Aid), I haven't done my applications, and I haven't taken an advanced
>
> placement class. So, the parent will be able to walk out and go, okay,
>
> we've got to complete the FAFSA, and we've got to get you enrolled in an
>
> advanced placement class. So, there's specific parenting actions that the
>
> parent can take to move their kids along the path of college ready or career
>
> ready. It's really exciting. (Interview one)

As mentioned earlier, the district sought input from the community when

developing the district's mission and vision. Dr. Allen related one of the processes used

in developing the district vision.

> Then we took it [the vision statement rough draft] to key business leaders
>
> in our community. Our Education Foundation board is about 30 people.
>
> We presented it to them and we got feedback. We went to the rotary clubs,
>
> we went to the Kiwanis and Optimist club. (Interview one)

Part of this inquiry also included defining what life ready would look like for future

graduates. The district has continued to seek input for defining life readiness. Dr. Allen

summed up his commitment to community input and partnerships when he related,

Most of the jobs that they're going to have, they don't know what they are.

They haven't been invented yet . . . We're in the process of defining those

metrics for our community with parents, teachers, students, community

leaders, to find what life ready looks like to them. And so, we can find

those out, and we can help our kids get there. (Interview two)

Creating

Midville ISD centered their strategic plan on producing students who will be

ready to enter life armed with the skills needed to be successful citizens. One of the

things Dr. Allen realized early in his tenure as superintendent was the need to be creative.

There did not exist programs or models aligned to preparing students for careers yet to be

formulated. The district needed to create goals centered on skills students would need in

the future. Dr. Allen chose to challenge the district to create goals which were centered

on preparing students to be life ready. His approach was to link each of the campuses

and departments together through a tightly focused one-page strategic plan. After

creating the strategic plan with input from multiple stakeholders, Dr. Allen challenged

each campus principal to come up with the one thing that would produce the best chance

for success at their level. In elementary, most principals agreed that if all students were

at or above reading level, and remained on level, by the end of the third grade, they

would have the best chance of being successful going forward. In high school, being

successful in Algebra I, which is centered on problem solving, would give students the

best chance of success going forward. Dr. Allen created the opportunity and structure for

the district to stay tightly focused on student success and life readiness while simplifying

goals around one thing at a time. Dr. Allen remarked,

> There is a book called *The One Thing* and it starts with a little script at the
>
> bottom of the page, it's an old Chinese proverb that says, "If you chase
>
> two rabbits, you will catch neither." And so, it brought to my mind an old
>
> movie scene from Rocky, when he was training for the big fight, his
>
> trainer gave him a chicken to try and catch, and it took him months for
>
> him to get to the point where he could finally catch the chicken, and it
>
> wasn't until he had really good feet that he finally caught it. Burgess
>
> Meredith, who was the trainer in that movie, focused on Rocky's feet first.
>
> He focused on one thing and then he moved on to something else. He
>
> fixed that one thing, and then he moved on to something else. (Interview
>
> two)

Dr. Allen continued with a description of how the district coupled the "one thing"

concept with a change theory centered on executing local accountability,

> . . . reading the book, *The One Thing,* was really transformative for me,
>
> and then coupling it with accountability execution where they had to
>
> demonstrate proficiency in whether or not the "one thing" that they had
>
> focused on was successful was pretty powerful. So, those two things go
>
> hand in hand. (Interview two)

The examples above present a direct connection to bridging the theory to practice gap and

show how Dr. Allen created a space for tying together the district's strategic plan to the

everyday operations of the district. Creating a new model from the synthesis of two

separate models was what best fit the educational needs of Midville ISD.

Reimagining roles

   As mentioned earlier in the current study, Dr. Allen does not see the need to

purchase pre-packaged change or reform programs. Instead he has indicated that it is

more powerful to create a structure that unifies efforts and goals within a tightly focused

strategic plan. Part of the process of accomplishing these common goals requires the

reimagining of roles. Dr. Allen indicated,

   . . . it's adult behavior that has to change. And that's one of the things that's

   been so much fun about this process that we've gone through is we require

   our principals to bring us a fidelity measure. And what that does is you

   have to think about what student outcome you want to fix, but you have to

   report to us on what adult behavior you're going to change in order to

   facilitate the outcome, and if that adult behavior changes, student

   performance is going to take care of itself. So, we don't write goals about

   improving student performance. We write goals about fidelity of adult

   behavior change. (Interview one)

   In the first year when the new strategic plan was implemented, each campus was

required to have Campus Improvement Plans aligned to the guiding statements created by

the formation of a new vision, mission, and core values. The campus principals had to

reimagine how they would serve their students. Part of the structure created by Dr. Allen

and his team included principals presenting their campus plans to the district

administrative team at the beginning of the school year, and then following up with quarterly progress presentations. This process helped thread the vision into the district's teaching and learning dynamic requiring principals to rethink how they were going to improve student performance at their campuses by reimagining roles and responsibilities. Dr. Allen shared how this process facilitated the reimaging of roles when he shared,

> So just to give you a great example, you know, we have our guiding
> statements, and the first time the principals came to us and actually
> presented their campus plans, fifty percent of them had things that weren't
> related to the guiding statements. And so, we made them go back and
> redo their plans and re-present.   And so, by forcing them to come and
> present their statements, their campus improvement plans to us, we knew
> whether they were on board or whether they weren't. And you know, it
> was an "Aha" moment because if you're sitting there and you're presenting
> to me and twelve others, the entire central office leadership team, and we
> look at you and go, "so tell me how that fits with the guiding statements,"
> and it doesn't, and they go, "OH, this is real." So, they'd come back, and
> they'd have to do it again. It took us a year to get all of the principals on
> board because they had to present their plans to us. (Interview one)

According to Dr. Allen, the key to improving student performance across the district was to change adult behavior. In order to accomplish that, the district's strategic plan not only had to be focused into a single page document, but the plan needed to be incorporated into district policy. Dr. Allen stated,

> We're a very complex organization that's never really had an effective
>
> strategic plan. It was, 84 pages, or 78 pages long, something like that.
>
> Who knows what it is, you know, you can't put your hand on it. And so,
>
> by the force of policy and time and consistent messaging from our offices,
>
> were driving it down.

By focusing the district's strategic plan into a one page document, and integrating the structure into board policy, Dr. Allen believes the reimagining of roles and responsibilities is not only aligned to every level of the organization but is sustainable because it is enforceable.

Change, inquiry, and research in practice

Another theme that emerged from the collected data was the use of change, inquiry, and research in the participant's practice. This theme was consistent with elements associated to a scholar–practitioner leadership model and were referenced in the literature presented in Chapter II (Bouck, 2011; Jenlink, 2006, 2010; Schultz, 2010).   Dr. Allen related an experience he had when working as a campus principal under a superintendent at another district directly related to connecting change and inquiry to practice. Dr. Allen told me,

> I can remember we had a conversation with the payroll clerk . . . we asked
>
> her, "Are you a good payroll clerk?" And she said "yes." And the
>
> superintendents said, "How do you know?" She said, "I need to think
>
> about that a little bit." So, she went home, and she came back the next
>
> day, and we were sitting in a meeting, and she says, "Can I talk to y'all a

minute?" And she said, "They're two things that people want with their

checks: they want them to be correct and they want them to be on time."

And she said, "So, I'm going to start measuring that. I'm going to start

measuring the number of our checks that go out on time, error free." And

that was her metrics. (Interview one)

Dr. Allen continued the story,

And so, at the end of the year, the superintendent called her and said, "Are

you a good payroll clerk?" And she said, "Yes." And the superintendent

asked, "How do you know?" And the clerk said, "Because ninety-nine-

point nine percent of our checks go out on time, error free every month."

And so, by monitoring that, she went from ninety-five percent to ninety-

nine-point nine percent. (Interview one)

Dr. Allen applied this type of inquiry when challenging his leadership team and campus

principals to identify the "one thing" that would drive their department or campus

forward in achieving higher student performance.

Additionally, each department and campus choses their own metric as long as it is

aligned to the vision's guiding statements. Every department, campus, and student

maintain a scorecard which is monitored and updated. Dr. Allen remarked further on the

scholar–practitioner model when he stated,

I mean that has been the most remarkable thing that scholar–practitioner

research piece, you know, not only understanding the scholarly part of

educational change, but the practitioner side to the implementation, or

understanding the research behind it, really understanding the drilling

down into how you implement it. (Interview one)

Defining readiness

Readiness has been a heated discussion in education for many decades. Both

federal and local governing bodies have influenced the standardized definition of

readiness. One aspect which quickly emerged as interviews and member checks

progressed during the current study was how do we as a local school district, community,

region, state, nation, or civilization define readiness? Each of the study participants

related strong views regarding readiness. This study found three different types of

readiness commonly discussed by the six school superintendents interviewed: 1) college

ready; 2) career ready; and 3) life ready.

At Midville ISD, Dr. Allen believed three different forms of readiness exist

related to the educational experience and preparation associated to K-12 schools. The

superintendent provided descriptions to what Midville ISD was doing in order to define

each form of readiness. Dr. Allen related,

What we're doing is we're really looking at and defining in our community

what does college ready mean, what does career ready mean, and what

does life ready mean? And we're working again with the American

Association of School Administrators (AASA), through a sub-committee

of them called Redefining Ready, and it's a group of superintendents

across the country that are defining the metrics of what that looks like. So,

for example, what are the key metrics of being career ready? Well, we

know that having an industry standard certificate, having 97 percent

attendance because you cannot be successful with a career if you don't

come to work. Earning that certificate, attending, completing an

internship, completing a course of study, career paths. So, we're defining

what those are and we're gonna put those on the scorecard. (Interview

one)

Dr. Allen continued,

And so right now there are committees working across our district that

have defined those things at the high school level. What is college ready?

What is career ready? I mean college ready, right? It could be, you know,

have completed two advanced placement classes with an A or a B, a 2.9

GPA, a 97 percent attendance record, completed the FAFSA, you know,

just a list of measurable things you've either done them or you haven't.

And then life ready has been even more challenging. (Interview one)

As interviews progressed with all study participants, the term life ready became a

frequent topic in multiple sessions, and I felt compelled to further explore this theme. In

tier two interviews with each superintendent, an inquiry into the topic of life ready was

incorporated. Dr. Allen indicated life ready was the most important form of readiness.

Dr. Allen posited,

At this conference. It was EAB which is the Educational Advisory Board.

They do a lot of research and what they know is that they estimate that

children that are in high school right now are going to change jobs

between 12 and 16 times over their career. Most of the jobs that they're

going to have, they don't know what they are. They haven't been

invented yet. And so how can we prepare a child for a career that doesn't

exist. Well, there's only one way in my mind, and that is to prepare them

to be life ready, and that makes them lifelong learners. Resilience,

lifelong learners, the ability to be a good teammate. The ability to be

coachable, the ability to be flexible, to have resilience, to have confidence

in yourself, learn how to learn, attend, attendance is huge. Be a lifelong

learner, transform a skill that was successful for you working over here, to

a new job working over there, so transference of skills. That's what I

define as life ready. (Interview two)

Dr. Allen indicated there are committees formed whose one purpose is to define the three

forms of readiness, and also suggest metrics to facilitate the monitoring of each of the

readiness standards. Dr. Allen was also adamant the defining of these different readiness

standards should be part of a continuing improvement process. He related that the

current strategic plan was a five-year plan already in to the third year, and a new five-

year plan would be implemented in two years. Dr. Allen believes each current plan

should be evaluated as a part of an overall continuing improvement process.

Summary

As outlined in the beginning of Chapter IV, similar aspects of participant practice

became apparent: ensuring the district's vision, mission, core values, guiding statements,

and strategic plan is aligned from top to bottom throughout the district; (2) creating trust

and vision alignment with the school board; (3) having positive relationships with leadership teams; and (4) connections to community. Consequently, four additional themes emerged directly related to bridging the theory to practice gap: (5) creating programs and practices to support learning; (6) reimagining roles and responsibilities; (7) change, inquiry, and research as a part of practice; and (8) defining student readiness.

Over the course of interviews, reflections, and emails, and phone calls, multiple examples of each elements became evident in Dr. Allen's views and practices. Chapter IV has described Dr. Allen's navigation of the theory to practice gap in his voice. The following chapters will describe the views and practices of other scholar–practitioners in their particular environments, and in their voices. Included in each summary will be tier-three questions as these questions were the culmination of data saturation and representative of the most common aggregate themes.

Two additional tier-three follow-up questions were developed as a result of the aggregate emergent data and themes. At different points during the interviews, I also asked each participant what element of their scholar–practitioner program most aided them in their jobs as superintendents. Two of the tier-three questions along with the participant responses are provided below. In addition, I have included the question and response regarding the element of scholar–practitioner preparation which has most aided them in their superintendent practice.

> **Question # 1: Aside from providing a safe environment for students (and staff), what is your most important mission or responsibility as a superintendent? Why?**

To improve student performance because that is how our performance is measured and how reputation is defended. Like it or not, our school accountability rating is how we are perceived by our community and that is how our reputation is earned. (Via email)

Question #2: In prior interviews and conversations, we have spent significant time discussing readiness, i.e., college ready, career ready, and life ready. Who should create the definitions for readiness, or are they necessary?

The definitions of readiness should be created by a broad-based group of community members and district employee and then approved by the Board. They are necessary because we need to know where we are going. For example, once a family decides it is going on vacation and everyone has agreed where that destination is, all of the plans are aligned to get the family there and back. If we don't know where we are going, plans are scattered and un focused. The same is true with readiness. If we do not know what college ready means, our efforts to get there will be scattered and unfocused.

Question #3: What, so what elements of your scholar Practitioner program best prepared you to serve as a superintendent in public school?

You know, how to facilitate change, how to monitor, how to involve people. I mean that has been the most remarkable thing . . . understanding

the scholarly part of educational change, but also understanding the

practitioner side to the implementation, or understanding the research

behind it, but really drilling down into how you implement it. (Interview

one; Interview Two)

CHAPTER V

Dr. Lara

Overview

This chapter underscores the emergent data from the second of six participants. As in the previous chapter, participant responses and the researcher's coding of emergent themes will provide readers with descriptions of how scholar–practitioner leaders, serving as superintendents in Texas public schools, bridge the theory to practice gap. The research questions will be used as an over-arching framework and lens, while common, emergent themes will provide detailed descriptions of participant views and practices in their individual voices. I will also draw upon the researcher's journal to provide observations and impressions.

During the course of the current study, several areas of superintendent practice and influence became apparent: ensuring the district's vision, mission, core values, guiding statements, and strategic plan is aligned from top to bottom throughout the district; creating trust and vision alignment with the school board; team leadership and modeling; and inviting community input and creating partnerships. Consequently, four additional themes emerged directly related to bridging the theory to practice gap: creating programs and practices which support student success; reimagining roles and

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responsibilities across the educational system; change, inquiry, and research as a part of practice; defining readiness; and a summary of the collected data.

Introduction

Dr. Lara (pseudonym) completed the scholar–practitioner program at Stephen F. Austin State University within the last ten years. She has been employed by Lakeside ISD (pseudonym) serving as the district's superintendent for the past five years. Dr. Lara has served in Texas public schools for twenty years. She served in different areas of the state for eleven years and returned an area close to where she grew up nine years ago to be closer to aging parents. Dr. Lara has only served in smaller schools with student populations under 500. Her first job in education was as an English teacher, and after earning a Master's degree accepted her first principal position a few years later. Dr. Lara shared,

> I grew up . . . about 40 miles from here. I graduated from a Christian
> University with my bachelor's degree, then moved about 180 miles away
> and . . . taught there, English, and then I went to school at a State
> University and got my master's degree . . . after I finished that we moved
> across the state. I started working as a principal, and then, my dad had a
> heart attack and so I ran home. And so that's why I'm back. I consider
> this home. This is my, my territory, where I grew up. I have one child,
> she's a freshman in high school and life is good! (Interview one)

Dr. Lara indicated that most, if not all, of the teachers and staff in the district were from the area. I noticed the front office was very inviting and the staff was cordial. The

superintendent office was located in the high school office area. Multiple signage was

present representing past celebrations and upcoming events. In addition, the students

seemed very happy. When I first entered the school, the bell for changing classes had

just rang, and students were very animated in their conversations, but were obviously

moving with purpose towards their next class. As we progressed through our interviews,

Dr. Lara mentioned multiple times she felt it was important students were happy and

having fun learning. Her desire for students to be actively engaged in learning and

having fun could be directly linked to the district's vision.

Vision

As with all superintendents, I asked Dr. Lara about the district vision, and her

personal vision for the district. The vision statement at Lakeside ISD included preparing

students for post-secondary success, changing society, and having an enjoyable

educational experience. After talking about the district's vision statement, I asked Dr.

Lara how the statement was developed and who developed it. She responded,

We did it. I led it, but it was developed. We started with doing surveys

and we had the principal team get together and they ranked things. "OK,

what do you think is most important?" And then, we had a Site Based

Committee meeting bringing the surveys and the information that we had

gathered and developed an outline of what we wanted to say. And then I

wrote it, but basically, I wrote the information that they wanted and

presented it back to the Site Based Committee. They agreed to it and then

we brought it to the board and they adopted it. And we did that five years

ago, the first year I was here. (Interview one)

Continuing the first interview, I asked Dr. Lara if there was a mission or vision in place

before she arrived. She responded,

There was, it was about 20 years old and it was very, um, probably any, it

was very, what do you say, very hospital like, like it didn't have a lot...

(Interview one)

Dr. Lara was hesitating, looking for words, so I prompted, "Clinical?" and she said,

Yes, clinical, and it wasn't relative anymore. I didn't think. Because I

think that education is, it should be fun and exciting and should be geared

to what the kids want. And that one [the former mission statement] was

very old school. (Interview one)

We continued our discussion about the district's vision and if it matched up well

with her vision for the district. During our conversation, Dr. Lara provided insight into

the local community, the state standards, and how those elements fit into the local

educational environment. Dr. Lara stated,

The most important thing for me is that our kids are prepared to do

something with their lives when they graduate. That is the ultimate goal.

Does it have to be college? Not necessarily, to me. I know that the State

has a big push that everybody is college ready, but if that kid wants to be a

welder, then they need to be prepared to be a welder. If that kid wants to

be a nurse, then he needs to be prepared to go to nursing school. If that

kid wants to be a janitor, then they need to have the set of skills to be a

janitor. (Interview one)

After meeting with Dr. Lara, I recorded some thoughts and observations in my journal.

The community around Lakeside ISD was obviously agrarian. I noticed that the schools

and churches were the best kept buildings in town. Many of the homes in the area were

in need of repair, and I wondered if some were safe residences. As our first interview

session progressed, I asked Dr. Lara to expand on how she felt the district vision aligned

to the community. She shared insight regarding the local economy and some of the

educational struggles associated to the community. Dr. Lara related,

So, there's a dichotomy in there that you have to be real careful about so

you don't have them just to accept [the job parents or community members

expect] because in our community, we're very high [poverty]. Lots of

[low] socio economic families where eighty five percent are economically

disadvantaged. So, these kids don't know what they *could* have. And so, I

think that's a dynamic that's important throughout the school. We need to

encourage, okay? Let's show them what they are capable of and what they

could be and not just settle for what they think is good, you know, good

for them. Let's show them all the possibilities. And then, once they

decide then let's get them ready for that and whatever that is. And it's not

for us to judge what that is. Does that make sense? They have a right to

choose what they want in their life, but we should, *need to*, show them the

possibilities too. (Interview one)

At this point, I made a clarifying statement to ensure I understood what Dr. Lara was relating. I stated, "So, you want to expose them to all the opportunities in the world. You want them to be aware of their abilities towards different things, but then you want to support them in their choice?" Dr. Lara responded,

> Exactly. And that's a lot to do, but it's certainly, I mean, we are a small
>
> community school and we are better suited to do that then I think that the
>
> larger schools are, because we do know these families. We know them,
>
> and we know what they can do. But they don't know what they can do.
>
> (Interview one)

The Lakeside ISD vision statement included input from the community, students, teachers, and the district's administrative team. Dr. Lara considered the frequency of words and themes which emerged from the survey distributed to nearly all stakeholders and created a draft from the gathered surveys. Dr. Lara felt the new vision statement was representative of everyone's voice in the educational environment. Even though this may have been true, she remarked challenges still existed in empowering the community to fully connect to the ideas and values conveyed through the district vision. Dr. Lara reflected on the steps needed to align the vision.

> I think looking at how to serve the kids individually and making them
>
> successful, finding professional development for teachers that's targeted to
>
> student needs and targeted to the community's needs, the stakeholders
>
> needs, and trying to develop programs and platforms that support the

parents. Outreach to the parents, in any way possible, I think those things

are probably the most important. (Interview two)

Dr. Lara expressed the need for the district to provide meaningful professional

development and appropriate learning platforms to the staff and to the community in

order to get the vision and the entire educational community aligned. She also indicated

there were incongruences between the manner in which the vision should be pursued.

One example centered on change. Dr. Lara remarked,

I mean this school has been here for a long time and they do not take

change well. It's very difficult, so you just have to take it in baby steps

and accept that maybe they're not ready to go there yet, and say, okay

well, we will go a different direction, and we'll figure it out. But I know if

it's good for the kids, I will get it there. (Interview one)

Dr. Lara indicated the school and the community were very closely connected,

and even though a shared, progressive vision had been collaboratively created, both the

district and community were slow to change. I later recorded in the researcher's journal

Dr. Lara exuded a passion for the district vision, and was determined to guide the district

through a deliberate change process.

Alignment to school board

As mentioned earlier, research has connected both district success (student

achievement) and superintendent tenure to the quality of the relationship between the

school board and the superintendent (Russell, 2014; Waters & Marzano, 2006). During

the interview process, I asked Dr. Lara multiple times about her relationship and

alignment to the school board. The following entries represent the data collected as a

result of that questioning threaded with reflections from the researcher's journal. Dr.

Lara expressed a close alignment with the board at Lakeside ISD.

When they hired me, that was one thing in our interview process, you

know, this is where I want to go with them. So, we were real clear that we

both, we all knew where we wanted to go. So, I would say that we're

pretty well aligned. Plus, they knew me; I had been the principal here.

But that was very important to me and I would say that would be my

suggestion to any superintendent in that process, you all need to have the

same vision because if you don't it doesn't really work as well. I think

that's one reason I'm able to make changes, or build this building, or you

know, put in the curriculum, because the board and I established that from

the very beginning. (Interview one)

When we were discussing Dr. Lara's alignment with the school board, she added, "I have

a really young board. Well, I have one member that's been on there for 27 years, but all

the rest of them are new." (Interview one)

As we discussed her relationship with the board, I asked Dr. Lara how she

supported the school board at Lakeside. She indicated she supported the school board in

different ways, but one of the most important was consistent and timely communications.

Dr. Lara commented,

I send them a weekly newsletter that informs them involving things that

are happening in the school and even has celebrations on there, of kids,

and things, so they get a weekly update of what the goings on are at the

school and I think that that helps them communicate to the community

because they're up to date, and I text them. I have them on text. So, if

there's something that comes up immediately, something that I, you know,

I want to get to them before the week is done, then I'll text them . . . You

know, like if we're going to have a fire drill, I'll send them a text and it

says, okay, when there are policemen up here, we're just having a fire drill,

and nothing to be concerned about, you know, that sort of thing.

(Interview two)

Dr. Lara also indicated she never wanted the board to be out of the loop, but there were

lines she felt needed to be drawn with regard to personal communications between her

and the school board. She further explained,

I don't want them to ever be in a situation where they go, well, I don't

know anything about that. I don't ever want that to happen. I try to keep

them informed about everything and that's not always possible, but to the

greatest extent, that's my goal, is to keep them informed and I think that's

supportive of the board . . . my door is always open to them. They can

always come in with anything, questions of any sort, and we don't do a lot

of individual texting on the phone. I avoid that, but if they come in, we

will sit one-on-one visit and talk about any of their concerns, any time.

(Interview two)

I asked her if she typically sent out individual or group texts, and Dr. Lara indicated that she typically sent out group texts, and also, "they are usually just informational" (Interview two).

Team Leadership and Modeling

During the interviews with Dr. Lara, a couple of examples of modeling emerged. I recorded a couple of reflections in my researcher's journal regarding the behavior and easy spirit I both felt and saw from the high school students. Dr. Lara was both personable and professional in her conversations with students, staff, and me. As we spoke about getting kids ready to be successful, Dr. Lara talked about the importance of citizenship and what effect the high school students could have on their younger peers. When I asked about the citizenship component, she related,

> Yeah, I think that it's important. I think that's something that we strive to
> do is to make them good citizens and to understand that what they do on a
> daily basis not only impacts them, but it impacts their families, and
> impacts the community, and impacts the country, the state, and the world.
> And you know, it's hard sometimes for kids to see that . . . What they say
> and what they do matters, and I was telling the older kids, you know, those
> little elementary kids are watching what you're doing and they're going to
> act like you act. And so, it's important to make good choices and not to be
> judgmental. (Interview two)

Dr. Lara also mentioned consistency and persistency are very important. When Dr. Lara came to the district, the math curriculum had been in place for at least eighteen years, and

all of the teachers teaching math in the elementary school had been at the district at least

that long, and a few of the teachers had only taught at Lakeside. The elementary school

was meeting the state standard in math, the secondary school was meeting standard, and

the teachers did not see a reason to change the curriculum. Dr. Lara agreed the district's

schools were meeting the state standard, but they were not challenging all of the kids

because the curriculum was not diversified or geared for higher/harder levels. Dr. Lara

related about the math curriculum,

> It was all just the same. And so, I wanted diversification and so, the new
>
> curriculum did start doing that. Are we where we want to be? No, by no
>
> means, but there's a trend line you can see. If you graph our data, you can
>
> see a trend, and so it's been successful, and so this last year we went
>
> secondary and so I'm hoping to see the same trend data in secondary as I
>
> did in elementary. We use the same curriculum. So, that was something
>
> that took me, I started when I was a principal, and I'm just now getting it
>
> all done. So that is an eight-year span, you know, it takes an extremely
>
> long time to get people to shift their thinking. (Interview one)

Dr. Lara modeled persistence and consistency while pushing for higher expectations.

I asked Dr. Lara how she articulated the district vision to her leadership team.

She indicated she always wanted to center decisions on what was best for kids. Dr. Lara

related,

> I challenged my principals to always ask their teachers that, you know, if
>
> they want to change something in their class, that should be the first

question, "is that going to benefit your kids?" And if so, show me how.

(Interview one)

The leadership team at Lakeside ISD consisted of the principals, the counselors, the janitor manager, and the business manager. She indicated the team met once a month, but that she met with the school principals every day. Dr. Lara explained,

I see the principals every single day. I meet with them. May Be a two-minute meeting, It may be an hour meeting, but every single day I see my two principals. Or that's my goal, sometimes they're gone, but you know, in my head, every day, I'm going to see them. I'm just checking, "Is there anything you need, is there anything you want to throw at me?" And it could be that simple. It takes thirty seconds, but I'm always touching base with them. (Interview one)

Dr. Lara related she felt the support between her and the leadership team was reciprocal. She supported the team by finding,

…whatever they need, we will find a way to make it happen. [participant laughs] It may not be in the most timely, you know as timely as they necessarily want, but financially we will get them whatever they need. And the business manager and I, we work really closely together and we tell them that all the time, you need something, we're going to find it for you, somehow. (Interview two)

Wanting to go deeper, I asked again how supported she felt with regards to her leadership team and the board. Dr. Lara related,

We have a really good rapport, you know, like I said, I see my principals

and the administration staff every day and like today we had a meeting

and it's always nice to know that we're on the same page and if we don't

know, we can always say, okay, I really don't know what to do with this.

Then we can brainstorm together. So that in itself I believe is supporting

us and the school as a whole. I mean, we're a great team. (Interview two)

Community

 In Lakeside ISD, Dr. Lara commented the school and community were closely

connected. Most of the teachers and staff either grew up in the area, or married someone

from the area. When I asked her how well she was aligned with the community, Dr. Lara

indicated she was not quite as closely aligned as she was with the school board. The

difference in alignment, according to Dr. Lara, were more connected to disseminating

information to the community they might not know.

They support the school completely, love the school. They have an

understanding that the school is the community. I mean, it's so sad

nowadays where you see a school kind of depleting. That means the

whole community is going deplete in schools like this one, in a

community like this. So, they're very supportive. But I think that they

have questions about, why in the world that we need this building, why in

the world, do we need to be putting iPads in every kids' hand. Why in the

world do you need to, you know, do this, so there are a lot of questions

because they don't see.

After this response, I dug a little deeper and expanded the initial question when I asked, "So, basically, why are we spending money on that?" (Interview one). Dr. Lara elaborated extensively and quite passionately,

> Right, uh huh, and so it's just communicating that it is important. But as
> far as the school, they're very supportive. I don't think that they
> understand the progress that these kids have to make anymore. I mean,
> the standards are crazy and they want to live almost like forty years ago.
> Does that make sense? And so that's a little bit difficult, but the board will
> say that, too. They'll say that this community is, they don't understand
> why everybody needs to go to college or while they may be encouraged to
> go to college, these are not college kids. That's what they'll say. These
> aren't college kids. I'm like, wait? But that is their thinking. That's been
> kind of interesting. It's changing, you know, because we celebrate these
> kids that are going to college and graduating and doing really well. But
> it's a long, long, long process. I would say the school takes a long time to
> change. The community takes much longer to change. (Interview one)

In our first interview, Dr. Lara mentioned building new facilities and the passing of a bond. At the beginning of our second interview I asked her about the new buildings and the bond. Dr. Lara informed me the district had a large industry move in to their area (the district had a 313 agreement with them), and had dramatically increased the tax base for the district. She indicated the bond was easily passed because no one in the community had to pay any more taxes as a result.

Creating

Even though "creative" is one of the descriptive words present in the district's vision statement, this theme did not emerge in the data collections with this participant.

Reimagining roles

Dr. Lara related that at Lakeside ISD, a district with less than five hundred students in the district, staff members must take on multiple assignments as a necessity. Teachers in secondary school have to teach different subject areas. As described in the earlier section, Modeling, many teachers at the district were only concerned with getting students to meet the state accountability standard. In the example of changing the mathematics curriculum, the teachers were not challenging student, especially the upper level students, to their highest potential. From the integration of the new purchased, copyrighted curriculum, which Dr. Lara had used in the past, and over an eight-year span, teachers began to reimagine their roles and responsibilities as educators at Lakeside ISD. Dr. Lara, through her persistence, started a transformation process to challenge students to higher levels of achievement. Dr. Lara related,

I ended up getting the teachers to say, okay, let's try. And they tried it, and they, they really liked it. Now, they only tried it at one level. I could not get all of them to do it. That was the next thing, you know, okay, let's try it in elementary. And so, they did. They tried it at elementary and it was successful. Scores went, started going up. We started seeing the higher levels. That was really the concern. Sure, we were maintaining standard, but my thing was those threes (threes are the commended scores

on the State of Texas accountability exam), you know, those higher-level

kids weren't being challenged. It didn't allow for diversification.

After changing the math curriculum, Dr. Lara reported teachers started integrating more

challenging elements of the Tes Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKs) into their

practice daily practice.

Change, inquiry, and research in practice

One of the themes prevalent in the conversations with Dr. Lara was her focus on

students and the decision-making process. Dr. Lara commented, ". . . it's gotta be about

what is in the best interest to that kid" (Interview one). The focus was most present in the

portions of our discussions centered on change, inquiry, and research in practice. At one

point in my first interview with Dr. Lara, I asked her how she articulated her vision to her

leadership team. Dr. Lara responded,

I challenged my principals to always ask their teachers that, you know, if

they want to change something in their class, that should be the first

question, "is that going to benefit your kids?" And if so, show me how.

And then I want them to follow up and go okay, did it? and if it didn't,

how can it be tweaked or how can it be improved upon? or should it be

dropped? And it's okay to drop it. People like to hang on to stuff. I don't

know, but it's okay to drop it. Okay, it didn't work. That's all right. Let's

move on. (Interview one)

I then asked Dr. Lara how she articulated her vision to the school board. She indicated

her focus on how a particular change or purchase would benefit kids was the driving

force in her practice, including negotiations with the school board. Dr. Lara stated,

> Same thing. You know. I'll tell them if I have something that I'm
>
> wanting, wanting to present, or something that's on the agenda; I always
>
> lead with this is how it will benefit the kids, or this is my concern about it
>
> benefiting the kids. Because sometimes I do present things that I don't
>
> necessarily think it does, because I have to, you know that. So, that's
>
> always, always, the first thing that I approach it as. And then the
>
> discussions go from there. (Interview one)

Wanting to explore deeper into this line of questioning on change and vision, I

asked Dr. Lara if she had experienced resistance to her vision, and also to expand on her

statement that, "some change was hard" (Interview one). She indicated research had to

play a role in promoting change. Dr. Lara explained about her initiative to change the

district's math curriculum. Dr. Lara began with researching other districts using the math

curriculum she wanted to adopt and comparing scores to her district's scores. She

reported there were several waves of resistance. The first wave was there was not a need

to change because Lakeside was meeting standard. The second reaction to her research

was the comparative districts were different. Dr. Lara reported the teachers complained,

> "OK, you're comparing apples and oranges, so you're comparing Lakeside
>
> to Happy county, who have different demographics, different okay, so
>
> how can you do that?" So then, I had to go back and I had to find schools

that were like me; that were eighty percent economically disadvantaged,

and majority Hispanic. So, I had to find my same oranges. And I did. I

did the research. I found schools that had used this other math curriculum

and then I brought it to them and I said, okay, these are oranges to oranges

and look at their scores. (Interview one)

After completing the research and presenting to the department, the teachers agreed to try

the curriculum. As a result of the change, math scores steadily increased over the next

few years. During the tier-two interview, I asked Dr. Lara what element of her scholar–

practitioner program had best translated to her practice as a superintendent. She replied,

I think that research is key. I mean, I know where to go to get

information. I think in this position it's impossible to know everything. I

didn't know how to build a building, but I knew how to find the

information that would support me through it. And I learned how to ask

the right questions. And, I think that that comes from learning and from

being scholarly, you know, you can ask the right questions and get to the

point. (Interview two)

Dr. Lara added,

. . . persistence is important for this position because you never quit, you

know, and then trying to be insightful into: okay, what are the long-term

consequences? And in brainstorming all the variables that may impede

the progress. Like every time I make a decision I try to think, okay, how

can this swing, what were all the possible roads that it could go down?

And I try to be proactive and thoughtful to prevent the ones that I think

would be negative and then try to enhance the ones that I think that would

be positive? And that comes from inquiry and research and all that.

(Interview two)

Looking for more data saturation, I also asked Dr. Lara what literature in her scholar–

practitioner program most impacted her practice.   She responded,

I just think anything that had to do with moral leadership, and of course

Dewey. Because even though we may not see things the same way; if the

core [your personal beliefs], if you're all about the kids then it's going to

be okay. And so, leading with that moral lens, you'll be more successful,

and you can better understand or better communicate what you're striving

for if you have a solid foundation on what is right and what is wrong and

how is this going to impact the kids. Is this going to have a negative

impact or a positive impact? So, it's all about understanding your core and

then how to convey that to others. (Interview two)

I decided to dig a little be deeper and asked Dr. Lara what her most important job was as

superintendent. She stated, "My most important job, my goodness! Um, I think it is

making sure that the kids are first, no matter what, is my most important job" (Interview

two). As we wrapped up the tier-two interview, I asked Dr. Lara what was the one

question I did not ask, that she expected me to ask. She replied, "Oh, what a good

question . . . I expected you to ask more of like how I impacted instruction" (Interview

two). Subsequently, I asked, "How do you impact instruction" (Interview two)? We

both laughed, and she reflected,

> Well, I think it's leading with the vision and kind of herding cats in a way .
>
> . . and finding out what the motivator is of individuals because
>
> everybody's motivator is different. I think there's five main motivators
>
> and I think that everybody's motivator is a little bit different, and my job is
>
> figuring out what motivates them, whatever it is, and then find a way to
>
> motivate them to do what needs to be done, in a good way. (Interview
>
> two)

Defining readiness

Preparing students for life after high school graduation was a common theme

among study participants. However, the definition of what readiness should look like

differed between superintendents and their districts. Dr. Lara has been an administrator

for Lakeside ISD for the past nine years. She has served the past five years as the

district's superintendent. Her leadership lens revealed an ethic of care for her students

and community. Dr. Lara's definition of readiness has been provided below. One of the

first questions I asked Dr. Lara in our first interview was, "What is your vision for the

district" (Interview one)? Her answer was directly connected to the welfare of her

students.

> You know, I think it's important that we individualize and then we
>
> communicate with the kids and their families and that we are preparing

them for what will make them successful in life. Not necessarily some

preordained goal that we set. (Interview one)

Dr. Lara touched upon the idea of life ready as she continued,

They need to be life ready. And of course, I want them to be challenged.

I don't want them to just see if they want to just be a janitor, but they have

the skill set to be, you know, an engineer. I want them to be encouraged

to be, to reach, to the engineer, but if they want to be [a janitor], then that's

what we need to prepare them for. Does that make sense? (Interview one)

As we continued our discussions, I revisited the topic of defining readiness by probing

deeper. I stated, "The term "life ready" came up during our first interview." I then

queried, "Could you please tell me what "life ready" means to you and do you think it

means the same thing to your stakeholders?" (Interview two). Dr. Lara responded,

Yeah, I think it means the same thing, but they may have varying ideas of

what it is, I guess. Um, to me life ready means that once they walk across

the stage that they have a toolbox in which they can grab something and

be successful with, whether it is intelligence and able to garner that

intelligence, or it's to pick up a welding tool and weld the pipeline

together, or whether or not it's being able to communicate successfully and

have a resume. You know, being able to write a paragraph, whatever it is.

I want them to be prepared to have something in their toolbox that will

make them successful in whatever they decide to do. (Interview two)

Summary

As outlined in the beginning of Chapter IV, similar aspects of participant practice became apparent: ensuring the district's vision, mission, core values, guiding statements, and strategic plan is aligned from top to bottom throughout the district; creating trust and vision alignment with the school board; having positive relationships with leadership teams; and connections to community. Consequently, four additional themes emerged directly related to bridging the theory to practice gap: creating programs and practices to support learning; reimagining roles and responsibilities; change, inquiry, and research as a part of practice; and defining student readiness.

In the case of Lakeside ISD, the district's vision was collaboratively formed with input from teachers, administrators, community members, and students. Dr. Lara felt she was well aligned with both the school board and the community. In addition, Dr. Lara indicated she was very well aligned with her leadership team, and she had interaction with them on a daily basis. There were multiple examples of Dr. Lara's lens of leadership indicating she led with students at the center of her practice and decision-making. In support of this, her description of student readiness upon graduation was based on exposing students to all of the possibilities after graduation, but supporting them in whatever life or career choice the student wanted to pursue. Dr. Lara felt strongly that research should play an important role in any change initiatives, and consequently, research coupled with inquiry and a moral lens were the most important elements she translated into her practice from her scholar–practitioner program. She also related education should be fun for students. Embedded in her leadership lens, Dr. Lara

encouraged teachers to reimagine their roles, and strive to provide instruction to students beyond what was required by the state.

Two additional tier-three follow-up questions were developed as a result of the aggregate emergent data and themes. At different points during the interviews, I also asked each participant what element of their scholar–practitioner program most aided them in their jobs as superintendents. Two of the tier-three questions along with the participant responses are provided below. In addition, I have included the question and response regarding the element of scholar–practitioner preparation which has most aided them in their superintendent practice.

Question # 1: Aside from providing a safe environment for students (and staff), what is your most important mission or responsibility as a superintendent? Why?

I believe that the superintendent is responsible for diagnosing issues in the school and then finding research based practices that will help overcome the problem. I believe that all schools are different because they reside in different communities that hold different values so issues in one school may not be the same as in others. It is the superintendent's responsibility to recognize this when diagnosing. Superintendents are the leaders that are ultimately responsible for preparing students for their futures so the diagnosis should be related to the development of the child. The question should always be "what is best for the students".

Question #2: In prior interviews and conversations, we have spent significant time discussing readiness, i.e., college ready, career ready, and life ready. Who should create the definitions for readiness, or are they necessary?

I believe that a definition is necessary but it should be fluid based on the student. Ultimately, it is the child that defines what "readiness" is but there are many meetings, information sessions and years that will ultimately lead to that definition. Exposure is important to form the definition. The students must be aware of the opportunities afforded them and also must believe they can attain them. That is the school's responsibility – to provide exposure and give them the belief and skills set to achieve the goal they have. Some students may choose to go to college, so they need to be "college ready" not only internally ready but also academically which is demonstrated on standardized tests. Some students may choose to be welders or plumbers so they need to have the skill set that will allow them to perform those positions. Some students may choose to be mothers and they need the skill set that will allow them to manage a house and raise productive citizens. My goal as a superintendent is to have each student that walks across the stage and receiving a diploma to have a belief in themselves and the skills required to be successful at whatever they chose to do.

Question #3: What, so what elements of your scholar Practitioner program best prepared you to serve as a superintendent in public school?

Well I think that research is key. I mean, I know where to go to get information. I think in this position it's impossible to know everything. I didn't know how to build a building, but I knew how to find the information that would support me through it. And I learned how to ask the right questions. And, um, I think that that comes from learning and from being scholarly, you know, you can ask the right questions and get to the point and never give up is something to say about that. It's hard to get your doctorate and it takes a lot of, um, persistence and that persistence is important for this position because you never quit, you know, and then trying to be insightful into . . . Okay, what are the long-term consequences? And in brainstorming all the variables that may impede the progress. Like every time I make a decision I try to think, okay, how can this swing, what were all the possible roads that it could go down? And I try, kind of try, to be proactive and thoughtful to prevent the ones that I think would be negative and then try to enhance the ones that I think that would be positive and that comes from thorough research and all that. (Interview two)

CHAPTER VI

Dr. Cepeda

Overview

This chapter underscores the emergent data from the third of six participants. As in the previous chapter, participant responses and the researcher's coding of emergent themes will provide readers with descriptions of how scholar–practitioner leaders, serving as superintendents in Texas public schools, bridge the theory to practice gap. The research questions will be used as an over-arching framework and lens, while common, emergent themes will provide detailed descriptions of participant views and practices in their individual voices. I will also draw upon the researcher's journal to provide observations and impressions.

During the course of the current study, several areas of superintendent practice and influence became apparent: ensuring the district's vision, mission, core values, guiding statements, and strategic plan is aligned from top to bottom throughout the district; creating trust and vision alignment with the school board; modeling of desired traits; and inviting community input and creating partnerships. Consequently, four additional themes emerged directly related to bridging the theory to practice gap: creating programs and practices which support student success; reimagining roles and

responsibilities across the educational system; change, inquiry, and research as a part of practice; defining readiness; and a summary of the collected data.

Introduction

Dr. Cepeda has served Cityview ISD as superintendent for the past four years. He attended high school in a larger district near Cityview ISD and earned both his undergraduate and graduate degrees from universities in Texas. Dr. Cepeda's wife is also an educator and works in a neighboring district. Dr. Cepeda has served as an educator in Texas for sixteen years. All of Dr. Cepeda's teaching experience was in middle and high school. He served one year as an assistant principal and five years as a middle or high school principal. Even though Dr. Cepeda has been serving in a district with a student enrollment of around 750, he has had opportunities to become involved with regional, state, and national organizations and entities. Dr. Cepeda shared,

> I've been in this position, as I said before, for four years. It has been a
> very good four years. We've accomplished a lot of things. Personally, I
> have accomplished quite a few, have been named to a national council.
> I'm with a group that focuses on innovation, at the district level, a regional
> advisory committee, Texas Rules educator, Legislative Council. So, lots
> of opportunities to lead even though being in a small district. Something
> that's very important to me is, you know, just to have opportunities to lead
> with organizations. TEA and I've worked closely a couple of times and
> plan on working more closely in the future. The Texas Association of
> School Administrators worked very closely with as well. The regional

educational service center has been a big part of our work that we've done here. (Interview one)

Shortly after arriving at the middle school office, Dr. Cepeda appeared from the principal's office and we walked together to his office. The office staff I encountered were very friendly and accommodating. All of the school entrances were security controlled and monitored. The students were polite and appeared happy. The following chapter will relate the views and perspectives of the participant, compiled over the course of two face-to-face interviews, and tier-three follow up questions.

Vision

As with all superintendents, I asked Dr. Cepeda about the district vision, and his personal vision for the district. The vision statement at Cityview ISD was formed by a process of inquiry. A student created video about education and asking what success should look like was instrumental in the vision development. I asked Dr. Cepeda if Cityview ISD had a vision statement. He replied in the affirmative, and he indicated the district's mission and vision statement were one in the same. I asked who developed the statement, and whose voices were represented. Dr. Cepeda replied,

We felt that it was an action statement as well. So, it was philosophical in nature, but also a driving force of the actions necessary to accomplish, you can call it a district goal. We call it a vision statement . . . It was developed in conjunction with the district leadership team that was comprised of librarians, teachers, instructional coaches, and that's who did the synthesis, incorporated data from students that was acquired through

direct conversations. Some was as a result of surveys taken that we did in

real time. So, the participants, participants would be able to see the results

of that in real time. That was really neat. (Interview one)

I dug a little deeper and asked, "So, you did that electronically?" Dr. Cepeda responded,

Yeah, projected it. So, they could see the graphing and it made

adjustments in real time. We did that with the parents and community.

Did that with the students and the staff. So, then began the process of

synthesizing that into a statement. There's quite a lot actually, there's

hundreds of pages of items that have been generated from these

conversations. (Interview one)

Dr. Cepeda also talked about whose voices were represented in the district vision

statement.

Some spots of student ownership, teacher ownership, community

ownership in the process, the development process. So, everything that

we're doing has ownership. (Interview one)

I continued the first-round interview with the question of what Dr. Cepeda's

vision for the district was. He responded, "I don't have a vision for the district. I'm a

part of the district so my vision, is our vision" (Interview one). Dr. Cepeda continued

with, "Here's, Mike, here's what I want to accomplish: Cityview ISD will provide all

students with a great educational experience," and he concluded with, "Probably not a

school in America that's doing that" (Interview one).

At the onset of the tier-two interview, I asked Dr. Cepeda, "Now that you've had some time to reflect, can you tell me other ways that you articulate your vision, which I understand is the same as the district's vision, to the district itself." (Interview two). Dr. Cepeda reflected and then responded,

> You know, I would say this, having done a whole lot of research on leadership and a lot of research on change management. If you can align what you would call an elevator speech, you know, stump speech, if it can be completely and clearly articulated in as short a statement as possible, you should sound like a broken record. Because when people ask the question, "Dr. Cepeda, what are you trying to accomplish in Cityview ISD," I say without hesitation, "we're seeking to provide every student with a great educational experience where they've become engaged problem solvers, ethical citizens, and they develop an entrepreneurial spirit." And you look at our visual of the instructional model that was developed with students, teachers, community, administrative input, research input, and then the vision statement, which is in every single classroom, It's on the calendar. It's on . . . [everything] So, um, I would say exhaustively communicated and as clearly as possible. And then we just work backwards from that point. (Interview two)

Dr. Cepeda added one more clarifying statement, "Every single one of those questions comes back to what is more likely to produce a system that perpetuates a great educational experience for students. And so, every single thing we do runs through that filter" (Interview two). Dr. Cepeda and Cityview ISD developed their vision statement

through a creative and innovative process. Dr. Cepeda and the district believed this process created an actionable vision embedded with input from all stakeholders.

Alignment to school board

As noted in the current study, research has connected both district success (student achievement) and superintendent tenure to the quality of the relationship between the school board and the superintendent (Russell, 2014; Waters & Marzano, 2006). During the interview process, I asked Dr. Cepeda multiple times about his relationship and alignment to the school board. The following entries represent the data collected as a result of that questioning threaded with reflections from the researcher's journal. Dr. Cepeda expressed a close alignment with the board at Cityview ISD.

I asked Dr. Cepeda how well he felt he was aligned with the local school board. He replied, "Very well. Very well. We provide . . . I didn't even mention the board being a part of the design. There has been a lot of board adopted priorities. The structural model was also adopted by the board of directors" (Interview one). Dr. Cepeda explained, "And so, we've refocused all, most all, of our conversations around the achievement of that. Ideally from policy adoption, we've had a lot of policy adopted, a lot of alignment" (Interview one). Dr. Cepeda's replies were very short and to the point in our first meeting.

In the second interview session, I probed a little more about Dr. Cepeda's relationship with the school board. He provided insight into how and why he felt his relationship to the school board was strong.

I support the school board by providing enough. I treat them like a thirsty

child and I am providing them with a fire hose worth of water. I make

sure that they are over-informed. I will say this; unless you have been in

the educational profession your entire life, at the design and research, and

the amount of work that's gone into building my particular expertise,

you're not gonna get it. It's going to be decontextualized. It's going to be

absent from your frame of understanding. (Interview two).

As we continued our discussion regarding superintendent and board relations, Dr. Cepeda

offered deeper insight into why he felt the relationship and commitment to a common

goal were of importance.

Mike, unfortunately in my region alone, over the past four years, fifty-two

percent of the districts have changed leadership at the superintendent

position. Almost four years since I've been here, and I'm now one of the

longest tenured superintendents in the region. (Interview two)

Dr. Cepeda became very passionate about the subject of commitment, tenure, goals and

the future for educational entities. Dr. Cepeda posited,

Well I believe that when your career is about the creation process as

opposed to the climbing process, there's going to be a different set of goals

and a different set of requirements. One of those is going to require extra

time. Something that's, you know, I've challenged, I've had an

opportunity to speak to a lot of superintendents and this is probably not the

most popular thing that I've said: the failure of public education can be

tied to the lack of continuity of leadership and our current state. Any industry, if you don't have long-term direction, it leads to disengagement from the employees, partially because every time there's a leadership change, there's a focus change. You do that three or four times and think about it, you know, that's exacerbated in a small district, but it's really prevalent in a larger district where there are maybe 200 campuses. And so, you've got all of this discontinuity and when you have discontinuity, you have lack of engagement, a lack of understanding of your place within the system, lack of what you're trying to accomplish as a system. And so, you wind up being isolated. When you're isolated, you become less engaged or less motivated to do a great job because you don't belong to something bigger than yourself.

Dr. Cepeda indicated a commitment to creating a sustainable system sensitive to all stakeholders was of utmost importance. Consequently, according to Dr. Cepeda, a commitment from both the superintendent and the local school board to creating "a great educational experience for all students" (Interview one; Interview two) needed to be supported by the development of a positive superintendent/school board relationship.

Team Leadership and Modeling

During the course of the first interview with each participant, fifteen questions are scripted. One of the scripted questions asked participants how they articulate the district vision to their leadership team. During the course of the second interview, only five questions are scripted. After analyzing preliminary data and artifacts, the researcher

developed questions related to the emergent themes, and any elements that are

incongruent to primary responses by the participants. A theme of positive relationship

building and modeling emerged as one focal point related to practice. When I asked Dr.

Cepeda how he articulated the district vision to the leadership team, he indicated the

leadership team was an instrumental part of the group who created the statement. Dr.

Cepeda stated, "They helped to articulate, synthesize that particular statement" (Interview

one).

Additionally, Dr. Cepeda helped campus principals pursue the goal of spending

fifty-one percent of their day coaching teachers. He did this by helping principals

prioritize items out of their schedules detrimental to this goal. Dr. Cepeda elaborated,

So, our goal was to move that from four tenths of one percent to fifty-one

percent of what you do on a daily basis. And in order to do that you have

to eliminate a lot of things and you'd have to get in the prioritization

process and your staff has to understand that the priority is instructional

leadership from the front office. (Interview one)

Dr. Cepeda continued his description of how the leadership team help articulate

the vison to the district and beyond when I asked him what he felt was the most important

thing his leadership did to support the vision. He again indicated the vision was a

journey together, and the leadership team was part of the creation of and articulation of

the vision/journey. Dr. Cepeda responded,

And I know that's a lot of times an administrative initiative. A lot of the

times it's a grass root desire to happen. And we've actually been

recognized nationally recognized for efforts to really sharpen this focus

down and I've had the opportunity to share why we're doing what we're

doing, how we're doing it, and why we are on that journey. And so, it's

very easy for me to discuss these things because we've had, I don't know, a

couple of thousand man-hours of discussion for me to arrive at this point

and I feel like a critical mass of our teachers are feeling the same way that

it's a participatory system. (Interview two)

Dr. Cepeda said he felt the most important thing he did to support his leadership team was to help remove obstacles preventing principals to facilitate the vision through effective coaching. Dr. Cepeda recalled his time as a principal when he had to deal with all of the laws and compliance issues from the state legislature, but also typically had a good deal of other tasks assigned by central administration. He stated his central office was not going to participate in assigning more tasks in conflict of the district vision. Dr. Cepeda related, "We chose to focus on what we want to do and then see what naturally begins to eliminate itself from the daily activities . . ." (Interview two).

Community

After discussing the implications of the superintendent and school board relationship, the conversation progressed to community connections. Dr. Cepeda spoke about multiple instances where the community was involved. I asked him how well aligned he felt with the community. Dr. Cepeda commented,

The formation of the task forces. You've got a community task force. We

take student test scores, go to the task force, and each one of those groups.

I'm the primary goal of each one of those groups. So, the goal of those

task forces, each one of those task forces, is to operationalize the

instructional models. And to incorporate the three e's, which is

entrepreneurial spirit, engaged problem solving, and ethical citizenship;

opportunities to provide those experiences for each student. We have

established a community garden that will be one of the centerpieces of that

effort. Schools participating in the development of that as well in

conjunction with students; we've incorporated that into our curriculum,

high school and elementary level, and community sponsors are

participating in that as well. It is just one of the first items that the joint

effort is working to bring to fruition.

Another example of creative community involvement was provided earlier in this section

when Dr. Cepeda described surveys being completed live in an electronic format, and the

updated results were projected for the audience. In addition to involving the local

community, Dr. Cepeda has also participated in the broader community, both regionally,

statewide, and nationally. Dr. Cepeda explained,

The Baylor Research and Innovation collaborative has been a partner with

us and so we formed a lot of really powerful partnerships and have had the

opportunity to discuss systemic change and things of that nature with

Skyward. Had an opportunity to speak with their design team on

numerous occasions of what we'd like to see. And speaking directly to the

design team has been really neat. I've been asked to speak to the Texas

software system that is supported by the regional service centers as to

consult them on some other designs.

I asked a clarifying question, "So you are talking about user friendliness type of stuff"

(Interview one). Dr. Cepeda clarified,

>Yeah, with the end user in mind, and broadening the definition of an end
>
>user to be more seamless from the administrator to the student, to the
>
>teacher, to the parents, and been working closely with the community, to
>
>get to a point where we have a tried and true community-based
>
>accountability system. (Interview one)

The theme of community was threaded across the interviewing sessions. During

the early stages of the second interview, I asked Dr. Cepeda to provide other ways the

vision was articulated. Part of an earlier response provided insight into how the

community was an integral part of both the formation of, and everyday practice related to

the district vision. Dr. Cepeda related, ". . . the instructional model that was developed

with students, teachers, community, administrative input, research input . . . is in every

single classroom. It's on the calendar. It's on everything" (Interview two). Near the end

of the second interview, I asked Dr. Cepeda, "So, what prompted the reimagining of the

roles and responsibilities here at the district" (Interview two). Dr. Cepeda responded,

>I believe it started with Jimmy Johns (pseudonym) asking/saying, what is
>
>success? And then we sat down . . . Jimmy Johns is the student that
>
>developed that video package which you have access to. I asked the
>
>question to the district's students, I said, what does success mean, tell me

what success is? And so, his struck a chord and then I asked the teachers

and the community, what does success look like? What do the

administrators think, what does success look like? And then we began to

define what we thought was success and success is what our vision

statement is. And so, we have begun the process of creating a successful

system. (Interview two).

Creating

The following section will provide insight as to what role creating has occupied in

the participant's practice. The data provided has been coded from participant interviews

and is augmented by perceptions from the researcher's journal where appropriate and

relevant. Creating proved to be an integral part of Dr. Cepeda's practice. As mentioned

in the earlier section on Community, Dr. Cepeda incorporated a creative approach when

asking survey questions and tabulating the results for stakeholders in real time.

In addition to the creation of a live, relative, process for inputting and

communicating survey results, the educational system itself in Cityview ISD is embedded

in creativity. In our second meeting Dr. Cepeda continues to reveal how creativity plays

a role in the development and practice of the vision at Cityview ISD.

. . . what we're seeking to do is create a system that perpetuates a great

educational experience for students with the real-world skills and

experiences necessary to go out and make a positive impact on the world

and make the world a better place. And so, you ask what are the various

ways? There are not various ways. There is a very sharp, articulated,

clearly, visually, [system]; it is the same. We are doing this. And I think

that is so amazingly important when you talk about transitioning from

theory to practice. You have to have a razor's edge focus on what you're

trying to accomplish. And, even though we have a razor sharp focus on

creating that educational experience, we are also constructivists in that

process and that is an evolving process. (Interview two)

In continuing with the idea of creating a system perpetuating a great educational

experience for students, Dr. Cepeda related a conversation he had recently with his staff.

One of the conversations we had yesterday was about professional

development. I said, we are seeking to eliminate professional

development as being developed AT you and you being a participatory

agent in the construction, so the development is no longer professionally

developing you and your skills independent of the system. It will be you

as a participatory agent working to build the professional environment that

will create this system that we want. And that is a huge paradigm shift

and that's how we are attacking moving things from theory to action. It has

to be every single person is a change agent, and you can't be a change

agent if you don't know what you're trying to change, and what you're

trying to accomplish with the change. (Interview two)

At this point of the second interview, I inquired deeper to gain insight on how deep

creating permeated the participant's practice. I asked, "So, you're changing adult

behavior to benefit student success?" Dr. Cepeda responded, "I would say we are

changing, and I would say we are focusing belief systems, and asking for action tied to
that belief system" (Interview two). He stated,

> But what we really focused on was that if you're going to practice, you
> don't practice the same thing over and over and over and over and over.
> You purposely look for additional skills or the most important skills to
> incorporate into your practice.

Dr. Cepeda continued,

> And so that's why teachers have been brought in to the constructivist
> experience because when you began to create, you begin to own, and
> when you begin to own, then your mindset starts to change. You're no
> longer being developed AT, or scheduled AT, you are a part of the
> construction of that experience, that calendar, that professional
> development, or professional learning opportunities. And so, everything
> is, I would say, really pulled in and focused. And I've never been a part of
> an organization that has spent as much time, resources, to sharpen that
> focus down to a razor's edge and that everyone is a part of the construction
> of that vision. (Interview two)

> I asked, "Ok, so in our first interview you talked about being extremely focused
on product, so can you please elaborate upon the idea on that idea and provide some
example of what those products are?" Dr. Cepeda smiled and responded,

> I can't, but I can say this, that when I no longer am developing AT my
> employees and I'm no longer training AT them, when they have become a

constructivist part, a constructivist agent in the process of creating our

system that me outlining what the product has to be is a serious

impediment to the creative process. And so, what we're trying to create is

a great educational experience for every student. And what does that look

like? Well, Mike, I can't tell you what that looks like exclusively. I can't

be the one that defines that. It has to be a creative process and every one

of our teachers has to participate in that process. So what product are we

looking for? I don't know yet. (Interview two)

Dr. Cepeda went on to say, "So, we are constructing products that will perpetuate that

system" (Interview two). As we continued to discuss the system and how creating is one

of the essential elements of the system, Dr. Cepeda concluded the final product, a great

educational experience and student success, would most likely take on different shapes,

and by the design of the creative process, the face of that product would change again,

and should.

Reimagining roles

During our first interview session, after Dr. Cepeda communicated to me his

vision and the district's vision was the same, I asked how he articulated this embedded

vision to his leadership team. Dr. Cepeda told me that his leadership team helped to

articulate and synthesize the vision statement. He expanded,

Um, we have partnered with a group, an outside group called Modern

Teacher. And Modern Teacher has been very instrumental. We've

reimagined. They were running parallel to what we wanted to accomplish,

which is a digital convergence initiative. They're all about digital

convergence and we realize the need for technology, to leverage

technology, to get where we wanna go. And I don't mean just a one-to-

one, I mean a total rethink of every nut and bolt in the educational process.

Every single role has been reimagined, is continuously being reimagined.

Being a former principal yourself, you would appreciate some of the

things that we've done. One in particular is a research study that was done

on what a principal does from a day to day standpoint. It was broken

down into fifty or so general categories and then that was brought into a

more, a generalized pie chart. We wanted to focus on instructionally

related items. The one that showed the highest level of correlation

between improved instruction was principals coaching instruction, and

across the longitudinal study that was conducted by this particular group,

four tenths of one percent of their day was devoted to that. And having

met principals, and have a been a principal, it doesn't take much to know

that can happen pretty easily, with the challenges of the principalship. So,

our goal was to move that from four tenths of one percent to fifty-one

percent of what principals do on a daily basis. (Interview one)

I then asked Dr. Cepeda if there had been any resistance to this reimagining, and

if so, where the resistance was coming from. Dr. Cepeda indicated there had been some

ongoing resistance. He associated the resistance to the indoctrination of both educators

and communities regarding what education should look like. Dr. Cepeda related,

Everything that you're talking about is part of it, and has to do with this
presentation I am giving in Florida. And I would say the biggest problem
is a symbol of what a school is. The symbol of what a teacher is, a symbol
of what a classroom is. And you know, I have a picture of toast and eggs
and you know, I ask the question what meal is that; everyone knows that's
breakfast, doesn't really matter that it's bread and eggs, and we associate
that so strongly with breakfast that it's almost impossible to detach that
symbol. The same goes for a school classroom, bell schedule, gray bars,
everything. So, what do we have to overcome? We have to overcome
thirty years of indoctrination of our compliance model, which is in April
or May, students are going to take a test that tells you if you've been
successful, if they've been successful. Well, I equate that to the
elimination of the regular season and we're just going to play the super
bowl and win all in one day. And, we are not going to participate in that
process. If it's, you've got one game that you're practicing for all year, you
lose focus. And so, we've cut that down to the smallest slice of success.
And success is now defined, not on a test in March, April or May. It is
defined by a great educational experience every single day for every single
student and what does the system that perpetuates that look like?
(Interview one)

I then stated, "And so, that's the reimagining."

Dr. Cepeda agreed, "Yeah. You have to reimagine what does a day in the life of a

student who's a part of the school district look like . . . And so, we have refocused all,

most all, of our conversations around the achievement of that" (Interview one).

In the second interview, Dr. Cepeda explained further how he and the district

believed they had to reimagine the educational experience. As a result of the

determination to reimagine students' educational experience, he felt traditional roles

needed to be reimagined as well. Dr. Cepeda elaborated,

> But on a day to day to day to day basis, fifty-one percent of what
>
> our principals are doing is coaching teachers to create a system that
>
> perpetuates a great educational experience for students. By the way, our
>
> educational system has not been designed to do that. It has been designed
>
> to provide a general diffusion of knowledge towards students. (Interview
>
> two)

As we continued the second interview, Dr. Cepeda provided more data indicating the

reimagining of roles at Cityview ISD. As mentioned earlier in this section, principals at

Cityview are expected to be engaged in coaching teacher, improving instruction, fifty-one

percent of their day. Dr. Cepeda posited,

> And so, a principal that's moving towards providing a student a great
>
> educational experience has to be different than a principal that was meant
>
> to make sure that the student passed the test in March, April or May. And
>
> so, what a principal does on that pie chart, and what a principal does in our
>
> system is different. (Interview two)

As we neared the end of our time together during the second interview, I asked made a statement and followed up with a question hoping to dig a little deeper into how and why Cityview felt the necessity to reimagine the educational system. My query was,

> One of the biggest challenges in education is getting students life ready upon high school graduation. How do the current concepts, according to the state of Texas, fall short of preparing students to be life ready, and how does your district's vision reimagine life ready? (Interview two)

Dr. Cepeda replied,

> Well, I would say that educational improvement cycle is really slow. Um, when you're talking about a legislative body that meets every other year, makes major decisions every other biennium. So, you're talking about every four years, and implements major change every other, other session, so every six years. If you've got a kid in sixth grade then he will have graduated by the time any of those changes happen. So, we're talking about our current system, how it is designed. We operate like an aircraft carrier and we need to operate like a drone. Nimble, reactive, individualized, smart, precise. Those are not words that are associated with education on a grand scale. And so, and I've been in discussion with the commissioner and he gets it, legislators and they get it . . . So, when we turn the state of education, we turn it like an aircraft carrier, very slowly, very methodically. You have to be careful when you do it, make sure the weather's perfect, blah, blah, blah. And our kids are turning the

ship at a generational pace versus an individual student, individual district,

individual system pace. (Interview two).

Dr. Cepeda concluded with the statement,

And so, when you're making decisions, and the mechanism of change is

for single people detached by hundreds of components from the end

product, that's a recipe for disaster at the corporate level. Guess what? It

is for student lives as well. So, I would say, woefully inadequate.

(Interview two)

Change, inquiry, and research in practice

There were multiple examples of change, inquiry, and research imbedded in the

interview data from the last sections. Particularly, the sections Creating and Reimagining

roles and responsibilities offered both philosophical and actionable elements applicable to

practice. Reimagining the educational experience was a result of inquiry and the

application of research into a change initiative. Dr. Cepeda decided to implement a focus

on improving instruction after researching what most highly correlated to student success.

As a result of this change initiative, principals spent more time coaching teachers than in

performing other duties. Dr. Cepeda also pledged support for his administrators in

accomplishing this change. In one example, he told the story of a parent coming up to

the elementary school to talk to the principal about something. The principal was not in

her office, she was in a classroom observing instruction. When the parent was told the

principal was not available, they went to the superintendent's office to complain. Dr.

Cepeda asked the parent, "What's the principal's job" (Interview one)? The parent

replied it was for the principal to be in the office in case . . . to handle things. Dr. Cepeda

explained, "Well, we're not doing that anymore." He indicated resistance to the change

dwindled significantly after the exchange. Dr. Cepeda remarked, "Yeah, it went

relatively well after that" (Interview one). In addition, Dr. Cepeda indicated he had used

the analogy of the scorpion and the frog with parents and staff as an example of why

educational change can be so difficult. He claimed,

> . . . the scorpion and the frog are like the nature of education; it's like
>
> changing the nature of the teacher, the expectations of students and parents
>
> and community members with the symbol being so strong and ingrained.
>
> What is success? The scorpion can't swim and asks the frog to give him a
>
> ride across the river. The frog says, "if you stick me, we both will die."
>
> And, of course, the scorpion claims he will not sting the frog. And, of
>
> course, half way across the river, the scorpion stings the frog. Before the
>
> frog sinks, he asks the scorpion why he stung him because they both are
>
> now going to drown and die. The scorpion replies, "it's my nature." And
>
> so, having to overcome those powerful symbols is probably our biggest
>
> challenge. (Interview one)

However, Dr. Cepeda claimed the ongoing changes being made at Cityview ISD

were not only worth the resistance to change, but needed. In the second interview

session, I asked Dr. Cepeda about why the district he was leading held the belief the

educational experience needed to be reimagined. He responded,

Because, um, it [education] was originally imagined as: How do we get as

much information into our students in this given period of time and set

them out into the world as really well informed on the things that we've

outlined here. Well, there is a lot of research that shows that students

retain very little of what they're taught that's not contextualized. And

guess what, that happens for adults as well. So, I don't know why it's that

hard to understand that that's the way it is for kids. And so that's another

one of those taking research and theory and putting it into practice, we

know that if a student is not engaged in an activity that relates to their life,

that they're not going to retain that information. (Interview two)

Dr. Cepeda added, "And, is it worth the blood, sweat and tears, investment,

monetary investment, human capital investment needed to make the transition? And, we

believe it is" (Interview two). As we neared the end of our second interview session, Dr.

Cepeda posited, "I think it is incumbent upon leaders to create a better system, in parallel,

as we are having to comply with the current system, and then eventually overcome and

hopefully supplant, replace [the current system]" (Interview two). As we finished up our

last face-to-face meeting, Dr. Cepeda stated there was some excellent change going on in

districts across the nation and in some of the smaller states. He reflected,

Now will say this, the work that's going on in Delaware, the majority of

their school districts have begun to work together. That's pretty powerful,

I mean, we are talking about Delaware here. So, we are talking about a

very small, and so I think unfortunately, well maybe not unfortunately, I

think that a lot of success is going to come from individual school

districts. A lot of the leadership's going to happen there. Smaller school

districts that can turn like a zero-turn mower versus, an aircraft carrier,

smaller states that can implement a more cohesive change across a larger

scale, you know, many school districts. (Interview two)

Defining readiness

I discussed different aspects of readiness with each participant. Readiness,

especially "life ready" was a term that emerged from the data and was pursued as it

became prevalent. While interviewing Dr. Cepeda, and subsequently reading back

through my researcher's journal, I realized readiness was threaded through the fabric of

the systemic changes made at Cityview ISD. The entire change initiative and

reimagining of roles and responsibilities were directly linked to preparing students for life

after graduation. Empowering students to become actively engaged in the choices

defining their own readiness was the central part of the origin of change at Cityview.

Dr. Cepeda touched several times on the need to redefine readiness with respect to

the slow reaction time associated to the educational improvement legislated by a

government entity. He offered,

I need flexibility and I need a creative sovereignty as a school district, and

trust. I'll report what we're doing, I'll report. But for some reason we've

really, really, dug in and entrenched ourselves in the idea of accountability

has to look like this . . . education is just, it's so stable and it's been in

place for so long that major changes don't seem to be dangerously

important, but they really are. And I think it's dangerously important to send a student out into the world that's not equipped to be successful in that world. (Interview two)

Summary

Cityview ISD has been involved in an ongoing change initiative reimagining the local educational system in order to provide a "great educational experience" (Interview one) for its students. The district's vision and the superintendent's vision are the same. Dr. Cepeda has taken innovative steps in involving communities both inside and outside of his district's immediate geography. The district has partnered with both local state educational entities as well as national forums and research groups. Dr. Cepeda has related significant change in the nation's educational improvement will arise from leaders in small districts and states taking the initiative to institute systemic change.

Two additional tier-three follow-up questions were developed as a result of the aggregate emergent data and themes. At different points during the interviews, I also asked each participant what element of their scholar–practitioner program most aided them in their jobs as superintendents. Two of the tier-three questions along with the participant responses are provided below. In addition, I have included the question and response regarding the element of scholar–practitioner preparation which has most aided them in their superintendent practice.

Question # 1: Aside from providing a safe environment for students (and staff), what is your most important mission or responsibility as a superintendent? Why?

I believe my most important "mission" is to keep the focus on growth. Whether it be Curricular, organizationally, philosophically, technologically, etc., we must continue to question everything we do to ensure our product, which is the instruction, support, and opportunities we provide for our students, is what each of our students need in order to go out and apply their passion to the world!

Question #2: In prior interviews and conversations, we have spent significant time discussing readiness, i.e., college ready, career ready, and life ready. Who should create the definitions for readiness, or are they necessary?

A collective defining of readiness by expert sources, teachers, students, parents, and administration. The process must be ongoing to accommodate market/economy trend emergence, individual student passion, technology/instructional method improvements, and assessment data for the purposes of sharpening focus.

Question #3: What, so what elements of your scholar Practitioner program best prepared you to serve as a superintendent in public school?

Think probably the design of the program. I think that the cohort is definitely important. I know that through the completion process, a cohort shows that higher percentage of students will complete the program when they're a part of a cohort model. However, I don't think that was what was

valuable. It was the continuity of conversation. So, over a three-year

period we could have a continuity of conversation with a group of

thoughtful, conscientious professionals. And so, that allowed those

thought processes, those underlying beliefs to evolve over a longer period

of time than would be available on a typical model. Now the focus being

a scholar–practitioner, taking the scholarship and putting it into practice,

bridging the gap between theory and practice, that focus . . . So, that

continuity of conversation, continuity of thought, continuity of

opportunity, through the lens of scholar practitioner model is probably the

magnifying glass effect to help sharpen that focus, on how to do that, how

to take something that's theoretical and sounds good, and put it into

practice, and introduce it into a system that is iterative and ongoing and

ever-improving, ever-changing, and embraces that process.

CHAPTER VII

Dr. Swanson

Overview

This chapter underscores the emergent data from the fourth of six participants. As in the previous chapter, participant responses and the researcher's coding of emergent themes will provide readers with descriptions of how scholar–practitioner leaders, serving as superintendents in Texas public schools, bridge the theory to practice gap. The research questions will be used as an over-arching framework and lens, while common, emergent themes will provide detailed descriptions of participant views and practices in their individual voices. I will also draw upon the researcher's journal to provide observations and impressions.

During the course of the current study, several areas of superintendent practice and influence became apparent: ensuring the district's vision, mission, core values, guiding statements, and strategic plan is aligned from top to bottom throughout the district; creating trust and vision alignment with the school board; (3) leadership team relationships and modeling; and inviting community input and creating partnerships. Consequently, four additional themes emerged directly related to bridging the theory to practice gap: creating programs and practices which support student success; reimagining

roles and responsibilities across the educational system; change, inquiry, and research as a part of practice; defining readiness; and a summary of the collected data.

Introduction

Dr. Swanson has been the superintendent at Riverside ISD for the past nine years. When I asked Dr. Swanson to tell me a little about himself, he stated, "I grew up in this area, and have worked in different school districts in the area for the majority of the time" (Interview one). Dr. Swanson reported he obtained his bachelor's degree from a university located about one hundred miles from where he grew up. Dr. Swanson shared,

> I was involved in a lot of opportunities, played ball there, and then got into
>
> coaching after graduation for a couple of, well for five or six years and
>
> then moved on to different jobs. Moved into an assistant principalship at a
>
> different district, and then eventually a principalship, and it just kind of led
>
> to the superintendency here. I grew up about six or seven miles from here
>
> in a neighboring district. I'm married with three kids, we have been
>
> married 25 years and, you know, that's the most important thing to me.
>
> You know, we are Christians and attend church. I think that's very
>
> important and very important in community like this for people to be able
>
> to trust you. And so that's a very important to, to me, and to my family.
>
> (Interview one)

Dr. Swanson has served in education in Texas for twenty-five years. He completed his scholar–practitioner doctoral program at Stephen F. Austin State University within the

last ten years. Riverside ISD had between 600 and 800 students enrolled in K-12 schools at the time of this study.

Vision

After collecting background information, the first interview began in earnest. I asked Dr. Swanson, "So, does your district have a vision statement?" He replied,

We do, but we are in the process of re-working it now to be more student

centered with expectations that create a little bit higher expectations for,

for all of us. We have, that's probably something we really need to, you

know, as far as putting in writing. I mean we all understand the vision, but

I haven't done as good a job because I probably should have like put it on

the wall, and displayed it, things like that. I'd probably shoot, could have

done better at that, but they do know where we're going. (Interview one)

The second scripted question asked if there was a separate mission statement for the district, or if the vision was a collective statement. Dr. Swanson commented,

Well if you're talking about vision, the vision . . . you're talking about the

difference between mission and vision, the vision is more we, we've

embarked upon a program to help students achieve a career later in life.

(Interview one)

During the course of the discussion about vision, Dr. Swanson informed me the district was in the process of building a collegiate center. Dr. Swanson felt the best articulation of the district vision was through the creation of programs supporting student readiness,

and the actions accompanying the formation of those programs. One of the important

elements, according to Dr. Swanson was communicating a rebranding of the school.

I extended one of the scripted questions in the first interview in order to dig

deeper into the actions connected to the articulation of the district vision. I asked was,

"So, the new statement that you're reworking, who are the voices. So, who's represented

in that statement? How are you going about doing that?" Dr. Swanson explained,

> Well, we're having community meetings and talking to other stakeholders
>
> and parents, and of course they, you know, they talked to the parents
>
> before we enrolled students, but we've, we've had several meetings and
>
> they'd been well attended and we had a college night here about two, three
>
> weeks ago . . . We want to rebrand our school. I mean it was a struggling
>
> district, and has been, you know, but I mean that's our, that's our vision
>
> right now. And people know, the parents know, the community knows,
>
> the school board knows, the educators here know. (Interview one)

When I returned for the second-round interview, I began by asking if Dr. Swanson could

tell me some other ways he articulated the vision to the district, how he took action. He

responded,

> I think the leadership team. It permeates from there more than anything
>
> else, and when we have opportunities to have community meetings, but
>
> you know, the other leadership in the district, you just keep emphasizing it
>
> to them, and then they spread it from there. (Interview two)

Digging deeper, I asked Dr. Swanson what he felt the most important things his leadership team did to support the vision. He responded, "I think the communication, you know, they enhanced the communication throughout the district is the main thing they do" (Interview two). Dr. Swanson believed it was his responsibility to listen closely to the school board and the community said and then articulate those thoughts and ideas into a direction for the district. He also indicated the implementation of the collegiate center, which Dr. Swanson felt was the focal point for the vision, was communicated to the leadership team as a top-down decision.

Alignment to school board

After Dr. Swanson indicated the decision to start a collegiate center was a top-down decision, I began to probe into what kind of relationship existed between him and the school board. Dr. Swanson clarified, "They didn't come to me and say, "you got to do this," but I could tell by their talking that we needed to do something different, you know, we needed to make a name for ourselves. It's time to quit just being, just being here" (Interview one). He continued, "And there's been other schools that have done things like that too, you know, other administrators, it's not an original idea. But it's worked [starting a collegiate center] better than I ever thought it would" (Interview one). After that statement, I commented, "So it sounds like from that comment that you and the school board are pretty well aligned?" Dr. Swanson replied simply, "Yep. Yep" (Interview one).

In the second-round interview, I revisited the theme of school board relations with Dr. Swanson. I asked him what actions he took in support of the school board. Dr. Swanson replied,

Oh, well, you have to maintain confidentiality, and you also listen very closely to what they're trying to say and take that and compile it into a direction and then articulate that direction to the rest of the district through the superintendent. But you never tell employees, you know, where certain information comes from or where certain directives or directions come from. You say this was the decision, you know, the board is supporting me and this decision to move forward in this area. (Interview two)

Later in the second interview, I asked Dr. Swanson about the timeline for when he started the push for college classes, and then the collegiate center. The conversation after took an unexpected turn. Dr. Swanson said, "I say that probably started about six or seven years ago. I've been here almost nine years, and the first two years were spent in survival mode" [we both started laughing] (Interview two).

I dug deeper into this line of questioning, asking, "Okay. Okay. Well that segues well into this. So, you told me before that the school board was not satisfied with the district's performance and especially distressed that none of the athletic teams were successful." And Dr. Swanson responded, "Nothing was successful" (Interview two). Dr. Swanson had indicated in the first interview the district was academically successful,

so I dug deeper and stated, "Nothing was successful, but the district was meeting

academic standards, you said." Dr. Swanson explained,

> Well, yes. The academic. I think there, as far as the meeting standard and
>
> state accountability is less . . . It's still a priority because it has to be, but
>
> it's not the common thread that drives everything. It's not the only focus.
>
> (Interview two)

I wanted to dig a little more, and I asked, "How would you say the school board defines

success, now, today?" Dr. Swanson smiled, and replied,

> Through those areas. You know, I think if our collegiate program is
>
> successful. I think they would not like it if we didn't meet standard
>
> academically . . . But I think they define the success through our
>
> collegiate program and the extracurriculars, moreso than through state
>
> accountability. Although state accountability has to be important, but it's
>
> not the main priority . . . We wouldn't be successful if just the athletic
>
> teams were winning, and we weren't with the collegiate program involved.
>
> (Interview two)

Team Leadership and Modeling

The leadership team at Riverside ISD consisted of an elementary principal, an

assistant principal at the secondary school, a high school principal, a director of academic

services, and a counselor. A new principal was being hired for the new collegiate center,

but was not yet on the administrative team at the time of the study. The collegiate center

was going to be the new high school, and would not open until the fall of the next school

year. I asked Dr. Swanson how he articulated the district vision to is leadership team.

Dr. Swanson replied, "Well, the leadership team was in the discussions we have had, but

this was a top-down decision" (Interview one). I asked in the second interview if Dr.

Swanson had thought of any other ways he articulated the vision to the district. He

responded,

> I think the leadership team. It permeates from there more than anything
>
> else and when we have opportunities to have meetings, but you know, the
>
> other leadership in the district, you just keep emphasizing it to them, and
>
> then they spread it from there. (Interview two)

Digging deeper, I asked the superintendent if he felt supported by his leadership team.

Dr. Swanson replied, "Very, very supported" (Interview two).

Dr. Swanson indicated the leadership team was focused on doing something

special, something different to brand the school. He told me,

> Well, I think it was on most of the campuses, and with some of the
>
> leadership, I think they thought that if they did well with testing, then the
>
> district was doing well. And some of them, to not take things away, some
>
> of them did do well with that. We were a recognized district and all of
>
> that, you know, as I got here even, it was good in those areas. (Interview
>
> two)

Dr. Swanson said he realized they needed something different. Dr. Swanson related,

But people, the public just isn't really that concerned with those state

ratings, academic ratings. They get more excited and more engulfed in the

school if the other things are more successful. (Interview two)

Dr. Swanson believed the leadership team were on board with building something special

and rebranding the school. He indicated he met with each of his administrators every day

and felt comfortable with the level of support he received from the leadership team.

Community

During the first round of interviews, Dr. Swanson indicated communication of a

vision was a very important element of successfully creating a collegiate center at

Riverside ISD. Dr. Swanson posited in rural districts, gaining community support for

new, different programs or initiatives can be a difficult task. When I asked if the

district's vision and mission was a collective statement, Dr. Swanson related,

We have a lot of kids whose parents, and the kids [themselves], do not

believe they can attend college or even a trade school or a career and tech

avenue. So, we're trying to educate the public around here about the

possibilities and trying to teach them that they can be successful in

college, that they can get a certification, that they can get an education that

will help them. And I think the community understands that. (Interview

one)

Dr. Swanson expanded upon this statement, "It's kind of been a community movement,

you know, more or less" (Interview one).

I asked Dr. Swanson multiple times about both his alignment and if the vision was aligned throughout the community. He indicated as parents became better informed through a series of college nights and public relations work from a collegiate specialist he had hired into the district, the more on board the community was with the vision and the increase in opportunities for students to take college classes. Dr. Swanson commented, "We've got people excited about the possibilities of their kid getting a degree or, or in education, higher education" (Interview one). In addition, when I specifically asked Dr. Swanson if he felt he was aligned with the community, he responded, "Yeah, and I think we're aligned, and I don't think the community is afraid of it, I think it's the educators" (Interview one). Dr. Swanson went on to indicate he felt some teachers and administrators were afraid to give up power. The district hosts four or five college nights during the course of the school year, and those events are well attended according to the superintendent.

Creating

Creating was threaded through the emergent data found in interviews with Dr. Swanson. The vision was articulated through creative action. When Dr. Swanson was hired at Riverisde ISD, the school board was dissatisfied. Dr. Swanson reported, "One of the board members told me this was the worst district in Texas" (Interview one; Interview two). Over the course of the first two years as superintendent of the district, Dr. Swanson indicated he spent a lot of time listening to the board and the community and synthesizing the information. He ended up creating a new vision for the district. Dr. Swanson began creating the opportunity for more kids to be enrolled in college classes.

So, we have ended up, we have about 90 something, at one time we had

100 students in college classes, and we have over a 90 percent passage rate

so far, and we pay for those courses and we try to put kids into courses

they can be successful in, and we're about 70 percent low socio

economics. (Interview one)

As more students were successful, Dr. Swanson believed the creation of a new

brand for the district was needed. Digging in deeper regarding the creation of the

collegiate center, I asked, "So, it just kind of began as a campaign to inform?" He

recounted,

Yes, but to change, you know, change the focus, or the focus had been a

traditional, you know, the A through F on accountability and things like

that. But you won't get anywhere like that. I mean I've, I've been the

principal of a campus that we worked really, really hard and became

exemplary. Nobody cared because it really didn't help students like this

kind of program will. We were searching for something different. So,

we're building a collegiate center. (Interview one)

Dr. Swanson continued by telling me they had multiple colleges supporting their

initiative, and several of those colleges attend district college nights. Dr. Swanson

described the relationship the district had with several colleges.

We'll have college nights like that parents will come and we try to inform

them and then we'll, you know, we'll call, we'll try to get the counselor call

to try to get kids to become involved . . . We pay for the tuition and the

books. We've actually had to go out to the colleges, and I won't say we put

pressure on them, but that's what happened is, and they've lowered the

tuition for us, very affordable. A lot cheaper for us to pay for the tuition

for the kids, and they figured out that they're [the colleges] going to get

students in the long run. (Interview one)

Dr. Swanson told me the initiative was a top-down decision. He related,

It was not a collaborative decision. I mean they, you know, you talk about

collaborating and all, you know, and that's great, but sometimes you got to

move things; you have get them moved. It was a gamble, and there is still

some resistance among teachers and even maybe an administrator or two.

But I'm in the process of addressing that too. (Interview one)

Looking for a deeper understanding of how the initiative was created, I asked,

"So, when you say top down, are you talking straight from you or from you and the

school board?" Dr. Swanson replied,

Well, and I've got my ideas from, from the what the school board was

saying in terms of we got to create a better image around here and we've

got to include more kids and these kids need to be successful. And so that

led to me thinking and coming up with, you know, trying to, trying to

come up with solutions to some of those concerns. (Interview one)

When I came back for the second interview, I decided to dig deeper into how the creation

of the collegiate center got started. I made the statement, "When we met before, this ties

kind of straight into what you just said, you told me that the decision to initiate change

was started by the school board talking about creating a better image for the school. Dr.

Swanson replied in the affirmative. I continued, "Can you tell me a little bit more about

how things progressed from there? Cause it sounds like it just started out as an idea." Dr.

Swanson articulated,

> Yes. Well. The whole notion was to create a better image for the school in
>
> a lot of different areas, you know, whether it was academics or
>
> extracurricular activities or whatever it was to do a better job of those
>
> things. And it took, you know the board was patient, and it took a long
>
> time to get the right people or some of the right people in the right spots to
>
> be able to get that done. And it took some culture change as well.
>
> (Interview two)

Dr. Swanson provided further insight into the overall changes in attitudes and culture

needed from both inside and outside the school in order to create more opportunities for

district students and their families. Dr. Swanson continued,

> I can give an example, but it took a change of culture to get, you know,
>
> like you asked me about the girls (the girls basketball team was in the
>
> playoffs) if they won the other evening, we lost. But about four years ago,
>
> they were 0 and 29. And the volleyball team was about that bad, so we
>
> hired a girl's coordinator that had experience and had been successful and
>
> then we started, you know, I started working closely with him to try and
>
> change the culture. There were a lot of battles that had to be fought
>
> because there are other activities that were putting girls sports way down

on the totem pole, low priority. And so, a lot of things had to be flip

flopped in order for that to be successful and then, you know, this year, the

first year really where we're seeing the rewards of it and you know, the

volleyball team was in the regional tournament and the basketball team

just now lost. And so, you know, that was a far cry from 0 and 29.

(Interview two)

Dr. Swanson acknowledged cultural beliefs and norms were slow to change.

Time, patience, structural change, and cultural change were all needed for Dr. Swanson

to create the atmosphere and climate for the creation of a collegiate center at Riverside

ISD.

Reimagining roles

During the first interview I asked participants in several different ways how they

articulate the district's vision across the district. At Riverside ISD, the creation of better

opportunities for students to be successful was a driving force for Dr. Swanson. Dr.

Swanson translated discussions and comments made from the school board and from

other stakeholders into creating better opportunities for students. Dr. Swanson indicated

several things had to be reimagined in order to accomplish this goal.

Because we had kids that were not allowed to take TSI (Texas Success

Initiative is an assessment given to determine college readiness), you

know, so we just pretty well blanket give it now. That was the first battle

we had to fight was people saying, "no, they can't all take it, or they only

get one shot at it." No, we are not going to do that anymore. So, we've

got someone hired here that actually can give it here. She has her license to give it, so she can give it like ten times a day to a kid if she wants to, you know? So, we just had to change our thinking on that. So, we've got a bunch of Kids TSI compliant now, and then they became excited about going to college. These kids are poor, over seventy percent low socio economic. So, their parents don't think they can do anything like that, but we know they can. (Interview one)

Dr. Swanson related reimagining the way education should look can be difficult, stressful, and many districts simply give up.

You know, I see a lot of superintendents, you know, they, and not just superintendents, but educators, educational leaders, leaders in leadership positions, they try to go in and change curriculum. So, they start nitpicking these smaller things in within a system. They will say, well that curriculum is not right, that's why those kids aren't learning, or they have bad discipline techniques with students, or they have poor teaching skills, and isn't we gotta work on that, or we got to sit in a workshop for this or that, but they haven't fundamentally changed anything because most of the time that leads to resistance that oftentimes would defeat an administrator. And I think I've seen, if you just observe, and I looked at, you know, and I'm not a big Donald Trump fan, but I kinda saw what he was doing in the national political arena. He started a different movement. If I start, you

know, I was thinking this could be like that here. And that's exactly what's

happened. (Interview one)

Dr. Swanson not only considered another broad-scale example of reimagining a

traditional construct, but applied it to another traditional construct, and reimagined how

education could work in his district.

His application of theory to practice not only included the concept of reimagining

roles and responsibilities, but conceptualized scholar–practitioner models of change,

inquiry, and research in practice. In the second interview, I asked Dr. Swanson about

success and what defined it at Riverside. He commented success was defined by

everyone, every program having success, "the whole district has been reimagined"

(Interview two)

Change, inquiry, and research in practice

In the first interview one of the scripted questions asked participants about any

resistance or incongruences they encountered to the district vision. During conversations

about creating more opportunities for students to earn college credit while in high school,

Dr. Swanson indicated there was some resistance to the programmatic change. I began,

"Ok. You talked about resistance. Has there been any incongruences, you know, with

the, with the, I guess the way you are talking about it, it would be overcoming . . ." Dr.

Swanson interjected, "Fears" (Interview one). And he continued, "Yes, that's what it is.

Yes, that's what it is actually, exactly what it is. Fear of change" (Interview one).

I dug deeper into what Dr. Swanson meant by the fear of change. I prompted,

"So, can you give me a little bit of an example of some resistance that you've experienced

with, you said with some teachers and with even some of the administrators. What did that look like?" Dr. Swanson replied,

> The face of fear. It's like, it had more to do with they're afraid of change
> and it challenges the power structure of things. It gives the kids and
> parents more power. It empowers them and the community. A lot of
> administrators are reluctant to share power over a district. (Interview one)

I said, "Because they want to be thought of as omniscient." Dr. Swanson shed more light on why he thought change could be hard.

> Yes, that's the way I see it. Now, but, you know, when something has
> been done a certain way for so long, it's very difficult for people to accept
> change. People become comfortable. Teachers become comfortable
> teaching the courses they like to teach. People become comfortable in the
> job that they have. So, it is a stressful thing for them to have to think
> about something that different, that different of a philosophy. (Interview
> one)

Through inquiry, especially listening and asking questions of stakeholders, Dr. Swanson felt compelled to instigate change at Riverside ISD in order to rebrand his district into a place where students had multiple opportunities to become successful. In pursuit of the change initiative several roles and responsibilities had to be reimagined.

Defining readiness

At Riverside ISD, readiness has been defined by the creation of a collegiate program. Dr. Swanson told me the new district vision was being rewritten at the time of

the current study. He articulated the vision was well known by all stakeholders, and

could be observed in action through the number of students involved in college classes

and student participation in extracurricular activities. Dr. Swanson told me their district

was "searching for something different" (Interview one). I asked him, "So, really what

you are talking about is not only college ready, but life ready?" He responded, "Yes, but

while actually in college. I mean we've got kids who are going to graduate with sixty

something hours" (Interview one). Dr. Swanson added, "We will have more as more

classes come through. This is our first group that has kids that have that many hours"

(Interview one).

It was apparent Dr. Swanson felt the students at Riverside could be successful in

college coursework. He also felt the need to create a structure to support that initiative.

Dr. Swanson related,

>We hired a director of academic services that had experience with that,
>
>and we charged her with increasing college enrollment because that's what
>
>she did. That's what her passion was. That's what her experience was in
>
>previous districts, and so we used that and then gave her the support in
>
>order to implement those things. And like I said it wasn't easy. It's still
>
>not easy, and you know, there had to be some changes and there still will
>
>need to be some changes. But we're in the process of making those
>
>changes as we speak. (Interview two).

Digging deeper, I asked if the kids were happy. Dr. Swanson replied,

Yes. A lot happier. We still have some programs to work on. I'm going to work on a couple of extracurricular activities. We've got to improve our UIL academic program and then our baseball and softball, they still struggle. (Interview two)

Summary

The district vision at Riverside ISD was under construction at the time of the current study. Although the vision was not posted around the district, Dr. Swanson claimed everyone at the district and in the community knew the vision. The vision and mission are one in the same at Riverside. There has been some resistance to the vision and Dr. Swanson associated the resistance to the fear of a change in the district power structure. The district has created a collegiate program and is currently building a new collegiate center which will become the new high school.

Two additional tier-three follow-up questions were developed as a result of the aggregate emergent data and themes. At different points during the interviews, I also asked each participant what element of their scholar–practitioner program most aided them in their jobs as superintendents. Two of the tier-three questions along with the participant responses are provided below. In addition, I have included the question and response regarding the element of scholar–practitioner preparation which has most aided them in their superintendent practice.

Question # 1: Aside from providing a safe environment for students (and staff), what is your most important mission or responsibility as a superintendent? Why?

To provide hope for a positive future. To give them the best chance to become successful.

Question #2: In prior interviews and conversations, we have spent significant time discussing readiness, i.e., college ready, career ready, and life ready. Who should create the definitions for readiness, or are they necessary?

It is naturally set at the employment and college levels. Any other attempts would be difficult to create.

Question #3: What, so what elements of your scholar Practitioner program best prepared you to serve as a superintendent in public school?

Which element? Well, I think it's just knowing to be... I think, you know, you learn to be patient and you had to think about ways to be creative and being patient with people because you realize they really don't understand. A lot of times they really don't know what they want. They just know they're unhappy. I think I told you when I got here, I had a board member telling me this is the worst school in Texas, and you know, I think you just realize that things can be accomplished with patience and persistence. (Interview two)

CHAPTER VIII

Dr. Clark

Overview

This chapter underscores the emergent data from the fifth of six participants. As in the previous chapter, participant responses and the researcher's coding of emergent themes will provide readers with descriptions of how scholar–practitioner leaders, serving as superintendents in Texas public schools, bridge the theory to practice gap. The research questions will be used as an over-arching framework and lens, while common, emergent themes will provide detailed descriptions of participant views and practices in their individual voices. I will also draw upon the researcher's journal to provide observations and impressions.

During the course of the current study, several areas of superintendent practice and influence became apparent: ensuring the district's vision, mission, core values, guiding statements, and strategic plan is aligned from top to bottom throughout the district; creating trust and vision alignment with the school board; leadership team relationships and modeling; and inviting community input and creating partnerships. Consequently, four additional themes emerged directly related to bridging the theory to practice gap: creating programs and practices which support student success; reimagining

roles and responsibilities across the educational system; change, inquiry, and research as a part of practice; defining readiness; and a summary of the collected data.

Introduction

Dr. Clark (pseudonym) has served as an educator in Texas for twenty-nine years. Dr. Clark has served as a superintendent for fifteen of those years. Dr. Clark was hired as the new superintendent at Mountain ISD in the middle of the school year and had been only been on the job for seven weeks at the time of the first interview. Dr. Clark told me he knew he wanted to be an educator at an early age.

> I'm in my 15th year of being a superintendent and, I always knew that I
> wanted to be an educator. My dad was a superintendent and an educator
> and my brother was a superintendent and an educator and, and um, but the
> reason I even got into education at an early age, I already knew how to
> read and, and I was in a very diverse first grade classroom and my teacher
> basically enlisted my services as a peer tutor for others in my class and I
> got to help teach other kids how to read when I was in first grade. And I
> loved it. I mean it was so cool to watch the light come on with those kids
> and, and it just really inspired me to help other people. So, I knew from a
> very early age I wanted to go into teaching. And originally, when I went
> in, I thought I was going to be a teacher and a coach forever. (Interview
> one)

Dr. Clark informed me he did not think he would be an administrator when he began his

teaching career. He recalled being encouraged by his campus principal to pursue an

administrative role in education.

> I was teaching seventh grade Texas history and was having a great lesson
>
> and I get a knock on the door and it was my principal and I'm like, Hey,
>
> he's interrupting me, I'm right in the middle of something, so I step out in
>
> the hall my principal says, Mr. Clark, I've been watching you and I feel
>
> like you need to go into administration. He said, "I know I'm interrupting
>
> your class and it's probably making you mad." And I said, "Yeah, pretty
>
> much." So, he said, "I think you have the tools and I would encourage
>
> you to get into some kind of program and pursue that." And so, you
>
> know, even though my dad was an administrator, I never really was, was
>
> considering that. So, I thought, you know, what? Maybe the good Lord is
>
> opening the door for me to go to administration and maybe this is my sign.
>
> I took a job as an assistant principal and stayed in that role one year and
>
> then got offered a principal's job. (Interview one)

Dr. Clark indicated he worked under several superintendents as a principal and

observed their different leadership models and how leadership impacts students. He

reflected, "I just felt like the more kids and more staff that you impact, the more that you

can make a difference. And so, I just decided to pursue that" (Interview one). Dr. Clark

began his career as a superintendent in smaller districts and has progressively served in

larger districts. At his new position with Mountain ISD, student enrollment was around

20,000 students at the time of the current study. Dr. Clark completed his scholar–

practitioner doctoral program at SFASU within the last twenty years.

Vision

One of the first scripted questions I asked participants after introductory

information was if their district had a mission or vision statement, or both. One of the

things I noticed when entering the district administrative offices was an abundance of

informative flyers and media providing district news, programs, and celebrations.

Having only been the superintendent at Mountain ISD for seven weeks at the time, I was

surprised Dr. Clark was able to recite the substance of the vision without hesitation. He

reported Mountain ISD had both mission and vision statements. Dr. Clark knew the

substance of the vision statement and looked up the mission statement via the district

website. Dr. Clark commented,

> The thing is, that as is as a superintendent, I typically always do the vision,
>
> mission, and the district goals and beliefs together, but since I just was
>
> hired on and started in January, I hadn't had an opportunity to do that.
>
> And so, what I'm regurgitating to you is/was in place. It was in place and
>
> I haven't been part of that process. This summer, probably at our board
>
> retreat, we will revamp some of those things. (Interview one)

Dr. Clark presumed the mission and vision statements,

> I would imagine it was a collaborative process where you got input from
>
> all the different stakeholders. And then collectively the board and

> Superintendent and probably with some type of consultant drafted and
>
> developed these. (Interview one)

I then asked Dr. Clark about his vision for the district. He responded,

> My vision is that, um, all students will be able to read by the time they exit
>
> third grade or as many as possible. I'm strong on foundational skills,
>
> because I believe if, if they're not prepared to read by the time that they
>
> enter fourth grade, then they're always going to be behind . . . you asked
>
> that question and it's tailored to this district. So, that's going to be my first
>
> and foremost plan of attack is to strengthen the reading programs here and
>
> then, I want 100 percent graduation and I want kids to be ready to make
>
> that next move, whatever it might be . . . I'm going to focus on cultivating
>
> those skills, but also believe education has to be engaging and relevant and
>
> relevant for all kids. (Interview one)

> Since Dr. Clark had only recently begun his job at Mountain, I slightly altered the
next question to accommodate his recent arrival. I asked, "So, tell me how you plan to
articulate your vision to your leadership team?" Dr. Clark replied,

> Well they will be part of the process where you actually design what our
>
> vision is, and then what our non-negotiables are going to be and then what
>
> the systems we're going to put in place to make sure that all of our
>
> philosophies become actionable. I mean, that's the huge thing. (Interview
>
> one)

One of the elements Dr. Clark put emphasis on was the vision had to be put into a

strategic plan, and the plan had to be actionable. Over the next several months, Dr. Clark

intended to hire and meet with his new cabinet in order to include them in the

development of the new vision for Mountain ISD. After that process, Dr. Clark would

bring the rough draft of the plan to the school board. Dr. Clark stated,

> It'll start at our board retreat. We'll have our goal setting and it'll be data
>
> driven and then that particular document will be transferred and crafted
>
> and implemented into our district improvement plan and then each campus
>
> improvement plan. And so, that's what I'm planning on utilizing to make
>
> those actionable, you know, a lot of people do it just for compliance. I
>
> mean it's, it's a roadmap for me and is something that we monitor and
>
> review and we'll make adjustments as necessary. But, that's kind of an
>
> overview of what that planning phase will look like. (Interview one)

Dr. Clark provided a concrete example of how scholar—practitioner leaders move

from theory to practice. As Dr. Clark stated above, each element of a vision and the

subsequent strategic plan must be actionable in order to be effective. As we continued

the discussion on vision, I asked the superintendent how he planned to articulate his

vision to the school board. Part of his answer included how he presented his vision to the

board during his interview with the district during their superintendent search. Dr. Clark

related,

> And, you know, this is Texas, and Texas looks a lot the same any place
>
> you go. So, I've been able to take a lot of the core values, beliefs and

strategies that I've used elsewhere and implemented them here. And one

of the things, you know, we don't have kids that are all the same and

they're all different and they're all at different levels. (Interview one)

Dr. Clark indicated the Professional Learning Community (PLC) structure was an

important part of his plan to individualize instruction for each student at the district. Dr.

Clark related, ". . . one of the things that I've done to make sure that we have the data

pieces in place and we customize for every, every kid, is through the PLC structure"

(Interview one). Dr. Clark concluded,

So, I mean, that's what I sell to the board is I'm going to customize for

every single kid. We're going to teach what the state requires us to teach

and we're going to analyze. But then I also share with them I am very

competitive. I'm not status quo. I can't stand being below average. And

so, depending on your demographics and where you're at, I mean, we're

only forty-seven percent economically disadvantaged here. There's no

reason we should be below the state average in anything. And so, that's

what I basically tell them is we're going to monitor those results and I

want to be at least at the state average. And then in order to get there

though, you know, a lot of schools will only target those kids that are in

the middle. To me, you got to target everybody. (Interview one)

When I returned for the second interview, I asked Dr. Clark, now that he had time

to reflect upon our last meeting, if he had any thoughts about other ways he was planning

to articulate his vision to the district. Dr. Clark indicated communication was going to be key in getting the message out. Dr. Clark replied,

> Yeah, definitely. Once we reduce it to paper and action steps, we'll use our public information officer and then we will send it out in every format, like everybody in our district who have signed up for emails, we'll send it out, we'll put it on our Facebook page, on our website, on our twitter page. We'll communicate that with all the different stakeholders and then as I go and visit with the different civic groups. I'll share it with them as well; release it in that format. (Interview two)

Alignment to school board

After Dr. Clark answered my questions about his vision, and how he planned to develop and implement the vision into action, I asked him about his relationship with the school board. Dr. Clark was very candid.

> To be honest with you, the, um, the, the district's been somewhat dysfunctional. They've had in the past board members that have gotten in the weeds and they're trying to cross those lines. And, and I think they saw that with the recommendations that they were making and the path that they were going down in the interview process. We detailed that we needed to work together as a team of eight and they needed to identify issues and then just hand those over to me and let me come up with a solution for those instead of trying to solve them themselves. And so, a lot of what I have to do now is build those relationships and basically

bringing about trust and healing that we're going to do what we say we're

going to do. And so, that's kinda where I'm at right now. It's just, I'm

bridging that trust and trying to let them understand that, you know what,

the system will really work if you'll allow it to work but you can't do

things the way that you've always done them or you're going to continue to

get those same results. (Interview one)

I asked about any resistance he encountered with the school board. Dr. Clark indicated

he had not met much resistance because the board had hired him, but he did expect

resistance in other areas. He stated when you have to change adult behavior, then some

angst was going to occur. Dr. Clark elaborated,

And I always tell them when we change adult behavior, that means that

you're going to have some morale issues and I need them to have my back

and be supportive of me as I move forward. And there can't be any sacred

cows. Can't be that your cousin's working in some school and just because

they don't like what direction we decided to go that we're going to

abandon ship. (Interview two)

Dr. Clark indicated he felt he was in full alignment with the board at this point in

his tenure. He stated, "And so right now, no, I'd say the board's been very supportive and

the community has given me some grace and since I'm new, and I think the staff is too"

(Interview one). In addition, Dr. Clark commented, "My dissertation was on school

board and Superintendent Relationships and, I feel like that knowledge and knowing how

to communicate with my board members has really benefited me" (Interview one).

When we met for the second time, I looked to further investigate how Dr. Clark intended to firm up his relationship with the school board. I asked, "Tell me how you plan on showing support to the board. You touched on some of that with some of the communication. So how are you going to, I guess, facilitate that network?" Dr. Clark replied, "It'll, it'll start with them, because it goes to the vision and the mission it's going to be collective and it's going to be a team effort between myself and those seven individuals" (Interview two). Dr. Clark stated the board retreat was critical to the development of trust between himself and the board members.

> That's why the board retreat process is huge for me because they actually get to develop the vision, mission goals and then from there we work out the logistics with the cabinet administrators, teachers, and everybody else involved. And then I give them pretty much a monthly update on one of those initiatives or goals and, we carry it all the way throughout the year. So, there's a dynamic there that's ever changing and they're in the loop to see whether or not we're meeting that goal. (Interview two)

Team leadership and modeling

One of the scripted questions in the first round of interviews included a question regarding the superintendent's alignment to their leadership teams. Other questions were formulated, some during the first-round interview and others as tier-two inquiries, in order to obtain deeper insight into this specific relationship. Dr. Clark was in a unique position of having been recently hired by his district and had been given the opportunity to hire his leadership team. Dr. Clark stated,

So, my entire cabinet with the exception of a couple of people are going to

be brand new and so we can have a good team approach. And so, I'm

trying to hire people that have had experience but also a fall into my

collective vision as to what I want to see. (Interview two)

Dr. Clark indicated the importance of having shared vision with his leadership team. I

asked Dr. Clark how he intended to articulate his vision to his leadership team. He

responded,

Well, they will be part of the process where you actually design what our

vision is, and then what our non-negotiables are going to be and then what

the systems we're going to put in place to make sure that all of our

philosophies become actionable . . . We can all sit around and pontificate

and think that we have the greatest ideas in the world, but they're

meaningless unless they actually come to action, become action.

(Interview one)

Dr. Clark believed the vision not only needed to be a shared vision, but also had

to be actionable. He believed he needed to create ownership with his leadership team,

and distribute this model down through principals and instructional coaches. Dr. Clark

talked about putting his theory into practice.

I will sit down at the table with them and we'll work it out collaboratively.

We'll brainstorm because we're better as a team than I am individually and

then I'll ask them for input and we'll basically put down those strategies

and those action steps necessary to meet that goal. I'll work with the

cabinet, and then we have the district leadership team and our instructional

leadership team and meet with all those groups that have been selected and

we'll break it down and get a little bit of input from everybody so that we

can figure out what we need to do and how that looks as you take action

across the district. (Interview two)

Dr. Clark indicated as the local accountability structures were created, it was important

the process was modeled from top to bottom. Dr. Clark stated,

Yeah. Is as far as, once they've helped create that action strategy, then

they're going to be, same thing, providing evidences of attainment and

ongoing progress monitoring . . . I ask them to bring me back and we'll

circle back on several things, you have to give certain things a timeline,

and then in three months bring me back all your data and show me how

you're doing in this area. And so, we'll do that at our cabinet level

meetings or, our DLT meeting, or our ILT meeting, what it takes to get

there. So, it's kind of the same process but just broken down into what's

relevant for that individual.

Dr. Clark indicated he felt it was important to thread strategies and practices throughout

the district. He planned on accomplishing this through actionable items with his

leadership team, and through modeling the process from top to bottom.

Community

Early in our discussions, Dr. Clark mentioned community involvement was very

important to him. Dr. Clark stated, "I try to bridge that gap and I'm real big into

community partnerships because I absolutely believe that this school belongs to the taxpayers and to the community and to everybody here and it doesn't belong to me" (Interview one). Dr. Clark went on to explain he felt community partnerships could be instrumental in developing readiness criteria for students. He went on to explain,

> I always usually have a meeting with the Chamber of Commerce and
> business and industry leaders. I usually call it leaders breakfast and I'll
> develop a spiel for about 25 minutes and then I'll divide them up into
> tables of 10 and I'll have driving questions and I'll ask them, you know,
> what can we do as a school to help you in your business? And nine times
> out of ten, it's not about content. It's all about attendance, being good
> people, not having a criminal history record, and being able to accept
> constructive criticism. And then just being, having the ability to want to
> learn. (Interview one)

In addition to inviting input from the business community, Dr. Clark has enlisted help form different organizations and places an importance upon preparing students for entry into the real world. Dr. Clark commented,

> . . . especially for a first-generation kid that might not be entering into an
> occupation that their parents were in or their grandparents were in, and
> then, um, worked with, um, some of the civic organizations and they
> brought this program called Reality Check. I don't know if you're familiar
> with it or not; it breaks down everything. So, you want to be a carpenter?
> All right. Do you do want to own your own company or do you just want

to work for somebody else? All right, well, you can expect to make $20

an hour. So, this is $20 an hour working 248 days a year. This is what

you can expect to make. From this, would you like to own your own

house? Would you like to rent an apartment? Would you like to live in an

RV? Where would you like to live? You choose that. So, with that you

can expect to have an electric bill, the water bill. Do you want cable TV,

or do you want satellite TV, or do you just want to do without? And it

goes through every facet and so it really helps with that financial literacy

piece and the reality of what life is all about so that you can make an

informed decision. (Interview two)

Dr. Clark was passionate about community connections and inviting community

input with the formation of the district vision, and in preparing students for life. Dr.

Clark told me, "I can talk to you a ton about partnerships but I haven't gotten the chance

to start building them here yet. But where I came from, I built a lot of very creative,

innovative partnerships we were very proud of" (Interview one). The partnerships, along

with programs like the financial literacy piece mentioned above, Dr. Clark looked to form

and put into place provided examples of how theoretical constructs can be put into

practice.

Creating

Dr. Clark believed creating PLCs at every campus was a key to student success.

Dr. Clark remarked even though many areas of the state had the same values, the students

all had different needs. He felt it was important to create structures supportive of individual student academic needs. Dr. Clark related,

> . . . one of the things that I've done to make sure that we have the data pieces in place and we customize for every kid is through the PLC structure. And I'm big into everyday professional learning communities and, I've got to get this district there because we have 24 campuses and they're all individual islands and if they're doing well, it's because the principals created systems themselves that work and they are actually differentiating and they're looking at the data per individual student. And we've got to get there across the board. (Interview one)

Dr. Clark commented if the master schedule structure did not create time for the team members within each PLC to meet it would not be effective. He believed it was important because if the meeting opportunities were not honored through dedicated blocks of time during the school day, then teachers would abandon individualized lesson designs. Dr. Clark expanded on the creation of PLCs.

> Nobody wants to be an under achiever. No, they really don't know how to get there, but that's also why the PLC structures are so important. And if you don't give them that designated time, then you're not really supporting them. So, if you give them undeterred 45 minute PLC time every day, then you're saying, I care about you and respect for your time, I want you to do well, I'm going to be part of this process. (Interview one)

During our second interview, I dug deeper into Dr. Clark's views on creating effective

PLC structures. I asked, "How will you bridge that theory to practice gap in teaching and

learning? In other words, how will you form PLCs into effective realities at each

campus?" Dr. Clark responded,

> Yeah, it's all about the data monitoring and making sure that what we're
>
> assessing is totally aligned with what are instructing. So yeah, the daily
>
> PLC model is huge for us and will be, and we're going to have to train
>
> them on that model because they're not used to it. So, basically, that will
>
> be probably a summer project and I've held some of our professional
>
> development funds back for that purpose because we're going to have to
>
> teach them how to unpack the TEKs.

Dr. Clark felt it was import to the success of the district to create effective PLC

structures supporting individualized instruction. Not only did the PLC model need to be

created on each campus, but it needed to be supported through dedicated time slots in the

master schedule, and the district had to support the creation through professional

development.

Reimagining roles

As mentioned in the previous section Creating, Dr. Clark felt the PLC structure

was the key to turning the district in the right direction. He indicated fully supporting the

new PLC structure would require dedicating daily meeting times at every campus. Dr.

Clark also indicated there would need to be training associated to breaking down

curriculum and instructional pieces. Dr. Clark continued as he described the process of teachers having to reimagine their roles as educators.

> I'm trying to set the tone for the expectations, and basically letting everyone know that what we're doing is just not good enough and that's no reflection upon them. They've been doing what they've been instructed to do or they haven't been instructed at all. Right? So, I'm also giving them grace and I don't think they're trying to be rebellious, but they don't know what they don't know. Sometimes that's the case and you just have to train and you have to educate and you have to make them aware. It's been my experience over the 15 years I've been a superintendent that people will buy in, but you have to plant seeds. It has to be their idea and you have to empower them to help you get to where you need to go. (Interview one)

Dr. Clark also indicated administrators would be required to reimagine the role they would be expected to execute in order to facilitate success in the PLC instructional model.

> Number one, we're going to have to look at what a quality PLC looks like. Once we train, and we'll have, our district administrators, our principals, and our assistant principals, and instructional coaches, they'll all go through that training as to what quality PLCs look like. (Interview two)

Dr. Clark continued his description of expectations for principals.

> I require all of our administrators to be in the classroom a minimum of an hour a day . . . I still feel like the global data that you get and the visibility

that you get from three to five minute walk through is, is just crucial

because you know whether students are engaged, right when you walk into

that classroom, you can see if the content objective is posted. (Interview

two)

Dr. Clark indicated reimagining or redefining roles could be difficult and typically took

some time to fully realize. Dr. Clark summed up the stresses associated with reimagining

roles within a change initiative.

. . . learning curve and typically that's a two, three-year process and so

you've got to balance out the frustration with the learning curve and

getting them out of their comfort zone. And so, you have to teach them

new routines. You have to teach them new strategies and you have to

teach them new ways to reflect upon their practice. (Interview two)

Change, inquiry, and research in practice

The most significant example of change, inquiry, and research in practice at

Mountain ISD implemented by Dr. Clark was related to the implementation of PLC

structures across the district. Consistent with Dufour and Eaker (1998), Dr. Clark

believed the impact of PLCs upon current leadership practice was critical to success at

Mountain. The PLC model of educational leadership practice focused on the increased

pressure for student achievement and operationalized concepts of best practice into

models which promoted collaboration between stakeholders, especially instructional

staff, and translated the collaborative process into student success. Dr. Clark emphasized,

And often it's how you lay things out. What I always, always tell people

is, I'm not going to lay something out that we don't have data to support

that is not research based. And that's not going to be what's best for kids

and that's not going to help us achieve our goal. (Interview one)

Dr. Clark also indicated in the case of Mountain ISD the change needed to align with the

current situation at the district.

But there needs to be a sense of urgency. I have two IR campuses here

and I've got a sense of urgency and turn those around. I've got charter

schools coming in here that are going to be competing with me. I've got

private schools that are competing with me. If we don't put out a good

model, then people are going to leave. So that's, you know, that's my

sense of urgency.

Even though Dr. Clark felt it was important to change some structures and put

other structures, such as the PLC model, into place, he also encouraged autonomy within

those structures. Dr. Clark stated,

There may be some different ways to get from point A to point B and I

usually don't care how you get there, but I'm going to have some basic

structures that give you some autonomy within those points. But

ultimately, I want this goal accomplished or you're not doing your job.

(Interview one)

In our second interview, I dug deeper into the changes Dr. Clark wanted to implement at

Mountain ISD. I asked Dr. Clark what he believed were the most important things his

leadership team could do to support the district's mission and vision. Dr. Clark responded,

> To figure out those action steps to take it from theory to practice. So, work out the logistics behind the scene. So much of that is just coming up with resources, support, and training for all the people that are involved in the process. It's like what you used to do coaching, you know, figuring out what your strengths and weaknesses are and then you make an action plan to address each one of those areas that you want to target and then make it happen, evaluate it as you go. (Interview two)

Digging deeper, I asked Dr. Clark would be his first steps in implementing change in the direction the district needed to progress. Dr. Clark articulated how the change needed to be accomplished.

> We plant seeds but we also make farmers and then we empower them to buy into our mission and vision collectively. And I already had that discussion with our principals because I feel like they'll be pretty stable. And I had to talk philosophically of how you take theory and merge it into practice, and that everybody's on the same page and it can't be that Dr. Clark said we're going to do it this way, so we're going to do it this way. It's that you as the principal go back and you say, you know what? Our leadership team has been discussing this item and I think this is absolutely incredible. I would like for you to take a look at this and, there you go. And then you basically frame it so that it becomes their idea and you

empower them to move on. Otherwise, you have the us against them

mentality and you never are able to accomplish anything. (Interview two)

Dr. Clark talked specifically how to operationalize the change effort. He felt

strongly the change needed to be supported by data and encouraged by an actionable

vision. As we neared the end of our second meeting, Dr. Clark explained how he

intended to present the need for change.

Well, first you start off with reality and you show them the data that they

have achieved and that their students have achieved. And you just have

frank discussions as to whether or not this is good enough and you share

with them the district's vision and goal for what it should look like and

then you compare with like schools and like kids. When they look at our

data, they're going to find out that we were below where we should be.

And so, once they embrace that and understand that, and it's not a personal

thing, you're not just saying I'm a bad teacher or I'm a bad administrator,

but you're just, you're showing the data and then you're showing where

you want to go and then you give them the tools and resources in which to

get there.

There were multiple evidences of change, inquiry, and research in practice at Mountain

ISD.

Defining readiness

Preparing students for life after high school graduation was a common theme

among study participants. However, the definition of what readiness should look like

differed between superintendents and their districts. As discussed previously in this chapter, Dr. Clark believed students needed real examples of what to expect upon graduation. He indicated,

> I believe education has to be engaging and relevant for all kids. And you
> know, I'm really big into ability, aptitude, and interest testing for kids so
> that we know what's going to be relevant for them. And I think every kid
> should be involved in career technology education, whether they're going
> to Harvard or whether they just want to go into the workforce because I
> think they're all skills that are practical and we can use in our everyday life
> and, I think it teaches them how to be creative and how to solve problems.
> (Interview one)

Dr. Clark talked about partnering with civic organizations to help students realize what they needed to be equipped with when they graduated. He mentioned a program called Reality Check one of the organizations utilized to represent personal financial responsibilities and as a way to inform students about the realities of life after high school. As mentioned before, Dr. Clark felt strongly students should be given ability, aptitude, and interest tests in order to help guide them in decisions about their personal future. Dr. Clark expanded upon the theme of readiness in the second interview. I asked him how the school system go about making students life ready upon graduation? Dr. Clark stated,

> Academic advising, and I'm going back to my previous districts where I've
> implemented this, but we utilized interests, aptitude, and ability testing,

and then we sit down one on one with every kid and every parent and

talked about their strengths and weaknesses and try to guide them. And

then from there we assigned them a career mentor. (Interview two)

Summary

Dr. Clark had only served seven weeks at Mountain ISD at the time of our

interviews, even though he had served as a superintendent in Texas for the past fifteen

years. Dr. Clark was employed as the superintendent of his previous district for over four

years. Mountain ISD did have a mission and vision statement in place; however, Dr.

Clark stated the vision and mission would be redone in the ensuing month. Dr. Clark said

he was very well aligned with the school board, and he also intended to bring many

community businesses and civic organizations into partnership status with the district.

Dr. Clark also felt he would be aligned with his leadership team since he was given the

authority to hire a new cabinet from the school board.

Dr. Clark indicated there were several schools in the district in need of

improvement, and the district's students were below the state average academically. Dr.

Clark intended to implement PLCs into the district's formal structure in order to better

support both students and instructional staff. Both the PLC dynamic and structure

represented forms of change, inquiry, and research as practice. In addition, the creation

of PLCs at every campus have required many district employees to reimagine their roles

in promoting student success. Part of Dr. Clark's change initiatives also include the

defining of student readiness and what programs and procedures he planned to

incorporate in order to support student readiness upon graduation.

Two additional tier-three follow-up questions were developed as a result of the aggregate emergent data and themes. At different points during the interviews, I also asked each participant what element of their scholar–practitioner program most aided them in their jobs as superintendents. Two of the tier-three questions along with the participant responses are provided below. In addition, I have included the question and response regarding the element of scholar–practitioner preparation which has most aided them in their superintendent practice.

Question # 1: Aside from providing a safe environment for students (and staff), what is your most important mission or responsibility as a superintendent? Why?

Providing high quality personnel, systems, opportunities, tools, and resources to ensure that our students are prepared academically for college, career, military and life in general. Why? So that our students can compete in a global economy and provide services and quality of life resources to ensure that our country remains a desirable and functional place in which to live.

Question #2: In prior interviews and conversations, we have spent significant time discussing readiness, i.e., college ready, career ready, and life ready. Who should create the definitions for readiness, or are they necessary?

Not sure about a one size fits all definition, but I see being college ready as having the ability to take and pass college classes; career ready as

having the skills in order to be employable and retain employment; and life ready as being able to be economically independent and to be a contributor to society.

Question #3: What elements of your scholar Practitioner program best prepared you to serve as a superintendent in public school?

You know, as I mentioned the last time we met, I did my dissertation on superintendent and board relations. I have drawn from that research many times. I think that the most important thing was knowing how to do the research needed. I mean, the PLC model that was originally put out is great conceptually, but it doesn't fit into every setting. So, I guess having the ability to research, and then apply that to what I do, in my practice, leaning what that looked like was probably the thing that gave me the most tools to be successful as a superintendent. (Interview two)

CHAPTER IX

Dr. Smith

Overview

  This chapter underscores the emergent data from the fifth of six participants. As in the previous chapter, participant responses and the researcher's coding of emergent themes will provide readers with descriptions of how scholar–practitioner leaders, serving as superintendents in Texas public schools, bridge the theory to practice gap. The research questions will be used as an over-arching framework and lens, while common, emergent themes will provide detailed descriptions of participant views and practices in their individual voices. I will also draw upon the researcher's journal to provide observations and impressions.

  During the course of the current study, several areas of superintendent practice and influence became apparent: ensuring the district's vision, mission, core values, guiding statements, and strategic plan is aligned from top to bottom throughout the district; creating trust and vision alignment with the school board; leadership team relationships and modeling; and inviting community input and creating partnerships. Consequently, four additional themes emerged directly related to bridging the theory to practice gap: creating programs and practices which support student success; reimagining

roles and responsibilities across the educational system; change, inquiry, and research as a part of practice; defining readiness; and a summary of the collected data.

Introduction

Dr. Smith has served as an educator in Texas for nineteen years. He has served the last seventeen years in the same district, the last seventeen have been as the district's superintendent. Dr. Smith also graduated high school from the district in which he now serves. Dr. Smith told me,

> Well, I guess a little bit about myself in an educational setting is I just kind of didn't have a family early, you know, I had a good family growing up, but after I graduated high school I didn't have a girlfriend, wife, nothing. So, I just kept going to school . . . to get my principal's degree because I didn't have anything else to do. You know never did get tied down.

Dr. Smith told me how he came to work in the same district he graduated from.

> The athletic director here called me, and I graduated from here and said, hey, I heard you were coming back to town, would you like to come over here and work for me? I need to hire an assistant coach. And I said, yeah, I'll do that. So, I took a job here and I really just intended to do it long enough to finish that principal's degree because I really liked it up in the metroplex area, and then the principal here at the time, he just took me in, and kind of liked me for some reason and he said, I'm gonna make you the assistant principal. And then he retired the next year and it just kind of, I didn't even apply for that job. And the superintendent came down on like

a Wednesday, had a board meeting on Monday and ended up two days

later and said, hey, we hired you to be the principal Monday night. And

then, he ended up leaving. And so, I did kind of principal slash

superintendent because he never came back. He was supposed to be back

in three weeks. He never came back. He just quit. (Interview one)

Dr. Smith went on to tell me he never applied for a job with his current district,

but he progressed from teaching and coaching to the superintendent position in a short

time. Dr. Smith related, "So we went several months with no superintendent and uh, I

just kind of did it all" (Interview one). After serving as the interim superintendent for a

year. Dr. Smith had married by then and his wife was in graduate school. They agreed

the interim superintendent position would be a good choice for the next year, and then

they could move wherever they wanted to go after she finished her master's program.

Dr. Smith said, "Well a few months later they had a board meeting and named me the

superintendent. So, I've never applied for a job here. It always just kind of fell in place"

(Interview one). Dr. Smith completed the scholar–practitioner doctoral program within

the last five years, but he informed me he took a couple of years off between completing

his coursework and writing his dissertation. Dr. Smith has been the superintendent at

Seaside ISD (pseudonym) for eleven years.

Vision

After introductions, the first scripted question I asked every participant was if the

district had a vision statement. Dr. Smith replied,

So, I couldn't tell you off the top of my head. We have a vision statement,

but it was, preparing for success every student every day. But it's nothing

that we've hung our hat on. Normally we don't put it on the coffee mugs.

We'd really need to, but we don't. (Interview one)

I then proceeded to ask Dr. Smith if the district had a mission statement or if the vision

and mission statement was one and the same. Dr. Smith responded,

One and the same. In our district plans. We have a longer sentence and I

couldn't move. I could show it to you verbatim. I could give you a copy

of it. And we talked about it at the beginning of the school year, but it's

nothing that we have hanging on the wall somewhere where, walked by

beside it every day, but you know. (Interview one)

I wanted to hear more about the districts vision, so I dug a little deeper into how

the statement was developed. I asked, "Who developed the statement?" Dr. Smith

replied,

Well at the time it's been there for a long time, but it was kind of a process

between the principals at the time and the school board that was in place at

the time, which most of them are still on. It's really been a motto for

several years and kind of tweaked a little bit over the decades I guess.

(Interview one)

I probed a little deeper and prompted, "So you said that the principals and the school

board pretty much developed it?" Dr. Smith responded,

Yeah, they had a little community input, you know, just kind of like your

district improvement committee getting together and then they just kind of

hashed it out. If I was going to just put the pen to actually who developed

it, I'd probably say a two of our teachers at the time. They kind of

spearheaded the project, but they were appointed by the principals.

I probed again, and asked whose voices were represented in the statement. Dr. Smith said,

Yeah, and to be honest with you, nobody, had a good time doing it. They

all felt like we had bigger fish to fry I guess than to write this statement.

But I do see some value in it, you know, that's one thing I'd like to do

better here is to brand, branding yourself better, you know what I mean?

But that's, it is what it was. (Interview two)

After asking about the district vision statement, I asked Dr. Smith what his

personal vision for the district was. He responded,

Well, I mean I'm, I'm the same way. You just want to see every kid get

better and it's this new accountability system is really set up for us because

was kind of way we've looked at it. We've never really looked at just

straight up scores. We've always just looked at, you know, what can I do

to get the smartest kid over the edge? What can do to get this lower kid to

that edge? You know? I mean, so I'm good with the statement. It's just,

we just don't do a good job of broadcasting it. Of advertising it.

(Interview one)

With respect to his vision and the district's vision, I asked Dr. Smith if there had been any resistance to the vision of meeting the need of all of the different groups of kids in the district. Dr. Smith indicated he felt everyone at the district was focused on the same thing. Dr. Smith elaborated,

> I think we have a pretty good focus. We have, you know, like every
> school, you have your couple of outliers, but I think, you know, for the
> most part, ninety percent to ninety-nine percent of the teachers and staff
> kind of focus on the main thing and that's educating our kids.

Alignment to school board

As we progressed through the first interview, I asked Dr. Smith how well he felt he was aligned with the school board. He indicated the school board had a good relationship. Dr. Smith stated,

> Me and the school board? Oh, we're aligned. We are aligned as good as
> we can be. I mean, I think our school board has, builds their vision based
> on. . . . I mean I think every year, you know, they come up with our goals
> and I'm a big part of that goal setting process. There's some goals that
> really don't mean nothing to me that they set, but at the end of the day, you
> know, it's something the community wants and I want to make sure that
> the community gets what they're asking for, but there's never been a time
> where the administration didn't have what we wanted on that list, too.
> (Interview one)

Dr. Smith continued,

So, I would say we are aligned very good, and have a good rapport. This

board they are kind of unique in that they always vote unanimous. I don't,

I mean if you look back through the last 10 years, there are probably not

three instances, they didn't vote all together . . . doesn't always mean it's in

my favor, but at the end of the day we walked out of here very tightly

bonded. (Interview one)

Since Dr. Smith reported the school board always voted unanimously on items, I

asked him how long this particular board had been sitting. He indicated that there had

been little turnover in the district's board of directors. He claimed the board was very

stable. Dr. Smith told me, "This board has been in place. Let me think. Yeah, of the

ones that are on the board, I'd really consider them, they have pretty much been in place

the last 10 years" (Interview one). In the second meeting with Dr. Smith, I asked him

again about his relationship with the school board and any resistance with individual

members. Dr. Smith provided a detailed example of how there was some resistance to

hiring a particular teacher. He said when the board could not agree, many times they

would put an item on hold and push the decision to the next meeting. In this case the

board decided they would all think about what had been presented and reconvene to vote

in two weeks' time. Dr. Smith explained,

I put the seed out there that wanted to hire this lady and you know, we had

two other options and I didn't feel like they were good options. So then,

during those two weeks I go to this fellow and I just explained to him why

she was the best fit, you know, and how we can get rid of or if it doesn't

work out. He come back the next meeting and voted for her. (Interview

two)

Digging deeper, I asked how supported he felt by the board. Dr. Smith

responded, "The school board, man, they give me more support than I deserve, really and

truly" (Interview two). Since Dr. Smith was a high school graduate of the district, I

asked him if he thought the fact played into his being hired as the district's

superintendent. Dr. Smith replied,

At the time I was hired, I didn't know any of school board members. They

were just people. I would say new. Basically, people that were married

into the town or, or moved there for whatever reason. They made me the

superintendent and then the stuff hit the fan right before I came to serve as

superintendent. And then it was all a bunch of local people that took over

the school board back when I was named superintendent, so I don't really

think that me being from here necessarily helped me get the job, but it's

definitely increased my credibility when something goes wrong when I

can go to them and apologize or go to them and say, yeah, I am right and

you're wrong, and here's why. (Interview two)

Dr. Smith stated building good relationships with individual board members was

an important part of his practice. He related, "It's really just about relationships, but with

board members and kind of going off to the side and meeting them on their terms,

meeting them in their driveway, you know, meeting them on their job" (Interview two).

Team leadership and modeling

One of the common themes associated to the practice of each participant was their relationship with their administrative team, and how they modeled success. The size of district leadership teams varied with the district's size. Seaside ISD had an enrollment between six and seven hundred students at the time of the current study. The district leadership team consisted of the superintendent, two principals, one assistant principal, a technology director, and a school counselor. During the first interview session, I asked each participant how they articulate the district vision to their leadership teams. Dr. Smith related,

> Well, I think it looks different every week, but we typically meet on Mondays. We have A-team meetings . . . we just talk specifically about where we're at with each student group, where we're at with, of course today, you know, we were making plans for our teacher contracts, and where're we at on our reading reports and growth reports . . . But as far as like articulating the vision, I mean it's just, it is what it is, because we're always, we say three groups and all, but what you're talking about, it's thousands of groups. (Interview one)

Dr. Smith continued,

> I mean typically when we meet the cushion is pretty small. So, you have a technology director who is also your facility director, transportation director. You got your assistant principal who's also your athletic director. You got your high school principal is also a junior high principal, and you

got the elementary principal, and your counselor to the whole district. So,

you know, six people in the room and we're talking about every student

group we have. (Interview one)

I asked Dr. Smith how he supported his leadership team, and also how they supported him. Dr. Smith went on to explain in each of their A-team meetings, the district leadership team disaggregated the literacy data for each of the schools. They monitored the elementary school very closely and wanted to make sure students were reading on grade level by the end of the third grade. The team also kept up progress monitoring to make sure students stayed on grade level as they progressed through the school system. Benchmark testing was used in the secondary school grades, so a continuous data stream was available on each student. Dr. Smith indicated every team member was focused on literacy and supported each other in their literacy goals. Dr. Smith also related the leadership team was good at celebrating success at each of the district's campuses.

I asked Dr. Smith what he believed the most important thing his leadership team did to support the district vision. Dr. Smith thought the most important thing his administrative team did was to monitor teachers and make sure they were preparing kids every day. He stated,

Well, I think the most important thing they do is realize which teachers

need more freedom and which ones need more of a leash. Some of them

are going to go out and they're going to teach the vision naturally, and then

some of them, they're going to need a lot of guidance because it's not

important to them. Now, does that mean they're out, you know, preaching

the vision to the entire staff and body? Not really, but probably the most

important thing that they do here in our district is determining when the

teacher's ready to be on her own more or less and when they're not.

(Interview two)

Dr. Smith also indicated he had close relationships with all of his administrative

team. He claimed several members of his leadership team were like family to him. Dr.

Smith stated,

So, I would say overall, four of them, I'd take anywhere I went, and the

fifth one I'd probably say, you know, maybe, maybe not, just being honest

about it, man. Three of them are like my brothers. I mean, there was

nothing I could do that would do that would change their loyalty, unless

there was something immoral or unethical, something like that. (Interview

two)

Dr. Smith said it was important in a small district to have tight bonds with both the

administrative team and the school board. He felt steady communication between both

was a key part of his practice. He said it was important to know his leadership team and

the board had his back when things got tough.

Community

As mentioned earlier, Seaside is a smaller district with a student enrollment

between six and seven hundred. The school and community are closely connected

according to Dr. Smith. When I asked him how well he felt he was aligned to the community, he responded,

> Pretty good. Yeah. You know, typically your complaints aren't real academic. Your complainants are more athletic, you know what I mean? So, I mean we have a unique community here and it's a great community, they really want to see the school excel academically. Seaside has had, you know, pretty decent academic scores, pretty much throughout history, which is strange because there's not a lot of highly educated people in this town and there are, they're out there. But there's also a lot of people in here that are just good, hardworking individuals that are probably a lot smarter than any kind of diploma they have says they are, know what I mean? (Interview one)

Dr. Smith continued,

> . . . they want the best for the school. And I think that we try to stay in touch with them the best we can and try to give them what they want. Now, does that mean that we, you know, have no enemies? No, that doesn't mean that, but it means that even the enemies you do have are proud of the school. (Interview one)

Another example of the school and community being closely connected was due to the loss of state funds. Dr. Smith set up a town meeting to discuss what cuts were going to be made to the school budget. Dr. Smith explained,

So, but an example of the community, you know we're losing this ASATR

money. Last year we had a set-in in the auditorium where we invited the

community and we have about 300 people in the room. I'd say we have,

our auditorium seats a little over 400. We had most of the seats were

taken, so I would say at least 300 people in the audience. Um, and we

talked for a couple hours and I was on the stage, you know, basically two

and a half, nearly three hours just answering questions and talking about it.

We went through every program at the school, you know, athletics and we

just basically ranked as a community, you know, how important is it to

have a police officer, how important it is to have a nurse, do we want to

drop football? We asked all kinds of questions and we just talked it out.

We went through this based to this survey that I created and we went

down each bullet and we talked extensively. How much does it cost us?

And at the end of the day, I think there were, you know, 296 people that

walked out happy and four people that walked out upset, but it's all you

can do. (Interview one)

Dr. Smith thought the combination of losing the funding along with the opportunity to

invite community input in a town hall type meeting drew the community closer together.

Dr. Smith recalled,

And the community really and truly stepped it up, maybe even more this

year than it had the past I think, because I realized we didn't have the

money to float a lot of things that we'd like to do and so, you know, you

had parents up here cooking for the kids before the games and things.

Dr. Smith continued,

So, It was really, to be honest with you, we lost a lot, but we gained a lot

more just back in community input and just from the community stepping

up and really adding back, you know, and it was pretty nice having their

involvement.

In the second interview, Dr. Smith added the school published the results from

agricultural class projects, and both mathematics and science class projects. He also

indicated the teachers designed projects in line with the local industry. Dr. Smith stated,

Let's say our newspaper article/quarterly report, it may show something to

the farmers in our area, something like done for years and the science

behind it. I understand that, you know, given this cow, this many ounces

of meal per day has increased the result of the three month gain, you know

what I mean? Just trying to do enough studies that make it relevant to our

community that gets people excited about education and understanding

that is much bigger than just that community. I mean, it can be benefits

worldwide if it were replicated, you know what I mean? (Interview two)

Not only was it reported the community and school have a tight alignment, Dr. Smith

facilitated the relationship through multiple communication mediums and by inviting

community input.

Creating

One of the emergent themes consistent with all but one of the participant's description of their practice was creating. At Seaside ISD, the superintendent charged the principals whether or not the existing curriculum was challenging students to their highest levels of achievement. Dr. Smith researched another school district in Texas who only offered advanced placement coursework to their students. Dr. Smith supposed if all students from another district could handle an advanced curriculum he didn't know any reason why the students at Seaside could not also. Dr. Smith stated,

I got the bright idea we were going to do that, too. We don't do it

anymore, but man, that's done more for our school than anything because

every one of those kids thought they could do it. And it really did change

the culture of the academic program at Seaside because like I said, now we

have over fifty percent of our kids wanting to get in the AP program, and

the college level courses once they get into the high school. And, you

know, that's probably not true for most of the rural schools I would think,

but it was just, it was initially getting everyone on to think they could do

it. And then, I guess the wake is just come on and kind of pulled

everybody else along, you know. (Interview two)

Dr. Smith related that even though the district did not adhere to a strictly advanced placement curriculum at the middle school, expectations were still high for students and students continued to apply for advanced placement and college credit coursework when they reached high school. In response to the removal of a required

advanced placement curriculum in the middle school, teachers created a gifted and

talented curriculum in several areas in order to challenge middle school students. Dr.

Smith provided an example when he related,

> So, like on the math, we might do a rocket on one level and we might do
>
> robotics another level. And so, if they get behind we can pull them out
>
> and do what we need to do. But the math teacher was really good about,
>
> hey let's design what we're trying to learn around these rockets make it a
>
> little more fun and challenging for them. So, they come in and they're
>
> working on their math and it is really a GT program that we use with the
>
> upper level kids, but we trying to tweak it to where these middle level kids
>
> can get involved, and man, they really excel because first off, they want to
>
> do it and it's not like a drudgery, and then, they're still meeting the things
>
> we need them to do. And then I noticed that the more they are around
>
> those types of activities, the better off they are in the years to come. The
>
> more confident and ready they are for harder classes. (Interview two)

Another instance where Seaside created a unique opportunity for students

involved the application of multiple curriculums to an asset the district already had. Dr.

Smith related, "Well, long story short, I'm just kind of going to give you an example;

Seaside ISD has had one forester in the history of the school district . . . the bone of the

economy in our district is forestry" (Interview two). Dr. Smith continued, "We've

purchased this block of land, about a hundred and ten acres total and we're building a

forestry program that's going to incorporate all subjects . . ." (Interview two).

Dr. Smith intoned the challenge was to create a forestry program which took the curriculum to a global level. Dr. Smith related,

> And so, our challenge is to figure out how to take this to a global scale . . .
> And so, we're trying to do studies based around agriculture and these pine
> and hardwood trees and whatnot that we have planted. So, you know, I
> don't know, that's just, that's just one small piece of how we'll go get our
> science lessons around this piece of property. But also, how to not only to
> create just this piece of property but how it affects the county as a whole,
> Texas as a whole, and where does this tree end up, you know, twenty
> years from now in the world? You know what I mean? And, we're kind
> of trying to move it from, "Hey, I'm sawing logs to put on this trailer to
> take to that sawmill, to I'm planting this tree that's gonna one day end up
> in New York City in a four-hundred-foot sky scraper. (Interview two)

Dr. Smith recognized and moved into action the utilization of resources already in place to create a deeper learning opportunity for his students and staff.

Reimagining roles

Seaside ISD had several challenges connected to the loss of funding from being an ASATR (Additional State Aid for Tax Reduction) district, which is a program in Texas where tax dollars are reallocated to poorer districts, often referred to in Texas as the Robin Hood law. Seaside lost state funding due to a change in the reallocation law. As a result of this loss of funding, several hard decisions had to be made. The loss of

funding caused a reimagining of district personnel and incentive to reimagine roles across

the district. Dr. Smith recalled,

> We thought we were losing the full amount of money, which we ended up
>
> losing about half of it but at the time we're thinking we're losing about
>
> 1,200,000. To split off football actually was 50/50 exact for and against,
>
> that was to drop football. Just kind of an interesting statistic. But we
>
> ended up doing away with a nurse, you know, because she had resigned
>
> already and that was just an easy one to get rid of. . . . we dropped a lot of
>
> these little piddly things, you know . . . Nothing that, we didn't lose
>
> anything that cut into academics. We lost five coaches. We coached
>
> football this year with four coaches, which was interesting because we had
>
> three times many wins as we've ever had.

Dr. Smith continued to explain about how the remaining coaches had to reimagine how to

operate a football program with a small staff.

> Yeah, they get along great, man. It was nice having a staff that got along
>
> and you know, was no dissension and I mean we had a head coach that we
>
> just basically asked to do it. And he had never coached football. We had
>
> a defensive coordinator that had never been a defense coordinator,
>
> offensive coordinator never been an offensive coordinator, and another
>
> assistant, and man they did better than we thought they would do, that's for
>
> sure. (Interview one)

When I spoke to Dr. Smith the second time, I dug deeper into how the district was dealing with the loss of state funds. Dr. Smith indicated they had to reimagine some structures and take on different responsibilities, but the loss of funds, he felt, had been good for the district. When I asked what effect the loss of funding had on the district, he responded, "Man, that's a good question for us because we have lost major money" (Interview two). Dr. Smith elaborated,

> You know, looking on it, a lot of our money loss has been a blessing. We haven't really taken a lot away from the kids academically, but we have kind of reprioritized and we have refocused our efforts on things that matter most. You know, we had kind of grown out of control on the number of coaches we had and the amount of money we were spending. And so, we had to reign in that and the kids are feeling it a bit, but academically, so far, we haven't lost anything. And it's been a real, real blessing in disguise, losing that money. (Interview two)

Change, inquiry, and research in practice

Elements of change, inquiry, and research in practice emerged in several instances during my conversations with Dr. Smith. Two examples stood out from others. One was the research into another district's advanced placement curriculum in high school and pre-AP curriculum at the junior high level. Dr. Smith inquired with another district about their exclusive use of pre-AP curriculum in the junior high and subsequently implemented the program at Seaside. During the first interview, I thought Dr. Smith

indicated the program had been removed, but upon further investigation, I found there was resistance from some high school teachers.

I asked Dr. Smith why the pre-AP program in the junior high had been abandoned, and he told me he started the program when he was the junior high principal, and when he was promoted to the high school the superintendent also got fired. He was having to manage a lot of different moving parts, and two teachers in the high school refused to allow all of the students into the pre-AP classes. Dr. Smith stated,

> I felt like at the junior high it was working, and the junior high teachers
>
> felt it was working well, too. The problem got to me when I started
>
> coming into high school, you know, they're having 50, 60, 70 percent of
>
> the kids were requesting again, these AP classes. And then I had two
>
> teachers that absolutely refused to work that direction. (Interview two)

Dr. Smith reported things changed when one teacher quit, and the other teacher retired. Another educator heard about the program at Seaside and contact Dr. Smith about teaching AP coursework and coordinating the AP program. Dr. Smith related,

> When she got there, her philosophy was much different in that, um, you
>
> know, she could take a special education kid and put them through our AP
>
> program and they will be successful as long as they put the work in, you
>
> know what I mean? And she recruited kids coming to her class. So, it was
>
> kind of a combination of her attitude and the kid's attitudes. Any kid that
>
> asked to get in an AP class, we put them in there, no question that she
>
> says, oh, they can't do it. (Interview two)

Dr. Smith believed the change in attitudes and offering AP coursework to any student who requested it also shifted the community's belief system about students' abilities and their futures.

Defining readiness

Student readiness was an emergent theme broached by each participant. Even though participants served in districts with varying student enrollments from around 350 to over 35,000 the topic of student readiness and how it was defined was a common occurrence. Seaside ISD believed strongly in maintaining a strong focus on literacy from the elementary school upward. Progress monitoring was a weekly leadership team activity. In addition, Seaside provided students with the opportunity to take both pre-AP and AP coursework. I asked Dr. Smith what Seaside was doing to prepare students for life after high school graduation. Dr. Smith attributed much of the readiness to the AP program and to the curriculum associated to the forestry program. Dr. Smith articulated,

> So, like me a superintendent, on Friday, you know, I take almost every
>
> grade to that property and we're doing things, you know, figuring price per
>
> acre. We're planting these trees. We're doing a lot of different things.
>
> (Interview two)

I dug deeper and asked also how this program and others were preparing students for life. Dr. Smith continued,

> I think it's a building process. And so, you know, these younger kids as
>
> they come up through, I think they're going to have a lot more of a
>
> portfolio to show. But I don't know if there's any one particular thing we

do, but there's a lot of things to try to expose them, and whatnot. And then

this is showing how their work not only affects a Seaside Texas, but how

that work affects the world. (Interview two)

Dr. Smith also related it was important to celebrate student success. He said the

district regularly announced student college acceptances and scholarships to motivate

other students who wanted to attend college. Dr. Smith indicated the programs and

communication go hand in hand. He said it was important to show kids the could be

successful. He felt regardless of whether students wanted to go directly into the

workforce, or on to post-secondary education, the district was preparing them for those

endeavors.

Summary

At Seaside ISD, the vision is not written on the walls or printed on the coffee

mugs, but Dr. Smith claimed the leadership team, school board, community, and district

staff were committed to preparing every student, every day for the real world. Dr. Smith

also related both school board and team leadership thrived because of strong

relationships, and frequent communication was the key to successful relationship

building. Dr. Smith has implemented several change initiatives at Seaside and been

required to reimagine roles and responsibilities across the educational system. Some of

the reimagining was due to a loss of state funding. Evidence of creating new programs,

and schedules to support them was also evident. Seaside believed exposing students to

diverse opportunities and engaging student in real world applications of study was the

best way to address student readiness.

Two additional tier-three follow-up questions were developed as a result of the

aggregate emergent data and themes. At different points during the interviews, I also

asked each participant what element of their scholar–practitioner program most aided

them in their jobs as superintendents. Two of the tier-three questions along with the

participant responses are provided below. In addition, I have included the question and

response regarding the element of scholar–practitioner preparation which has most aided

them in their superintendent practice.

Question # 1: Aside from providing a safe environment for students

(and staff), what is your most important mission or responsibility as a

superintendent? Why?

Aside from safety, I would have to say, at a school our size, that the most

important thing to have is administrative agility. . . . or the ability to

foresee what problems and or successes may come from particular

decisions. The reason for that is simple, you make a lot of big decisions

that set the course of the district, all while interacting with many critical

parts.

Question #2: In prior interviews and conversations, we have spent

significant time discussing readiness, i.e., college ready, career ready,

and life ready. Who should create the definitions for readiness, or are

they necessary?

I think the list is large on who should create the definition for readiness –

from kids, parents, community, staff, etc. However, what are we getting

ready for is the question that really has no answer for – so in the end, it is

the kids that should be guided to make the decisions in my opinion. If we

can get them to a point where they are determining what readiness is, then

we have something special.

Question #3: What elements of your scholar Practitioner program

best prepared you to serve as a superintendent in public school?

I'd have to probably say, I think the exposure. I've always been from a

small school. I've always worked in a small school. I think the exposure

and digging deep into what kind of helps other school districts, but you

know, truthfully, you know, I'll be real honest with you. I was going to

say the single most thing that's helped me out at SFA is just the

relationships that I've made while working, while going through that

program and that sounds like that's kind of a byproduct of the program,

but if I've got a problem, I pick the phone up, and I call another member

of my cohort, or I call a doctoral professor. It's access instantly to a good

idea, you know, talking to you off the ledge, where to look for better

information. You know what I mean, and so I don't know if that answered

your question or that might not be the answer you need, but the best thing

that happened for me is putting me around other people that were kind of

like-minded that wanted to look into things further, not just necessarily the

things that had already been done. (Interview two)

CHAPTER X

Findings

Introduction

The scope, roles, and responsibilities of leadership in K-12 schools have undergone great change since the inception of public education in America. As the roles, responsibilities, and scope continue to broaden, leaders need to rapidly adjust their objectives and apply theory into practice in order to properly serve students. My qualitative study surveyed six scholar–practitioner leaders in order to investigate and describe how these leaders navigate the theory to practice gap. My study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do scholar–practitioner leaders, as superintendents, translate the district's mission/vision into practice at the district level?

2. How do scholar–practitioner leaders, as superintendents, translate their own vision for the district to support the district's mission/vision?

This chapter will aid readers to further understand the aggregate findings represented in the previous six chapters. Findings in this chapter will be separated into two district categories. I identified four areas of alignment in participant practice and from those areas of practice, four themes emerged. The first section will provide analysis

regarding the four areas of alignment in participant practice. Those four focal points were: ensuring the district's vision, mission, core values, guiding statements, and strategic plan is aligned from top to bottom throughout the district; creating trust and vision alignment with the school board; leadership team relationships and modeling; and inviting community input and creating partnerships.

I identified four emergent themes associated to the actions tied to application of theory to participant practice. The second section will highlight the four emergent themes. The emergent themes were: creating programs and practices which support student success; reimagining roles and responsibilities across the educational system; change, inquiry, and research as a part of practice; and defining readiness.

Aligned Areas of Practice

Vision.

The first element of practice where participants showed alignment was through ensuring the district's mission and/or vision was aligned from top to bottom throughout the district. Even though the vision statement for one district was being reconstructed to be more aligned with the district's current situation and another superintendent had only been in office for a few weeks, each participant indicated vision alignment was a critical element of their practice. In Texas, all districts are required to develop and maintain a vision. The education code specifically requires every district to, ". . . adopt a vision statement and comprehensive goals for the district and the superintendent and monitor progress toward those goals . . ." (TEA, 2017b). The district vision is not only required by the state but is also directly connected to a superintendent's performance evaluation.

The Texas Association of School Boards (TASB) maintains guidelines for both the creation of vision statements, but also a template for superintendent evaluation tied to performance goals connected to the district vision statement (TASB, 2006; 2017).

Alignment to school board.

The second element of practice showing participant alignment was in creating trust and vision alignment with the school board. A recurring theme in the literature review was superintendent turnover was connected to board relations (Fusarelli, 2006, 2005; Mountford, 2004). Aside from the one participant who had been hired seven weeks before, the average tenure of the scholar–practitioner leaders serving as participants in the current study was 6.6 years. This average is well above the tenure reported by Russell (2014) and Jackson (2013). Consistent to Escalante (2002) each participant in the current study stressed the importance of building trusting relationships with their school boards, and the importance of strong, consistent communications with their boards. This is consistent with Kowalski (1998) who added the role of communicator to the list of critical superintendent duties along with the argument communication is an essential role, which the superintendent must master in order to successfully run a school district. The six participants all reported being aligned with their boards in their visions for the district. Each participant also stated the importance of having decisions and actions based upon the district's vision.

Leadership team and modeling.

The third element of common practice indicated by each of the six participants was having supportive relationships with their leadership teams, and consistent modeling.

The six scholar–practitioner leaders participating in the current study all reported supportive relationships with their leadership teams. Participants also reported it was important the superintendent and the leadership team modeled the practice expected from other district employees. In addition, three of the participants reported the central office administration underwent the same or very similar evaluation structures required by campus principals and department heads. The concepts of building trusting relationships, building leadership capacity, modeling frameworks, and collaborative teaming were consistent to Bolman and Deal (2008) and Blankstein (2004).

Community.

The fourth element of common practice among participants was inviting community input and creating partnerships. The six participants agreed the school and community should be closely connected. One participant commented the school and the community were the same. Consistent with Dewey (1916; 1938), each of the participants believed schools should be constructivist, or experiential, in nature and are critical to the promotion of the local community. The school and community connection was commented on by Phillip Schlechty (2009).

> Those who advocate more state and federal control of schools seem oblivious to the fact that such a reform does not solve the problem of America's schools. Rather, it moves the means of solving the problem further from the reach of precisely the people who must solve it if it is to be solved at all: the local educational leaders and the citizens of the local communities the schools are intended to serve. (p. xi)

Emergent Themes

The following common themes emerged from the collected data. These four themes provide insight into how scholar–practitioner leaders who participated in the current study moved from theory to action.

Creating.

I identified the act of creating programs and/or practices which support student success in five of the six participant data. Consistent with Darling-Hammond (1997), five of the scholar–practitioner leaders found the need to create different forms of programs or practice in order to best serve their students. The needs for creating new programs or practices were different in each district; however, the goals were similar. The act of creating could be directly tied to some type of change initiated in each learning community. The change initiatives in each instance were very different.

One district created a new learning opportunity, which connected all core content areas. Another participant has been involved in creating a new educational experience for all students in his district and has influenced the thought process associated to professional development training at his regional service center. Another superintendent has melded the structure and theory behind two different constructs and created a new progress monitoring and strategic plan based upon the new construct. One participant created a new vision, brand, and collegiate center. Creating new programs and practices supportive of student success was a common theme in five of six scholar–practitioner leaders.

Reimagining roles.

Each of the participants felt the need to reimagine roles, responsibilities, and/or practices across their educational systems. Systems, structures, or personnel were not supporting students in the best way possible. None of the superintendents interviewed reimagined the same elements. One leader felt compelled to reimagine the whole of the local educational experience for students. This reimagining required significant changes to the roles, responsibilities, and practices of many individuals. Another participant undertook a restructuring of personnel and student services because of the loss of a funding source. Each of the scholar–practitioner leaders interviewed related the need for their districts to consider how they were doing things, and in all instances, reimagined the way a particular element was conceptualized or practiced.

Change, inquiry, and research in practice.

The third emergent theme was connected to the utilization of change, inquiry, and research in the scholar–practitioner leader's practice. Multiple researchers have articulated the need for ongoing change and continuous improvement in education (Bolman & Deal, 2008; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Schlechty, 2009). Consistent with these ideals, each of the six participants were involved in change initiatives within their districts. In addition, both inquiry and research were communicated as part of their practices and were indicated by their responses in interviews. Five of the six scholar–practitioner leaders cited research on multiple occasions as practices which led to action. In addition, four of six superintendents indicated the ability to research as one of the most important elements gained from their scholar–practitioner leadership program.

Defining readiness.

Defining readiness standards for students was the fourth emergent theme indicated by the data. Readiness was a consistent theme embedded in all interviews. Consistent with Dewey (1916) and Schlechty (2009) all six of the participants indicated they defined readiness by social and communal needs. There was some variation in the definition of both student and societal/communal needs. Each of the scholar–practitioner leaders commented the definition of student readiness should be a collaborative effort, and should not be static, but governed to some extent by the rapidly changing technological advances and globally connected marketplace. Each participant agreed student choice should play a role in the definition of readiness, and in determining each student's individual readiness.

Conclusions

Through face-to-face interviews, phone conversations, emails, and informal observations recorded in a researcher's journal, four common elements of scholar–practitioner leadership practice were identified by the researcher. In addition, four common themes emerged as how scholar–practitioner leaders applied theory to practice. The four common elements of practice were: ensuring the district's vision, mission, core values, guiding statements, and strategic plan is aligned from top to bottom throughout the district; creating trust and vision alignment with the school board; leadership team relationships and modeling; and inviting community input and creating partnerships. The four emergent themes were: creating programs and practices which support student

success; reimagining roles and responsibilities across the educational system; change, inquiry, and research as a part of practice; and defining readiness.

This chapter has presented the findings and results identified from the interviews represented in Chapter IV, Chapter V, Chapter VI, Chapter VII, Chapter VIII, and Chapter IX. Four common perceptions of practice and four common themes were identified by the current study. Chapter XI will present a condensed summary of the study, conclusions, implications and recommendations for further study, and the researcher's remarks.

CHAPTER XI

Summary, Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

Introduction

During the following pages of Chapter IX, I condensed the qualitative survey and provided a summary. In addition, I will present conclusions as digested by the researcher. Conclusions were formed by the analysis of emergent themes, perceptions of the participants, and common threads of practice. The subsequent implications have been considered based upon connections to leadership preparation programs and current practitioners. Implications have been geared to provide insight to populations who may benefit from the research. In addition, recommendations for future research are included. I will also make personal remarks generated from the conducting of the study as the researcher and through the lens of a practicing administrator.

Study Summary

Possessing the ability to take the theoretical model or idea(s) formed by others, and create effective solutions, which serve students at the campus level is a monumental task. Success demands cooperative administrative teams and a determined focus upon the district's mission and vision. The translation, articulation, and implementation of

new programs in conjunction with the ongoing improvement of existing programs create the need for high levels of scholarship and practical administration.

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe how serving superintendents apply their prior learning and knowledge to the articulation and translation of their district's mission/vision. This study focused on the perceptions of serving Texas superintendents who have completed a preparation course centered on scholar–practitioner leadership. The study described how six serving superintendents translate theory to practice by inquiring how each participant articulates the district's mission/vision to their campus administrative teams.

Using the interview as a research tool, this study set out to explore and describe superintendents' perspectives regarding how they digest educational theory and how they personally apply theoretical knowledge to their practice. In simplest terms this study set out to investigate how scholar–practitioners navigate the theory to practice gap. The following two research questions guided the study:

1. How do scholar–practitioner leaders, as superintendents, translate the district's mission/vision into practice at the district level?

2. How do scholar–practitioner leaders, as superintendents, translate their own vision for the district to support the district's mission/vision?

The researcher began the study by soliciting superintendents to participant in the study. The result of the solicitations procured six serving superintendents as participants for the study. After participant selection, the researcher scheduled the first face-to-face interviews with all six participants. As soon as the first interview was concluded, the

researcher recorded observations in a researcher's journal. After transcribing each interview, the researcher began to code data using apriori coding. As themes emerged, open coding was implemented.

As interviews, journaling, and the collection of documents continued, both apriori and open coding were utilized. As a result of coding, four areas of superintendent practice emerged from participant perceptions: ensuring the district's vision, mission, core values, guiding statements, and strategic plan is aligned from top to bottom throughout the district; creating trust and vision alignment with the school board; leadership team relationships and modeling; and inviting community input and creating partnerships.

As coding and data collection continued, four additional themes emerged directly related to bridging the theory to practice gap: creating programs and practices which support student success; reimagining roles and responsibilities across the educational system; change, inquiry, and research as a part of practice; and defining readiness.

Conclusions

Several conclusions can be drawn from participant's perceptions of areas connected to superintendent practice. Superintendents felt a responsibility for facilitating the alignment of practice to the district mission. The broadcasting or advertising of vision statements for each participants' district were not as important to some participants as others; however, each superintendent felt a responsibility to ensure all of the district's employees were on the same page. A superintendent's relationship with the school board translated directly to the superintendent's ability to successfully direct the district. Strong

relationships with the superintendent's leadership team translated to success in the articulation of the district vision and plays and important role in student success. Modeling of desired traits by the superintendent and the leadership team promoted cohesive system alignment. A superintendent should seek community input and work to create partnerships with outside entities in support of student success.

From the four common areas of superintendent practice emerged four themes representative of the translation of the theory to practice gap. First, scholar–practitioner leaders seek to create programs and practices to facilitate student success. Second, scholar–practitioner leaders reimagine roles and responsibilities across the educational system when programs or structures are not adequate or are deficient. Third, in an effort of continuous improvement, leaders will need to actively inquire both within and without their educational environments in order to promote successful outcomes for students. Leaders must have the ability to recognize deficient systems and situations and have the ability to initiate change programs when needed. Research should play an important role in a leader's practice. Research can and should be utilized in making informed decision as well as initiating change.

Finally, the definition of student readiness should be a collective decision, but latitude should be given to local school districts in the definition and articulation of readiness. As one participant suggested, education needs to be more like a drone than an aircraft carrier as definitions of readiness adapt to a rapidly changing world and marketplace.

Implications and Recommended Future Research

The design, participant selection and setting, and findings of this qualitative survey study indicate the crucial role leaders play in the educational system. Superintendents have an incredibly complex job to fulfill. Leaders must have the ability to create meaningful, significant, and temporal opportunities for students as we, as society, moves into the future. Educational leaders must accept the responsibility to prepare each next generation for a productive place in society. Findings provided by the data in this study exemplify the scholar–practitioner leader model in real terms. Other studies are needed in order to provide further illumination into the practical application of the scholar–practitioner model. In addition, studies should be conducted with serving public school superintendents who completed a doctoral program with a different emphasis or in an online doctoral program.

The literature reviewed in this study pertained to contemporary leadership theory, but included studies and models directly connected to the future of educational leadership. The reviewed literature also provided insight into the complexity of the school superintendent position and included an overview of required school vision statements in Texas. The scholar–practitioner model represented by the reviewed literature and the practical applications of the model provided by the practitioner participants in this study illuminate the need for further studies centered on navigating the theory to practice gap.

Consequently, universities need to recognize the complex task of preparing future leaders for rapidly changing schools. Preparation programs need to embrace the

opportunity to supply education with leaders who have the knowledge and ability to translate theory to practice. More research needs to be conducted in the area of scholar–practitioner leadership in order to better inform current preparation programs. A study comprised of principals as participants needs to be conducted in order to explore how the scholar—practitioner leadership model applies to practice at the campus level. The way we learn is changing, and it is essential leaders are equipped with the tools necessary to guide future students into a rapidly changing world.

Concluding remarks

I would like to make some comments regarding the insights I garnered during my journey through this study. First, to any researchers interested in replicating this study, I want to share a small piece of my experience with regard to the research. After I developed my research questions to guide the study, I developed a list of apriori codes to assist me in the identification of thematic elements. These codes were created based upon the research questions and my expectations of possible themes. I would caution future researchers in using apriori coding because of the potential bias. The emergent themes drove this study. The apriori codes I selected prior to beginning the study were inadequate umbrellas for the data collected. The emergent themes occurred naturally and embodied the participant voices. If I were to replicate this study, I would not develop apriori coding.

Second, I was overwhelmed with numerous connections to the works of John Dewey as they presented themselves in data products. Prior to this study, I was engaged in a scholar—practitioner leadership program and have read several of Dewey's works.

However, I was not aware of how deeply rooted the scholar—practitioner leadership model was in John Dewey's work. Dewey's ideas that educational programs should be temporal, moral, constructivist, and experiential in nature emerged as a part of participants' practices. This was an element I knew was represented in extant literature but did not fully coalesce in my mind until completing this study.

Two less frequent themes I did not directly report upon were the characteristics of persistence and listening. Several scholar—practitioner leaders employed persistence and listening as they connected inquiry to leading change. These characteristics provide additional insight into the practical application of the scholar—practitioner model and I feel compelled to mention them here.

Education in the 21st Century does not look like it did in the 20th Century. In fact, education today does not look like it did five years ago . . . maybe even three years ago. Technology and the global marketplace are creating rapid changes in how we view our lives, how we shop, how we pay our bills, and yes, how we go to school. The contexts of both K-12 and post-secondary education are changing rapidly. Earlier today I searched for educational doctorate programs on the Internet and was rewarded with 30,600,000 responses in less than .06 seconds. Amazing, huh? The top five returns would direct me to the websites of university programs offering 100% online Doctor of Education programs.

These programs will probably create graduates who are armed with the theoretical knowledge to digest theory and translate said theory into practice. I am unsure if that will be enough to sufficiently arm leaders, but in a rapidly changing global marketplace, I am

sure we, as a society, will adapt. The need for scholar–practitioner leaders in education is paramount to future student success and the positive progression of democracy in our country. Leaders will need to respond rather than react to rapidly changing environments and student needs and lead with an ethical, moral lens facilitating equity of access to quality educational experiences for all student populations. I believe the scholar–practitioner model is a model well-suited to that task.

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APPENDIX A

Research Participation Consent Form

Dear Participant,

My name is Michael Jones, and I am a doctoral student at Stephen F. Austin State University (SFASU) in Nacogdoches, Texas. I am conducting a study, researching scholar–practitioner leadership and the theory to practice dynamic. As a graduate of the scholar–practitioner leadership program at SFASU, I am inviting you to participate in my study entitled, "A Qualitative Study Exploring Scholar–Practitioner Superintendent Application of Theory and Practice in Texas Public Schools." As a practicing superintendent, I would like to provide you with a vehicle to relate your experience and practice to others. In addition, your participation will help in the future development of leadership preparation and practice.

As a study participant, you will be asked to participate in three interviews, unless more are necessary and agreed upon by the researcher and participant. All interviews will be conducted in private. All participant responses to questions will be kept confidential and all records of responses will be destroyed at the study's conclusion. Each of the first two interviews will be conducted face to face and will last approximately one hour. The third and final interview will be conducted over the phone. You will also be asked to be available via phone between interviews in order to check and verify your responses are accurate and what you intended. There are no known risks to the study.

Your name as well as your district's name will not be mentioned or referenced on any forms or in the study. All responses to questions will be kept in confidence and destroyed at the conclusion of the study. You also have the right to stop participating in the study at any time. You will not be compensated for your participation, but the study will be made available to you and your district if desired, at the end of the study.

I would be happy to answer any questions associated to the study or its scope. Please feel free to contact me at 469-667-4845, or my dissertation chairperson, Dr. Karen Embry-Jenlink at 936-468-1784.

Any concerns with this research may be addressed to the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, Stephen F. Austin State University at 936.468.6606.

My signature indicates my agreement

_____   _____ _____

Participant Name (Print)   Participant Signature (Date)

_____   _____ _____

Researcher Name (Print)   Researcher Signature (Date

APPENDIX B

Superintendent Information Form

Superintendent Number:_____   Date:_____

Number of years with current district:_____

Number of years as superintendent: _____

Highest degree earned:_____

Number of years as: Teacher _____ Principal _____ Asst. Principal _____

Central Office_____Other campus administrator_____

Number of years at each level: Elementary____ Middle/Intermediate ____
High School ____ Central Office ____

Current District Enrollment:_____

Number of School Board Members: _____

District Rating as of last reporting period:_____

First Round Interview Questions

Protocol for first round interview questions: The researcher will conduct the interviews in a face-to-face setting. All recorded interviews will be transcribed, and the data analyzed for emerging themes. The researcher will prepare a second level of interview questions necessary to further examine the participants' experiences and perceptions.

1. Please tell me about yourself.

2. How long have you been in this position?

3. How many years have you served in public school?

4. When did you complete your scholar–practitioner program?

5. Does your district have a vision statement? What is it?

6. Does your district have a mission statement? What is it?

7. Who developed the statement(s)?

8. Whose voices are represented in the statement?

9. Tell me about your vision for the district.

10. Tell me about how you articulate your vision to your leadership team.

11. Tell me about how you articulate your vision to the school board.

12. Have you experienced any incongruences between your vision for the district, ...

    and the district's vision for itself?

13. Have you experienced a time of resistance to your vision?

14. How well do you feel you are aligned to the school board?

15. How well do you feel you are aligned to the community?

APPENDIX C

Second Round Interview Questions and Protocol

1. Now that you have had some time to reflect, can you tell me other ways you articulate your vision to the district?

2. What do you believe are the most important things your leadership team does to support the district vision/mission?

3. Tell me how you support your leadership team.

4. Tell me how you support the school board.

5. Tell me how supported you feel with regards to your leadership team and the school board.

Protocol for additional second round interview questions:

After analyzing preliminary data and artifacts, the researcher will develop questions related to the emergent themes, and any elements that are incongruent to primary responses by the participant.

APPENDIX D

Follow Up Questions

Tier-three questions were formulated as a result of participant responses. The two most common dialogues centered on what the superintendent was doing to promote student success and how they defined student readiness. Therefore, the following two tier-three questions were asked of each participant. A third question was added to inquire about participants' perception of what elements of their scholar—practitioner leadership program has helped them the most in their role as a school superintendent.

1) Aside from providing a safe environment for students (and staff), what is you most important mission or responsibility as a superintendent? Why?

2) In prior interviews and conversations, we have spent significant time discussing readiness, i.e., college ready, career ready, and life ready. Who should create the definitions for readiness, or are they necessary?

3) What elements of your scholar Practitioner program best prepared you to serve as a superintendent in public school?

VITA

Michael D. Jones graduated from MacArthur High School in Irving, Texas in 1978 finishing in the top 3% of his class. He attended East Texas State University and earned a Bachelor of Business Administration with an emphasis in Management Information Systems in 1987. He began a career in business and industry, and started Pyramid Pool Construction, LLC in 1992 winning several national design awards for projects in the Dallas, Texas area. During this time, he also taught continuing education coursework at Collin County Community College in Plano, Texas. In 2001, he began teaching at Rivercrest Middle School in Talco, Texas, where he taught 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students in career and computer coursework. In addition, he coached at both the middle and high school levels. Michael entered the Masters program in Educational Leadership at Stephen F. Austin State University in 2004 and concurrently earned his first principal position while at Como-Pickton CISD. Michael has served as a high school, middle school, and elementary school principal in both public and private schools in Texas. He entered the Doctoral cohort at Stephen F. Austin State University in 2013.

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Style manual designation: *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, Sixth Edition*

Typist: Michael D. Jones

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