ADAPTIVE WORK FOR HIGH POTENTIAL EDUCATIONAL LEADERS: ACTION

RESEARCH CASE STUDY

by

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(Under the Direction of Sheneka Williams)

ABSTRACT

This study sought to determine how a social learning model that builds defined leadership

competencies and requires high-potential assistant principals to engage in adaptive work could

produce more quality school leadership candidates. Through the case study, the action research

team was able to define systemic competencies needed to be a successful school and/or district

leader, and also investigated how engaging in adaptive work as an assistant principal better

prepared candidates for a future role as principal. By doing so, this research attempted to solve

the problem presented by a leadership shortfall within one district created by a lack of systemic

leadership development, an increased need for leaders possessing technical and adaptive

leadership competencies, and increasingly high principal turnover rates. Many of the problems

in this district are attributed to leaders and authority figures, "as if they were the cause of them,

and although people in authority may not be a ready source of answers, rarely are they the source

of the pains" (Heifetz, 1994, p.2). Through the action research process, the study uncovered

keys to success for defining a leadership competency framework and promising practices for

developing locally created leadership pre-induction curriculum. Through qualitative measures,

three research questions were answered and yielded positive results for the use of a social

learning model focused on adaptive work.

INDEX WORDS: Adaptive Leadership, Principal Preparation, Social Learning

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Randy and Judy Moore. Without your love, persistence, and support, I would have never made it this far. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for everything you have done to get me here. I also dedicate this dissertation to my son, George Wyatt Moore. You are the motivation that a father and educator needs to push through hard times. I hope that this work serves as an example for everything that you can achieve if you put your mind to it. The world is yours son, go and take it!

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This work has been the culmination of years of hard work and persistence. My parents, Randy and Judy Moore, have been with me every step of the way and continued to push me toward this ultimate goal. I cannot thank either of you enough for your support.

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To my sister, Danielle, thank you for being a role model for toughness and work ethic. You have always pushed me and I appreciate it more than you know.

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To Arthur Mills, who gave me the runway and support to work on "the right work," and who always pushed me to think bigger and greater.

To my son, George Wyatt Moore, you are the greatest inspiration that there is. You are my why and I stand in amazement watching the young boy that you have become. By the time you read this work, you will be a young man. I can only hope that when that time comes, this document serves as an example of what your education can do for you, and also that your father worked hard for everything that he has. You can do the same, and I will always be there to push you towards your dreams.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The charter district that will serve as the basis of this action research study has undergone significant change in the last five years. Having transitioned to the third new superintendent in under two years, there has been a litany of human resource changes at the central office and the local schools. Some of these changes were directly related to the selection processes for both assistant principals and principals. Previous practice had allowed area superintendents to make principal selections with little documented criteria. The new human resource "pool process" requires that leadership candidates possess and demonstrate expected leadership competencies that have been agreed upon by district leaders.

While this new human resource function's intentions were to be more selective and ensure that top talent was entering school leadership positions, district leadership nor the process could account for 215 principal seats turning over since 2011. As seats are continually vacated, with close to 25% or more turnover expected during the 2015-2016 school year, the pool of candidates who can actively demonstrate the required competencies to lead and manage a school has dissipated. To exacerbate the effects of such high turnover, there is a complete lack of systemic professional development for school leadership. While professional development for potential school leaders exists in pockets, it is rarely sustained year-to-year. Additionally, potential leadership candidates are being assigned to leadership roles without sustained enrollment in a professional development program. Currently, there are no formal mentorship programs that exist for these school leaders. The development of a network or support structure

is left largely to the individual, so very little feedback, other than formal evaluations, are given to current school leaders.

Heifetz and Laurie (2003) may attribute this astounding amount of turnover to a lack of technical and adaptive capacity for current leaders in this district (p.1). In this study, the terms adaptive work, adaptive leadership, and adaptive capacity will be used interchangeably. Heifetz (1994) provides the following definition of adaptive work:

> Adaptive work consists of the learning required to address conflicts in the values people hold, or to diminish the gap between the values people stand for and the reality they face. Adaptive work requires a change in the values, beliefs, or behavior. The exposure and orchestration of conflict – internal contradictions – within individuals and constituencies provide the leverage for mobilizing people to learn new ways. In selecting adaptive work as a guide, one considers not only the values that the goal represents, but also the goal's ability to mobilize people to face, rather than avoid, tough realities and conflicts (p.22-23).

The need for adaptive capacity is more than palpable in a district with growing concerns about equity in access and student performance, a new governance structure that requires schools to engage families and communities in strategic planning, and growing accountability that puts direct pressure on school principals to produce results. However, principals and district leaders continue to apply old solutions to new problems. Using old solutions is a particularly relevant topic when defining technical capacity or technical challenges. Heifetz (1994) defines technical problems as those that require "the application of current technical know-how or routine behavior…answers or assured visions" (p.35).

The job of a principal has grown in its complexity over the past 30 years. Educational leaders are now expected to handle difficult and complex tasks that may not have favorable or readily available answers. As Heifetz and Linsky (2004) suggest, "leadership in education means mobilizing schools, families, and communities to deal with some difficult issues – issues that people often prefer to sweep under the rug" (p.33). Daresh (2007) concludes that expectations for principals to manage both the instructional environment as well as the managerial side of schools "make the principalship of the 21st Century a vastly different job than the one veteran principals undertook when they were rookies" (p.22).

A new principal manual does not exist in this district, and because of that, leaders are lacking the technical capacity to solve day-to-day problems. The ability to evaluate teachers, access and analyze data, manage employees, develop budgets, and maintain operations are technical in nature. However, the technical capacity to solve these problems is not possessed by the majority of candidates for school principalships, nor is it developed by the district through any kind of professional development structure. As new candidates enter buildings lacking both the technical expertise to solve common managerial tasks and the ability to move communities towards new ways of thinking, they continue to experience failure.

The organizational and cultural issues facing the district are rarely popular topics. Rather than dive into the assumptions that exist amongst the various stakeholders in the organization, district authority figures, the local board of education, and the community quickly substitute for other measures of success that are easily rewarded. In fact, principals who exist within their scope of authority, deliver on assumed expectations, and make even the most incremental achievement gains are often celebrated (Heifetz and Linsky, 2004, p.34). This approach, warns

Heifetz (1994), may restore equilibrium in the short term through a variety of expedient measures but may not solve the underlying problem" (p.36).

Continuing to remove sitting principals as they implement initiatives and programs to change education could also have an exceedingly negative impact on students and school culture. Augustine-Shaw (2015) suggests, "principal play a central role in the effectiveness of any school and has a significant impact on student achievement and school culture" (p.21). If the district wants to succeed in its mission to educate all children to their fullest potential, then they will have to facilitate different means of change. Rather than continuing to promote the revolving door for principals, the district must engage in a process to change the culture of the organization through "sustained alterations in faculty behavior and organizational priorities" (Bowe, Lahey, Armstrong, & Kegan, 2003, p.715). A failure to do so could result in recrimination, denunciation of stakeholders and the organization, and/or a regression to the status quo (p.716).

A recent employee exit survey was conducted for all employees who left the system within the previous two school years. The results of this survey, which were the focus of salary increase talks, highlighted areas of concern related to school administrators. School administrators highlighted local culture (26.09%), district culture (22.73%), lack of supervisor support (39.13%), and lack of district support (21.74%) as the main reasons for leaving the district. This data points a wagging finger at the induction and training process for principals, as well as the overall local and district culture. If employees do not feel supported and are working in a negative environment, then their propensity for moving on will undoubtedly rise. The following table (Table 1) displays the results of the employee exit survey for teachers, administrators, and support staff as to why they chose to leave the district:

Table 1. Employee Exit Survey Results

Factors	Teachers	Administrators	Others
Salary	16.49%	12.50%	33.44%
Benefits	3.12%	0%	6.69%
Job	13.43%	8.70%	9.54%
Local Culture	22.85%	26.09%	10.30%
District Culture	14.30%	22.73%	7.38%
Lack of Supervisor Support	14.13%	39.13%	12.17%
Lack of District Level Support	9.35%	21.74%	10.96%
Lack of PD Opportunities	3.38%	0%	8.22%
Lack of Career Opportunities	12.31%	17.39%	18.21%
Unprepared for District Reforms	3.53%	0%	2.01%
Dislike District Reforms	7.17%	0%	2.68%
Commute	23.94%	8.70%	13.58%

Few district and/or school initiatives are aimed at providing additional support for leadership. The district was split into five geographic learning communities in 2011. Each learning community is appointed with an area superintendent and a team of program specialists aimed at supporting schools. The intention of this structure was to provide more direct support to schools, but unintentionally the learning communities have created silos in the district. Some learning communities are in the early stages of leadership development, but these programs are not focused on developing the necessary competencies. Additionally, these programs have incredibly subjective selection criteria, and few who participate are eventually eligible for leadership candidacy.

Purpose and Research Questions

The Board of Education, the Superintendent, and the local communities of the charter district for this action research study expect local schools to develop innovative practices and provide excellent educational opportunities for all students in all schools. The focus of this work

has rested on the shoulders of school principals. The expanding expectations placed on principals have been accompanied by a dramatic principal turnover rate. Despite the alarming turnover, little has been done to develop a systemic professional development structure for principals, nor has any work been done to develop a systemic collegial network of principals in the district. Candidates who have navigated through the rigorous principal candidacy screening process have demonstrated a lack of capacity to deal with both technical and adaptive challenges that require navigation by school leaders. The purpose of this study was to determine how a social learning model that builds the technical and adaptive capacity of high-potential leadership candidates could produce more quality school leadership candidates.

This study sought to answer the following questions:

1. How can an action research team made up of former principals develop a leadership competency framework and curriculum that requires participants to engage in adaptive work?

2. How can a social learning model that requires participants to engage in adaptive work develop the competencies of high-potential assistant principals?

3. How does building the competency of high potential assistant principals help create adaptive leaders who are more principal-ready?

Context of Current System

In July 2012, this district became one of the largest district charter systems in the United States. Guided by a theory of action and local school autonomy, the district is attempting to distinguish itself through its shared school governance model and theory of action. The school district's approved charter allows the district and local schools to waive existing state policies.

To date, there are over 50 current waivers from state policy ranging from seat time requirements to specific course requirement exemptions. The system has encouraged the inclusion of local communities, staff members, and students to develop these waivers from state and local school district policy. As an additional incentive, schools are given the opportunity to request seed funds for innovative initiatives related to their strategic plans.

The byproduct of this system is the growing complexity of the issues affecting schools, students, and staff. For principals especially, the capacity to strategically lead a school in the current system is the difference between employed and unemployed status. Although the belief is that local schools, and the principals that lead them, are in the best position to determine the needs and direction of their schools, there are still district accountability measures that are directly aligned with state and federal legislation. The district accountability measures also bring forward district initiatives that effect local schools. For example, in order to meet the district strategic goal of 90% graduation rate by 2017, the district is developing a personalized learning framework that all schools are expected to implement. What this creates is an ever-increasing focus on the school principal as the determining factor of school success, when in fact; there could be more underlying adaptive challenges that determine how schools function.

To further complicate the role of the school principal in this district, there are clear and present achievement and access gaps for traditionally underserved populations in the district. The following graphic displays the district's student demographic breakdown by race (Figure 1):

District Race Breakdown

0.10%

10.18%

29.34%

2.74%

42.80%

14.79%

0.05%

■ Am Ind/Native
■ Asian
■ Black/Af Am
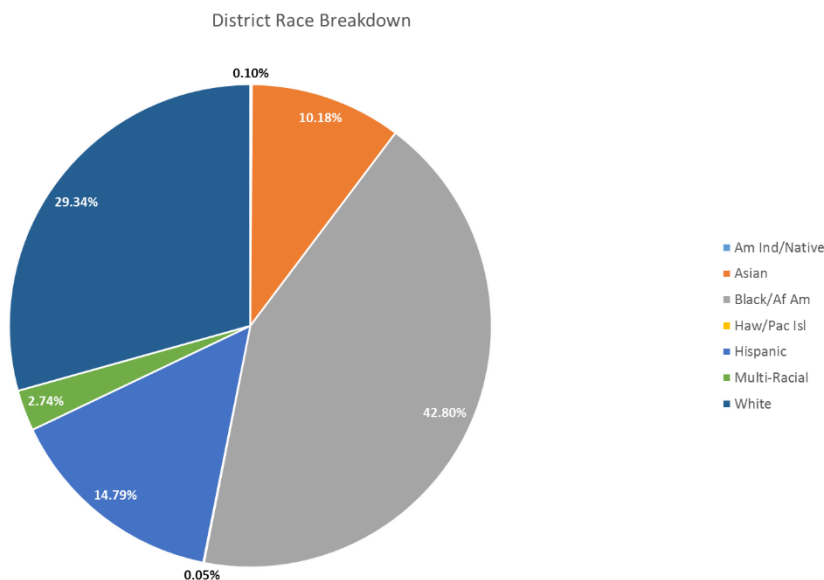■ Haw/Pac Isl
■ Hispanic
■ Multi-Racial
■ White

Figure 1. District Student Racial Breakdown

While this graph depicts the district as a relatively racially diverse school district, the district is split racially based on geography. Except for the central region of the district, the racial breakdown of many of the schools is much more homogenous. In the northern regions, the majority of the student population is White, while the majority of the schools in and south of the city are predominantly Black/African American. Socioeconomics follow the same pattern, as there are less than five total Title One schools in the northern part of the county, while the majority of schools in the central and southern areas of the district receive Title One funds due to an ever-increasing free and reduced lunch population.

While the schools in the northern section of the district have not traditionally served minority demographic populations, there is a growing number of students of color and impoverished students being served in north county schools. These schools, and the district as a whole, are not adjusting to the demographic shifts. Nor are they closing gaps that currently exist

in the central and south. The following graphs display the racial breakdown of the gifted population (Figure 2) as well as the racial breakdown of the remedial and/or special education population (Figure 3):
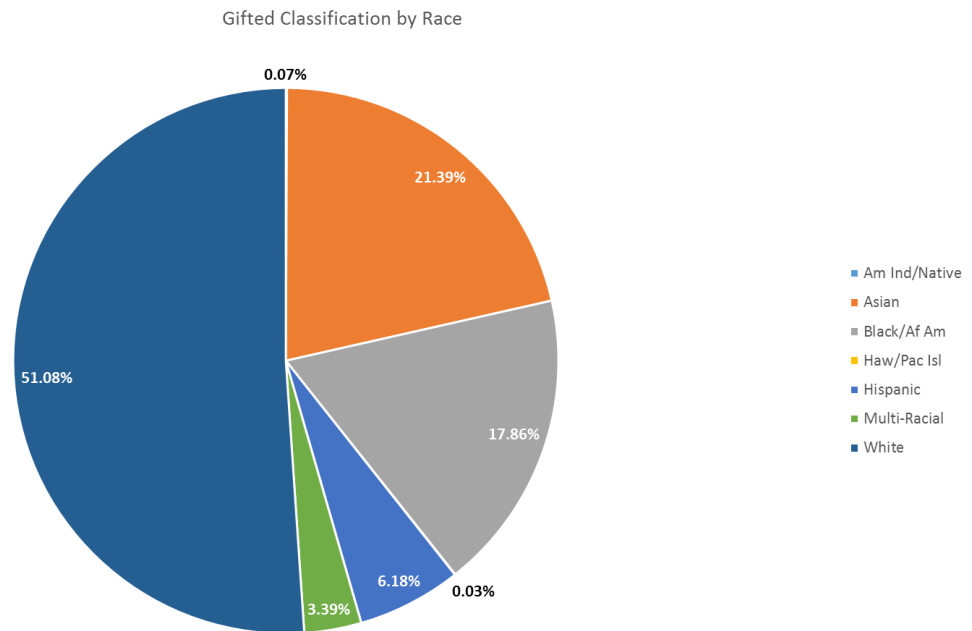

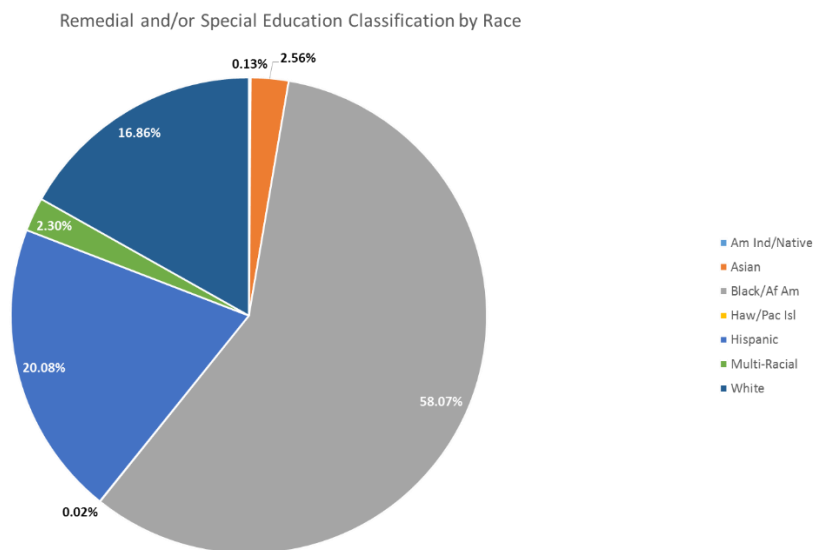Figure 2. District Student Racial Breakdown for Gifted Population

Figure 3. District Student Racial Breakdown for Remedial and Special Education Populations

What is clear to see from both charts is that the current practices and policies in the district provide a clear access advantage for White students. Nearly 73% of the gifted population in district is either White or Asian students. Conversely, 78% of the remedial and special education populations in the district are made up of Black/African American or Hispanic students. Considering these two demographic groups only represent 56% of the entire student population, it is clear that they are over represented in the remedial and special education category while underrepresented in the gifted category. This could be attributed to a school system that is "largely congruent with middle-class, European values" that is leading many educators in this district to "ignore or downplay the strengths of diverse students and their families" (Bazron, Osher & Fleischman, 2005, p.83).

The access gap is highlighted in course performance and discipline data. The following table demonstrates the percentage of high school course failures by race (Figure 4):

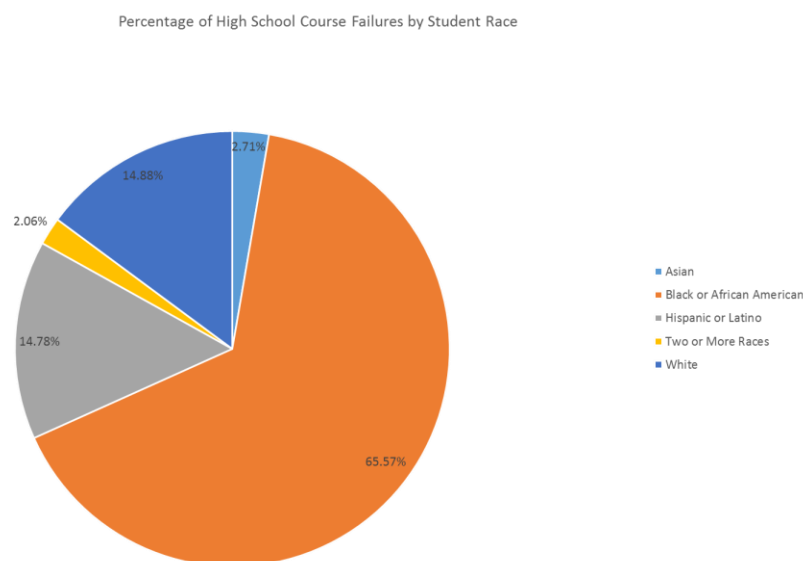Percentage of High School Course Failures by Student Race

Figure 4. Percentage of High School Course Failures by Race

According to Ford and Moore III (2013), African American males attending urban schools perform an average of four years behind their White peers. As Figure 4 illustrates, Black or African American students are failing at a rate nearly five times higher than that of their white counterparts. While research on the achievement gap continues to provide scathing commentary about achievement and access, little has been done to combat the problem. Last year, a reading screen at one school demonstrated nearly 100 high school students who were not reading at a third grade level. Kafele (2012) explains that it is not uncommon for black males to enter high school reading one to three years below grade level, but unfortunately, denial has taken the place of action in many schools. Heifetz (1994) explains, "Denial is popular because patients and their families are spared the work of adapting their lives to the conditions facing them" (p.79).

More troubling than the alarming failure rate of students of color and the access disparities that these students face is the rate at which the district suspends these students. The following chart (Figure 5) displays the percentage of total suspension days by student race:
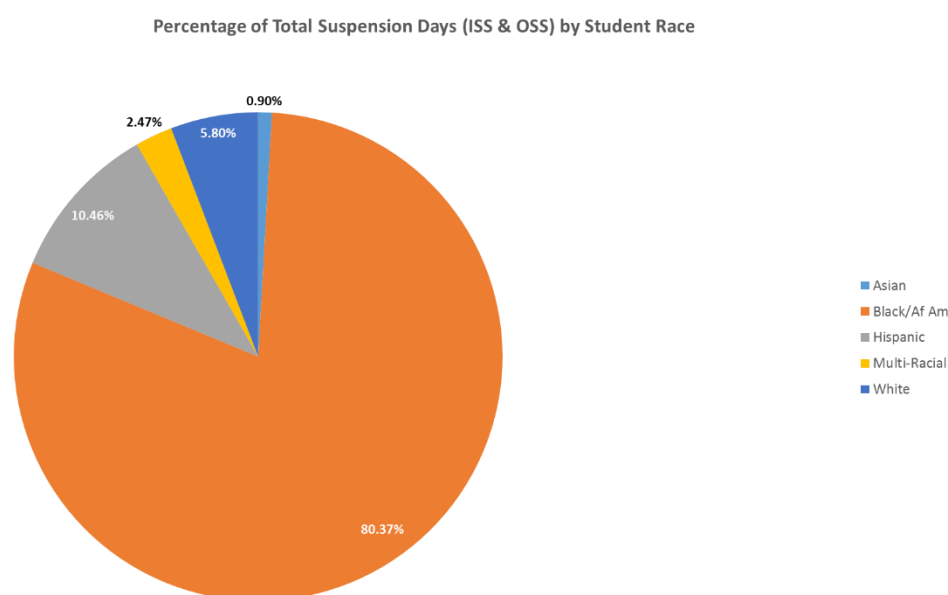

Figure 5. Percentage of Total Suspension Days by Student Race

Schools are clearly perturbed with student discipline. The school district has seen dramatic decreases in student referrals and suspensions, but the ownership has remained constant with students of color representing over 90% of the total suspension. Bazron et al. (2005) suggest, "schools unfamiliar with students' diverse backgrounds sometimes misinterpret cultural difference as misbehavior" (p.83). Instead of taking deeper dives into the underlying assumptions, values, and beliefs that are leading to these high numbers, district leaders continue to applaud the decreases in overall numbers. This leads to staff that believe they are doing everything expected, but that perception creates a dividing line between schools and families. Rather than draw a dividing line, school and district leaders should "help families gain the skills to negotiate the education system and knowledge of the norms of behavior that govern schools" (Bazron, Osher & Fleischman, 2005, p. 84).

Building the capacity of our parents and families is an important part of the puzzle for school leaders, but leaders must also be self-reflective and ask questions about how district practices might be hindering an equitable culture. This is not the current approach in this district. Instead, problems are attributed to leaders and authority figures, "as if they were the cause of them, and although people in authority may not be a ready source of answers, rarely are they the source of the pains" (Heifetz, 1994, p.2). Rather than blame school leaders and district authority figures, the system "should be calling for leadership that will challenge everyone to face problems for which there are no simple, painless solutions – problems that require everyone to learn new ways" (p.2).

Theoretical Framework

Identifying the problem in this context provides only partial understanding. Providing a deeper understanding must come from examining literature. This study will use a social learning approach that adopts collaboration and mentorship with dialogue and scenarios that focus on the principals of adaptive leadership as defined by Heifetz. The following sections will focus on literature that defines the study's theoretical framework, as well as relevant literature that discusses the development of leaders through various methods and in various settings.

The following graphic representation of the theoretical framework (Figure 6) is meant to depict the Adaptive Leadership Theory derived by Heifetz enveloped by the Social Learning Theory proposed by Vygotsksy. This study will use a social learning approach that adopts collaboration and mentorship with dialogue and scenarios that focus on the principles of adaptive leadership as defined by Heifetz.

Figure 6. Theoretical Framework

The underpinning of this action research study was based largely adaptive leadership theory. This theory, proposed by Heifetz, helped provide context for the issues that this district faces, but also provided a blueprint for how the district could remove itself from the mire. The bureaucratic nature of the district has led to a series of initiatives and programs aimed at supporting "leadership," but rarely have those efforts focused on bringing people in leadership positions together to discuss their work in any meaningful depth. This theoretical framework is contextually relevant because the adaptive leadership theory explains both the problem and potential solutions for change, but it relies on that theory being discussed in a social learning model where peers can learn from and with peers.

Social Learning Theory

Lev Vygotsky (1978) asserted, "The mechanism of individual developmental change is rooted in society and culture" (p.7). Vygotsky's theories on cognition were rooted in his early days as an educator, and specifically during his time working with the mentally handicapped. While his studies focus primarily on the development of children, his theories about the development of language through cultural interactions still have a resounding effect today. For the purposes of this study, the social learning approach is applicable because it is based on Vygotsky's experimental approach that was always meant "provide maximum opportunity for the subject to engage in a variety of activities that can, be observed not just rigidly controlled" (p.12). For this study, the variety of activities would focus on both technical and adaptive challenges. The beauty of the social learning approach is the lack of rigid control. By allowing the individuals on the team to interact freely on a particular set of activities, the study hopes to allow for the development of new ideas and approaches.

Because the issues faced by principals are varied and complex, it will be important to allow time for dialogue. As Vygotsky (1978) explains, the "more complex the action demanded by the situation and the less direct its solution, the greater the importance played by speech in the operation as a whole" (p.26). Providing potential leaders with the space and time to speak with each other about the technical and adaptive challenges they face on a day-to-day basis is paramount for this study. The social learning approach adapts for more complex problems using speech and dialogue, which would allow potential leaders to share possible solutions for the challenges they face.

The parallels between the adaptive challenges that leaders face in schools and the social learning approach are profound. Vygotsky (1978) explains that when subjects are faced with more difficult challenges, "the emotional use of language increases as well as efforts to achieve a less automatic, more intelligent solution" (p. 27). If school leaders are going to solve the underlying issues facing their schools, then they will have to look for solutions that are more intelligent. Typically, school leaders are asked to serve as the decision-making authority when problems arise. This idea of the "charismatic authority can generate a mindless following or devolve into bureaucratic institutions that rely on central planning and control" (Heifetz, 1994, p.66). Instead of immediately jumping to action or traditional hierarchical structures for existing solutions, leaders must use speech and the interaction with peers to "guide, determine, and dominate the course of action" (Vygotsky, 1978, p.28).

Currently, leaders in this district must make time for collaboration with peers. At administrative staff meetings, district trainings, and through ad-hoc conversations via the phone or electronic communication are the prescribed methods for collaboration between school leaders. The lack of structure for collaboration among leaders is contradictory to the

expectations that are set for teachers, and especially contradictory to the theory of social learning set forth by Vygotsky (1978) who believes "learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when interacting with people in his environment and in cooperating with his peers" (p.90). The ability to self-reflect, which is critical in the adaptive leadership model, is supported by collaborative efforts in the social learning theory. Vygotsky (1962) believes that "speech for oneself originates through differentiation from speech for others" (p.241). In other words, we form our own thought processes and speech patterns by interacting with other people. If human beings learn to speak through their interactions with other human beings, then establishing a formal process for school leaders to share ideas and communicate about technical and adaptive challenges is vital.

In the words of Vygotsky (1962), "thought is not merely expressed in words; it comes into existence through them" (p.231). The current system must provide avenues for school leaders; both current and potential, to express their thoughts with each other so the cultivation of new learning can take place. By providing the structure and guidance for effective conversation and problem solving, the district could develop a network of school leaders who exemplify the growth explained as explained by Vygotsky (1962):

> The relation of thought to word is not a thing but a process, a continual movement back and forth from thought to word and from word to thought. In that process, the relation of thought to word undergoes changes that themselves may be regarded as development in the functional sense. Every thought tends to connect something with something else, to establish a relation between things. Every though moves, grows and develops, fulfills a function, solves a problem. This flow of thought occurs as an inner movement through a series of planes (p.231).

Whiteside (2015) drew similar conclusions about Vygotsky's work and iterated "that students learn from reflecting on their own thoughts and then sharing those thoughts with their peers and instructors" (p.56). Whiteside's studies, which focus mostly on social presence in online environments draws inspirations from Vygotsky's concepts of developing inner thoughts through verbal contact with others. Whiteside concludes that the connections made between learners and with instructors "can change students' perceptions and motivations for a course and influence the entire experience for everyone" (p.53).

Degener (2001) suggests too that programs for adult learning programs "should be designed around the backgrounds, needs, and interests of students and should encourage a dialogic relationship between teachers and students" (p.1). Rather than provide experiences with rote memorization and little feedback, the author suggests, "learning through problem solving and practical application would lead students to take a more active role in determining their experiences and positions within society" (pgs. 4-5). This approach, which encourages interaction and group problem solving, must be used if school leaders are to begin solving the adaptive challenges they face in education. Dziczkowski (2013) support this method as well and concludes, "That leaders have the potential to achieve a greater degree of success if they seek out assistance from others to complete tasks" (p.353).

Furthering the work of Vygotsky in today's educational environment are leaders who focus on the development of professional learning communities. While much of the research about successful schools focuses on the work of professional learning communities that work to drive student learning, rarely is the topic of changing the beliefs and attitudes of the organization discussed as an early step in the implementation process. Instead, a litany of initiatives continue to hit schools and classrooms with little thought about core foundational skills including the use

of "carefully facilitated, structured mechanisms used for honestly examining student and teacher work that foster growth in the teachers and improved learning of their students" (Venables, 2011, p.9).

DuFour et al. (2010) define professional learning communities as "an ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve" (p.11). In order for this work to be conducted with fidelity and with that core philosophy in mind, school and district leaders must engage in work that shifts the beliefs and attitudes of the organization. Without the initial step of adaptive work, then professional learning communities will continue to be viewed by educators as "a program, rather than a continuous, never-ending process of conducting schooling that has a profound impact on the structure and culture of the school" (p.10).

The importance of well-established PLC's for improved instructional practice and school culture have a direct link to the need for leadership development related to providing feedback. Venables (2011) suggests that in order for teacher teams to work as authentic PLC's, there has to be "a culture or mechanism for offering serious feedback to one another" (p.12). If the district is failing to model serious feedback for leaders, then the trickledown effect for teachers could be extremely detrimental to teachers working to implement PLC's. Again, there is a need for the district to engage in work to confront the realities that exist so they can shift towards a culture more likely to provide the type of feedback that Venables states is necessary for authentic professional learning community work. Additionally, the lack of feedback and high turnover rates for school leaders threatens to derail clarity about any mission to implement professional learning communities with fidelity.

Venables (2011) states that "principals must be 100% committed to making effective PLC's at their schools a top priority" (p.15). Schmoker (2004) suggests that "clarity precedes competence," but if there is a revolving door of principals then the focus of the school could easily shift with each leader change (p.85). DuFour et al. (2010) defines this shift in focus as failed efforts to reform schools "characterized by random stops and starts, rather than by purposeful progression on a path of improvement" (p.16). The need for consistency and commitment on behalf of school leadership is clear, but in order to get past the continual shifts in focus, school and district leaders must confront their traditional beliefs and move professional learning community work to the top of the priority list.

Adaptive Leadership Theory

Adaptive Leadership Theory has been created and refined by Ronald A. Heifetz through a series of discussions and research articles about a leader's ability to attack adaptive challenges. Heifetz and Laurie (2003) explain that managers and leaders continually face challenges that can be met by "applying technical expertise," but that new challenges in organizations are requiring people to "learn new habits, attitudes, and values," which are classified as adaptive challenges (p.1). The root of the adaptive leadership theory focuses on two distinctions; between technical and adaptive work, and between leadership and authority (p.1). Because of the complexity of the social systems that exist within educational organizations, including charter school districts, the authors suggest that we need to quit looking for "saviors," but instead focus our search on "leaders who can move us to face the problems for which there are no simple, painless solutions – the challenges that require us to learn new ways" (p.1).

The beauty of the adaptive leadership theory is its practicality. When working to develop the theory of adaptive leadership, Heifetz and Sinder (1991) mentioned that the "cardinal guideline for the development" of this theory is to provide individuals with "an outlook and technique that is useful in practice" (p.1). Underlying the practicality, the researchers wanted to focus on the critical dimension of leadership, which they define as "the application of powers and influence in generating problem-defining and problem-solving work" (p.3). The culmination of these main ideas led to the prescriptive list for leaders to use when engaging in adaptive work:

1. Identify the adaptive challenges

2. Regulate distress

3. Maintain disciplined attention

4. Give the work back to people

5. Protect leadership below (Heifetz & Laurie, 2003, p.2)

One of the more profound facets of adaptive leadership is the expectation that leaders challenge their own assumptions. This is very different from the traditional expectation for leaders in a school district. As principals in the charter district are being asked to provide direction and solutions to student achievement and innovation, Heifetz and Laurie contend that "the prevailing notion that leadership consists of having a vision and aligning people with it is bankrupt; nothing more than omniscience and salesmanship" (p.2). In order to engage in adaptive work, leaders must remove the hierarchy from their decisions, and begin a process where ideas, plans, and direction are shared.

Because ideas are planned and shared across the organization in the adaptive leadership model, leadership will have to come from people outside of positions of authority. Heifetz

(1999) asserts that separating leadership from authority is essential so "we can begin to understand that we need leadership not simply from people in top positions or authority but also from people without authority" (p.19). This too correlates with the context of the charter district for this study. If principals are being asked to develop school strategic plans, request flexibility from state and local policy, and solicit funds for innovative practice then they will have to not only share leadership but also build leaders in the process. Heifetz contends that traditional notions of leaders and followers are "bankrupt," and that the "best leadership does not generate followers, it generates other leaders" (p.20).

This concept also dives much deeper into the need to self-evaluate and "make-meaning" of oneself. In order to distribute leadership and build leaders, you have to let go of some of the "authority" that your current position or title has granted you. That is a challenge that many have difficulty facing. It can even become dangerous if an individual in an authoritative position is not willing to separate their role from their entire self. This idea of separating your role from yourself is profound, as not doing so could lead to "robbing ourselves of self-worth and taking personally what is not personal" (p.20). The unfortunate outcome of this scenario is that leaders/authority figures misdiagnose feedback and end up responding incorrectly (p.20).

That is not to say that adaptive leadership does not have pitfalls. In fact, Heifetz and Linsky (2002) recognize that "adaptive challenges require an organization to separate what's previous from what is expendable, and at the start of the adaptive work, many people feel that everything is precious and are reluctant to give up anything" (p.3). The result of this reluctance comes in the form of marginalization, diversion, attack, and seduction (p.3). This resistance has to be understood at a functional level. The authors suggest, "Leaders are rarely neutralized for personal reasons, but are criticized when others do not like your message" (p.3). The trick then

is to resist responding to the personal attack, and understand that confronting adaptive challenges may result in opposition. Additionally, the authors suggest that having awareness about potential resistance will make reactions to it strategic.

Having an understanding of the potential roadblocks is essential, but leaders must also separate authority from leadership because of knowledge. Senge, Heifetz, and Torbert (2000) oppose the notion that those in authority have all the knowledge and attribute this fallacy to ancient days. The authors suggest that human beings have looked to authority figures for years to provide guidance about how to live. So much so, that it has become "a part of our biological and cultural hardware to equate leadership with knowledge, with knowing the way"(p.59). The problem this creates is that it hinders other from providing input and constrains the amount of knowledge to only one person. Additionally, if the organization maintains this norm, then adaptive challenges may be ignored. As Heifetz (1999) explains in the following passage, an authority figure with all of the vision could spell big problems for any organization:

> Take someone who was worked really hard to have expertise and know how, then plug him into an organizational circuit that is desperate for someone who knows the way, who has the vision. He is so smart that he pulls a rabbit out of the hat. Everybody in the organization deems himself blessed. The he pulls a rabbit out of the hat the second time. By the third time, nobody is thinking critically any more. The state of dependency becomes profound. Now you have the blind leading the blind because the person who is invested in his own self-importance becomes grandiose, and he cannot tell the difference between what he knows and does not know (Heifetz, 1999, p.20).

This example is certainly a cautionary tale about the dangers associated with equating leadership with both authority and knowledge. What schools and districts need in this era of complexity, are leaders who have the ability to identify the "underlying values that can mobilize people" (Senge, Heifetz, & Torbert, 2000, p.59). By investigating the fundamental challenges facing education, leaders should be able to move past "problems of inspiration and marketing" and begin to inspire real change.

The ideas of shared leadership and mobilization are certainly not isolationist views. In fact, Heifetz and Linsky (2004) suggest that rather than having leaders protect others by "real leadership involves giving the work back to the people who must adapt, and mobilizing them to do so" (p.35). None of this work can be done without other people, which brings up another important point about building relationships. In order to tackle adaptive challenges, leaders must "emphasize personal relationships" (p.35). This includes not only thought partners, but also oppositional entities who may not share the same values. If adaptive work requires the changing of values and beliefs, then some of the people who may be labeled as malcontents have to be turned and brought on board. The authors suggest, "to exercise leadership, you must work as closely with your opponents as you do with your supporters" (p.36). It is easy to build consensus when everyone in the group feels the same way. The challenge of adaptive work is to truly challenge the status quo. This cannot be done by simply ignoring opposing viewpoints.

CHAPTER 2

RELEVANT LITERATURE

Principals work in a time of increasing complexity, and recent studies conducted in various industries present findings on what the areas of complexity are, how leaders have worked through adaptive challenges posed by complex environments, and promising practices for leadership development, including but not limited to, collaboration and social learning.

What is clear through examining empirical findings related to this topic, is that there a few studies in the public education industry that combine the social learning approach with adaptive work. There are many contextual uses of adaptive work in the medical profession, and although there are strong implications for education, there are few programs that are working to build the adaptive capacities of potential principal candidates. The idea of social presence and social learning has been largely focused on online environments, but there is little information about the development of leaders through a collaborative or social approach with adaptive work at the core.

Empirical studies of social learning provide depth for Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development, which can be defined as the discrepancy between an individual's actual mental age and the level that individual reaches in solving problems with assistance" (Vygotsky, 1962, p.198). More simply, individuals have a higher ceiling for learning when they engage with others. This is pivotal to the concept of a shared learning experience for school leaders. Because

there is not an abundance of studies that combine this theory with the adaptive work model, this study will fill in a substantial gap in the literature.

It is important to separate this study from the work of Professional Learning Communities or Communities of Practice. Owen (2014) suggests that "all researchers characterize teacher PLCs as explicitly or implicitly being about shared values and vision, a focus on student learning, taking an inquiry stance, making teaching more public, sharing experiences and expertise, willingness to experiment with alternative strategies, and engaging in reflective dialogue" (p.58).

In this definition, there is clear separation between the work of this study and the work of a PLC or a community of practice. Heifetz & Linsky (2004) suggest that "adaptive challenges lie in the stomach and the heart…to solve them, we must change people's values, beliefs, habits, ways of working, or ways of life" (p.35). In order for leaders in my district to develop any type of meaningful solutions for professional development, we must engage in adaptive work that will allow us to see past our traditional notions of what works and what does not. This study is at the forefront of communities of practice and PLC's, but it is not there yet. Instead, this action research study must work to shatter beliefs and attitudes that have created a quality leader shortage as well as substantial performance and equity gaps at our schools. The beliefs of the district must be challenged and potentially changed, and then the work can begin to rebuild a common vision of effective leadership.

It is still important to engage the literature on PLC's and Communities of Practice because they shine a light on the importance of effective school leadership. DuFour (2014) provides a laundry list of helpful suggestions and anecdotes of successful practice for PLC

implementation, but more importantly, DuFour provides data to back up the practices he suggests. In one such example, DuFour explains that "within five years of engaging in this PLC process, one particular district reached the 90/90 goal, 19 schools were 90/90 schools, and several had become 95/95 schools" (p.34). The idea of providing sustainable practice that is backed up by tangible results is rare in the district being examined in this dissertation, but what makes this standout more to is the fact that using data is part of the practice that DuFour suggests. In a discussion about a school district symposium, DuFour iterates that each presenter had to meet two specific criteria: "(1) the presenters will explain how a team or the school implemented a process to improve student achievement or school culture, and (2) the presenters can provide evidence that the process had a positive effect" (p.34).

Too often districts and school leaders suggest practices without reliable results. The district in this study has seen this first hand, which has led to a lack of focus amongst schools and central office employees. Each group continues to add bullet points to their resumes, but few are leading with the type of focus that DuFour suggests. This provides further evidence that focusing on developing school leaders is paramount. In a discussion about Adlai Stevenson High School, DuFour acknowledges that the school has targeted the following goals: "to reduce the failure rate, increase the percentage of students experiencing success in the most rigorous course offerings, and improve student achievement on the ACT exam" (p.31). It was not the goals themselves that are surprising, but the fact that these goals have been maintained for nearly 30 years. That type of sustained focus is sorely needed in this district, where leaders tend to switch direction every time a new principal, area superintendent, or superintendent rolls into town.

Woodland & Mazur (2015) do an excellent job discussing the potential for both educator evaluation and PLC implementation, and in doing so, discuss the need for "teachers and leaders to work together to leverage the best of Ed Eval and PLCs" (p.7). What is clear in this article is that the authors are in-tune with the current context of K-12 education. Woodland & Mazur (2015) assert that PLC implementation struggles due to "lack of time and poor team processes" (p.10). Both of these issues rest on the shoulders of school and district leaders. Additionally, the authors suggest that "secondary school principals and assistant principals, aside from having far too little time to carry out the requisite (and numerous) cycles of observation and feedback, are often not well positioned to be the best evaluators of teacher performance for reasons that are both pedagogical and sociological" (p.11).

Both of these detriments to sound practices beg the question about how to incorporate each theme into my leadership development program. Neither PLC's nor Ed Eval are going away, as there is research to back the effectiveness of each practice, but if school leadership is unable to provide the conditions or supports for either then the impact of each will continue to be minimized.

A study conducted by Augustine-Shaw (2015) suggests that the job of a principal is "complex and stressful, because these leaders have great levels of responsibility for students who perform below mastery and have less resources and control over significant decisions involving budget, curriculum, and personnel" (p.21). The relevance of this statement for the charter district in this study is staggering. The district in the current action research study has felt the pressure from federal and state mandates to evaluate the performance across various measures (attendance, behavior, course performance, high-stakes assessments) of different student demographic groups. As the analysis of this data has increased, the district, and especially

school principals, have been asked tough questions about performance gaps among different groups of students.

Some of the questions being asked have started to move to cultural competency, as there are clear and present demographic obstacles that students in the district cannot seem to overcome. Being a student of color, being economically disadvantaged, or being labeled as remedial early on (K-5) have become indicators of future turmoil as it relates to attendance, behavior, or performance. Because of the necessity for improving the experience for all students, principals "must place a high priority on quality instruction, provide specific feedback to teachers, and support for purposeful change" (p.22). The unfortunate reality is that the political landscape is not ready to accept principals who are willing to challenge their staff with these complex issues. Holding teachers to higher instructional standards has led, and will continue to lead, to political and cultural backlash. As a result, district reports on teacher evaluation are held tight and infrequently shared. When the data presents serious issues on instructional evaluations, the data is quickly manipulated to tell a different story.

In order to navigate the dangerous waters of politics and instructional leadership, the Kansas Educational Leadership Institute (KELI) put together a statewide task force aimed at providing improved professional development for principals (p.23). This task force embraced the notion that educational leaders "don't know what they don't know," and set out to gather input from existing principals and superintendents about their current experiences with mentorship and induction (p.24). The work of the task force identified the essential elements for a principal mentorship program and concluded that "preparing new leaders to be courageous, to take risks in putting learning first, and to challenge tradition or opinion were necessary in an era of accountability" (p.29). These essentials, as defined by the KELI task force, align directly with

the adaptive work described by Heifetz and others. In order to tackle the challenges associated with today's schools, leaders will have to address unpopular issues and challenge the status quo. In order to do this gracefully and ensure survival, the task force suggested providing principal mentors who "through valued experience keen insight, and understanding of the complex role of building-level leadership…were able to listen, ask reflective questions, and understand local-context issues" (p.29).

The concept of providing mentorship is not new. Alsbury & Hackmann (2006) indicate that "principals cited mentors as their primary source of assistance in becoming successful school leaders as opposed to coursework or educational leadership professors" (p.171). As a result of mentoring relationships, the authors also suggest that "effective programs can enhance the mentor's professional growth through increased job satisfaction, increased recognition from peers, and further opportunities for personal career advancement" (p.171). All of these results, would undoubtedly improve culture among the principal ranks, which begs the questions as to why the district in the current study does not provide any principal induction? Principals leaving the district have clearly articulated that they do not feel supported by direct or district supervisors, which has direct correlations to the overall culture of the district.

The results of the Alsbury & Hackmann (2006) study indicate that mentoring programs should focus on "role socialization, reflective conversation, and role clarification" (p.183). While this study acknowledges the need for leaders to self-evaluate and reflect on practice with a mentor, it did not acknowledge the benefit of mentors providing "specific advice in how to address difficult issues" (p.183).

Daresh (2007) echoes the sentiment against mentoring programs that provide short-term interventions, but suggests mentoring efforts should be "ongoing with a focus on guiding" (p.22). Daresh's work is based loosely on the conceptual framework created by Michael Huberman (1989). Huberman (1989) explains that "career development is a process, not a series of events" that could include "plateaus, regressions, dead-ends, spurts, and discontinuities" (p.32). Because of the potential for these difficulties, Daresh emphasizes the need for ongoing mentoring throughout the professional development phases of a principal, which include "initial career entry, stabilization, and risk taking or risk avoidance" (Daresh, 2007, pgs. 22-23). Because the current charter district in the study is pushing principals to engage in risk taking behaviors, it is essential that leaders be provided opportunities to engage in mentors continually so the mishaps pointed out by Huberman do not derail careers. This study is valuable to the research because it highlights the need for mentors who can "guide colleagues toward making decisions based on what must be done in response to unseen challenges and realities" (p.26).

The need for strong principals is paramount, as highlighted by Karakose et al. (2014), because "the critical role of leadership may be the single most important factor in successful schools" (Karakose, Yirci, & Kocabas, 2014, p.1366). In an era of consistent change, decentralized district structures, and complex contexts, the scope of a school principal's leadership continues to increase (p.1366). The same can be said for the district in this study, as principals are expected to successfully manage operational tasks, set the strategic vision for the school, lead teachers instructionally, and survive in the micro-political environment of their community. Even more valuable than the background this study provides is the implication that novice principals "feel alone most of the time" as they navigate the various forces affecting their schools (p.1374). Unfortunately, the authors of this study provide little more than a list of the

factors affecting principals in their specific context. There is not a call to action or viable

solution presented.

Saban and Wolfe (2009) assert such a call and propose that "leaders must know what

they believe and why, and then they must clearly communicate these beliefs and values through

their daily actions" (p.3). Moving beyond some of the managerial concerns highlighted in the

Karakose study, Saban and Wolfe base their study on the view of a principal as "pioneers who

search for opportunities to grow, improve, and challenge the process" (p.3). Because of the need

to address adaptive challenges and uncover the underlying assumptions of the organization,

leaders in the context of this study must engage in this process of growth and improvement. This

cannot happen within the confines of the school building, but must also take place within the

mind of the individual. Principals have to challenge their own beliefs and assumptions so they

do not thrust their schools, students, and communities into their way of thinking just because it is

their way of thinking.

In order to avoid these pitfalls and engage in a new model of leadership based on

teamwork, community, shared decision making, and ethical behavior, leaders need to be

provided mentors who provide opportunities for "reflective conversations, emotional and moral

support, and affirmation" (pgs. 4-5).   This approach to mentorship, allows for self-reflection

and individual growth through the relationship with a strong mentor. There are no such

programs in existence in the district for this action research study.

There are opponents to mentorship as a means of developing effective leaders. Gumus

(2015) conducted interviews with sixteen primary and middle school principals who argued that

"having a master's degree in educational administration and having administration certification"

were the two fundamental requirements of effective principals. While this study focuses on the value of undergraduate and graduate degree programs for educational administration, it does little to highlight the value of ongoing mentorship programs, self-reflection activities, or affirmation.

Another common argument is that the cost of leadership induction is too great for districts to incur. Alsbury and Hackmann (2006) suggest that "many mentoring initiatives have suffered from a lack of sufficient funds and sporadic planning efforts" (p.169). Despite this reality, other studies have shown that leadership induction and mentoring is too vital for school districts to pass up, regardless of the costs. Lochmiller (2014) uses a cost feasibility approach developed by Levin and McEwan (2001) to address the viability of leadership induction programs. Based on his analysis, "coaching support appears to be financially viable when provided to all newly hired principals, but may be particularly so when targeted to support new administrators working in high-poverty settings" (Lochmiller, 2014, p.12). Despite the viability, Lochmiller warns about the dangers of coaching programs due to a lack of research on best practices for coaching and the inability to monitor the effectiveness of coaching efforts (p.12). The researcher suggests conducting empirical studies on best practices and tying coaching jobs to strict regulation and certification. One thing is certain, despite potential pitfalls; this study provides specific per-pupil costs for induction that policy makers and human resource departments across the country could use to develop principals in schools.

While most of the literature focuses on the need for mentors in the complex societal context of schools, there is also a focus on using adaptive leadership approaches in other contexts. Burke (2007) conducted a study on the need for adaptive leadership practices in order to engage communities on the complex and even controversial issue of climate change.

According to the author, "future of public administration must move from a dominant expert basis toward a wider, deliberative form of effort, so too must policies to address climate change gain a broader public contribution and commitment" (p. 413). The move from leaders as knowledge experts to leaders as motivators of public contribution and commitment are attributed to the work of Heifetz. The health care field has also embraced the idea of adaptive and complex challenges. Thygeson, Morissey, and Ulstad (2010) suggest that "adopting an adaptive leadership framework in the practice of medicine promises to improve the doctor–patient relationship, increase our effectiveness as healers and reduce unnecessary health care utilization" (p.1009).

The empirical studies indicate that leadership in education and other industries has evolved into a complex practice that requires ongoing support. Although some detractors focus on undergraduate and graduate studies as the answer to the leadership problem, most of the studies indicate that ongoing mentorship opportunities provide the best support system for leaders. By ensuring that these mentoring opportunities allow for self-reflection, admiration, and socialization into their role, districts can ensure that principals will be able to adapt to adaptive challenges and survive the political landscape. Studies have also shown that developing coaching and/or mentoring programs is feasible within the education industry.

The justification for technical and adaptive capacity building in a social setting is clear, but as the work has progressed about how to provide high-potential educational leaders with the best support possible, it became clear that additional research should be conducted to include practices for experiential learning and design thinking. As McHenry (2016) explains, "experiential education is, inherently, leadership training. Whether facilitating or participating in a learning event, the choices one makes are a direct reflection of how one chooses to lead

oneself" (McHenry, 2016, p.3). This is an especially relevant concept in a district where professional learning is rarely viewed through a practitioner's lens. In many cases, professional development in this district lives at the theoretical level, and professional are rarely asked or pushed to apply the knowledge in actual situations.

There is synergy between this concept and the adaptive leadership model proposed by Heifetz. Wheatley & Frieze (2010) suggest that we should "abandon our reliance on the leader as hero and invite in the leader as host…we should support those leaders who know that problems are complex" (p.2). By providing our leaders with the opportunity to work through various case studies and view the concepts and theories through the context of their day-to-day, we hope to provide professional development opportunities that "people willingly support…because they've played a part in creating" them (Wheatley & Frieze, 2010, p. 2).

Guthrie & Jones (2012) also assert that "experiential learning theory provides a solid foundation for leadership education, as well as a framework for developing and implementing programs for students to reach their full leadership capacity" (p.54). A facet of experiential learning is lost in translation is the importance of meaningful reflection. Guthrie & Jones (2012) suggest that "connected reflection emphasizes the importance of integrating the experience with class work and academic learning…challenging reflection pushes students to think in new ways and produce understanding and new ways of problem solving" (p.57). Another missing piece of leadership development within this district is the lack of formalized reflection opportunities for leaders. There is a continuous stream of direct instruction and content overload. Rarely are the participants, in this case assistant principals and/or principals, given the opportunity to make sense of the information and describe how they will process and proceed with the new

information. This is vital if we are to solve the complex problems that await us in school buildings.

A concrete method for providing these opportunities exists within the use of case studies. Guthrie & Jones (2012) recommend, "role-playing activities that allow students to apply ethical guidelines to case studies, reflect on the case study from multiple perspectives, and begin to conceptualize the ethical implications of the case study" (p.59). By placing leaders in the field with given parameters, we create an opportunity for leadership styles, opinions, and misconceptions to come to the surface. This is valuable, as many school leaders have little time to reflect on real-time decisions or plans of action unless there is a problem with that decision or plan of action. Providing experiences where leaders can flex their leadership muscles in a safe space for dialogue with others can allow for real change to occur and provides the potential for analysis that goes beyond the surface.

As leaders work through various scenarios and problems, it is also important to provide tools that stimulate productive thought and innovation. Education continues to prove that it is an industry that requires both passion and adaptability due to the ever-changing landscape of initiatives, policies, and mandates from government bodies. As the change continues to hit schools, leaders need to develop ways of thinking that encourage the disruption of the status quo. Additionally, school leaders should consider the fact that education is a people business. Whether big or small, school leaders engage with people on a day-to-day basis. The need for human-centered approaches brings the concept and framework of design thinking forward as a needed tool for school leaders.

Pelochino (2015) believes that "design thinking is synonymous with human-centered design" (p.42). The five-step process of design thinking starts with empathy, moves to defining problems, encourages participants to ideate a multitude of ideas, quickly move to low resolution prototypes, and finally test those prototypes with users (p.42). Education does not follow this cyclical path, but usually requires years of bureaucratic review. The result is a continued focus on solving technical issues at the surface level, but design thinking helps users "go through the process many, many, many times, and you end up moving past the process and into mindsets" (p.42).

Clegorne and Mastrogiovanni (2015) also assert that "finding the balance between technical preparation and holistic development has proven elusive write large with a majority of public emphasis being placed on the technical side of the spectrum more often than not" (p.46). This does not suit the world of education though, as many of the problems we face are human-centered problems. Whether it be a resistance to change, a lack of empathy for others, or social inequities, "the immense challenges of contemporary society require both technical and social attention" (Clegorne & Mastrogiovanni, 2015, p.47). Adaptive challenges require methods and ways of thinking that can match up in their complexity. "Design provides great hope for creating generative educational environments with which to create sophisticated solutions to wicked problems" (p.52).

Another critical issue in the district is the lack of meaningful professional development at any level of the organization. The New Teacher Project (2015) presents a thoughtful analysis of the state of professional development in schools and districts. One of the more pertinent and thought-provoking points in the entire article is the statement that "too many teachers peak before they master core instructional skills" (TNTP, 2015, p.12).

It is important that the future professional development and/or curriculum teams focus on hitting the mark by "defying routine" and providing a "highly individualized process" rather than a bland one-size-fits-all approach that this research article rallies strongly against (p.18). The root cause of the issues related to professional development rest on leadership. If educators are going to be subjected to professional development, that is more than "the equivalent of a coin flip," then school and district leaders must refocus their efforts (p.22).

Teacher effectiveness continues to be heavily reliant on the effectiveness of school leadership. TNTP (2015) suggests that "as teachers report feeling more positively about their schools' efforts to help them improve, and as their perceptions of their evaluators improve, their scores can be expected to improve a bit, as well" (p.23). Despite all of the bells and whistles offered by vendors and professional development gurus, it appears that one of the determining factors in teacher growth is a strong school culture based on high expectations from administrators. TNTP went farther and stated that "the alignment between teachers' perception of their instructional effectiveness and their formal evaluation ratings" is an important factor in teacher growth. This too comes back to a teacher's faith in their leaders and evaluator to provide meaningful feedback and ratings based on instructional effectiveness.

What comes next then? It has to be development for our leaders, and the development of current high-performing teachers to eventually take the reins of educational leadership. If "only 40% of teachers believe the majority of the professional development they receive is a good use of their time" then we need to seriously reconsider who is in charge of selecting, delivering, and providing feedback for the implementation of teacher development efforts (p.26). Teachers need options and who better than high-performing teachers to develop professional learning activities that are relevant and supportive of a broad range of teachers. The article suggests that "if

students need choices, then teachers need choices too," so it is vital that we use our front line experts to determine the menu of development options that are available (p.26). Likewise, there has to be continuous feedback loop between teachers and their evaluators so professional development becomes more than just lip service.

All too often, everyone in the district office thinks they have a solution to the development problem. While these efforts often "focus on helping teachers," the lack of collaboration in the executive suites leads to an over-saturation of development opportunities (p.28). While some executive in our district believe this provides a thorough menu of options, the reality is that it creates a sense of confusion amongst teachers and school leaders. Often, people engage in the development opportunities that are provided by people that hold the highest office rather than those who are providing the most aligned and beneficial programs. The same can be said about leadership development, as many individuals have attempted to crack the code without any meaningful result.

The summarization of all of this analysis and data comes back to the need for a refined focus on developing our school and district leaders. In the discussion about a charter district who showed results, TNTP (2015) suggested that the central office in the study began to "rethink the traditional job function of principals and assistant principals" (p.31). Rather than searching for the next big thing, leaders in this organization found success by "establishing a clear vision and high expectations for excellence and giving teachers specific, actionable feedback on their areas for improvement" (p.32). This seems like an easy fix, but none of this will be possible unless the same level of development is provided for our leaders so they can establish a level of professional trust that is currently lacking.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Conceptual Framework

By building the technical and adaptive capacity of high potential assistant principals

through a social learning model, this action research study hoped to yield more highly qualified

principal candidates for the future. In addition to engaging in the adaptive leadership framework

and providing the social construct for participants, there was also a pressing need to incorporate

experiential learning tasks through case study and reflection of current contextual realities. As

the discussions moved past technical challenges, it became important for participants in both the

action research team as well as the high potential leaders to build core competency on design

thinking elements so they were better suited with tools to navigate complex challenges. The

conceptual framework graphic below (Figure 7) depicts the model that was used to develop

curriculum for high-potential assistant principals in this case study.
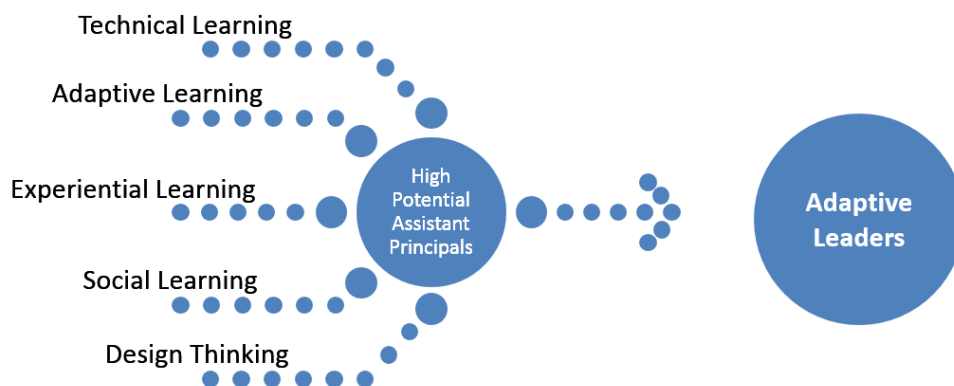

Figure 7. Conceptual Framework

Boundaries

This study was bounded by the selection of the participants. Members of the action research team were all executive directors or area superintendents, and three of the members were former principals in the district. Additionally, all participants in the professional development were high-potential assistant principal candidates who had successfully moved into the district principal pool and were considered eligible for school-based interviews for principal vacancies. High potential was defined by data collected through the principal selection interview process that measured candidates' level of specific leadership competencies. The action research team determined the selection of candidates in the early phases of the action research team meetings. The entire study was based within one large metro area district that serves rural, suburban, and urban student popualtions. Because members of both the action research team and the professional development must be employed within this district, employment status within this specific district provided another study boundary.

Recruitment

Because majorities of our executive leaders are former principals, I felt it was vital to have these individuals serve to help solve the problem. The action research team, made up of district leaders, have all been principals in this particular district. Because of their influence as district leaders and the credibility that they possess as former principals in the district, they were and still are in an ideal position to push forward the results of the action research study to improve leadership development in a district that does not currently have a systemic leadership development program.

Recruitment was a key factor in this action research study, and I was forced to leverage several existing relationships to pull the team together. Initial considerations for the action research team included inviting three sitting area superintendents, one area executive director, and one executive director of talent management. This was an interesting part of the work that required a great deal of vetting with executive leaders within the district, as several teams and individuals wanted to be a part of the work. To that end, I was calculated and recruited leaders that I had established strong working relationships with during my time in the district. Of the three area superintendents, I had previously been a direct report for two. Having worked with and for these individuals in the past, I concluded that presenting the case would draw interest and involvement. I was met with mixed results.

Of the two area superintendents, only one chose to participate in the study. The other, despite being invited, refused invitations to meetings on multiple occasions. At the direction of my executive level superior, this individual was removed from the action research team invitee list and did not participate in the study. The other area superintendent, knowing the importance of the work and because of his personal support of my work, happily joined and was an integral thought-partner in the project.

The third area superintendent and the area executive director also had close ties to me professionally. Both leaders are still involved in massive school turnaround efforts that have at their foundation a major focus on educational leadership and developing agents of change. Over the past two years, I have partnered with both of these inviduals on projects related to data review and analysis, technical and adaptive leadership building, leadership selection, and even attended school turnaround conferences/workshops at the University of Virginia to support their

school turnaround efforts. Because leadership is so paramount to their mission, they both happily agreed to participate.

The final member of the action research team was the executive director of talent management. This was my direct supervisor and this individual oversaw strategic initiatives related to leadership selection, leadership development, recruiting, and district staffing. As my supervisor, it was hugely important to have this invidual's support, political cover, and advice during the action research case study. This individual's work responsibilities and direct reporting to the chief talent officer also made this project an organizational necessity.

Pulling these individuals together to form an action research team took months of work. In fact, it delayed the start of the project, but it was so important to have these individuals in the room. My relationships helped bring everyone into the same room to discuss leadership development, but the underlying tension between all of the groups cannot be overstated. The learning community model that exists within our district has created regional silos of focus and control. Area superintendents, who used to multiple schools across the district, now serve schools that are nearly identical in their student demographics and performance. Because this regionalization of the district gave more power to the area superintendents and narrowed their focus to the needs of their region, little collaborative effort takes place that leads to systemic changes. This group of area superintendents does serve as a vetting board for district personnel to pitch school-based initiatives, but the needs of regional schools has overtaken the vision of one district.

To further complicate matters, the area superintendents and their staff are housed under the academics division. The talent management division, which I and my supervisor at the time

were a part, are often seen as opponents to the academics division. There are vastly different philosophies that exist about educational leadership present in the two divisions. While the learning community leadership focuses nearly all of their effort on matters related to their specific schools, the talent management division takes a systemic viewpoint to all district initiatives. This clash of all versus ours is always present in discussions, but especially prevalent when leadership development is the topic of conversation. By bringing members of both houses to the table, I intentionally built cover for the work that could pass the vetting required to push good ideas forward. Without participation from both sides, the work would have been easily cast aside as a one-sided effort that did not take into consideration the viewpoints of all involved.

There was room for improvement on the action research team in relation to diversity. We had representation from two African-American participants and three Caucasians, and while this did represent the two largest racial groups in the district, we lacked the Hispanic and Asian perspective. These two groups are ever-growing in our district, but we have yet to see leaders from either background working within the district on leadership development. We also lacked gender diversity on the A.R.T. The refusal to participate from one area superintendent left us with one less female participant. This left our team with a heavy male perspective with four male participants and only one female. The group did have a wide range of experiences in schools though with members serving in schools that represented a variety of student and community cultures. The talent management executive director also had work experience outside of education which proved invaluable. Future studies should work incorporate more diversity and could stand to have a bigger action research team overall.

Recruiting for the participants in the leadership development phase of the project was exhiliarating and important as well. As previously mentioned, much of the work aimed at

developing leaders takes place in silos within this district. To that end, we scoured our

leadership selection data to find representiatives from each learning community that represented

the needs of varying school communities. With the help of the action research team, we ended

up with five participants. These participants had successfully completed central office

interviews indicating they were eligible for school-based principal vacancies. This piece of the

project was a massive selling point for executive leaders within the district as we were able to

say that this was a program intended for all of our schools. Because high principal turnover

existed across learning communities and levels, it was easy to suggest that the need existed to

develop leaders in all areas.

The eagerness of the participants to engage in the project spoke to pressing need for

assistant principals to partake in meaningful and targeted leadership development efforts. After

invites were sent, all participants responded within twenty-four hours confirming their

participation and commitment to the program. Racial and gender diversity was present as we

had three females and two male participants in the program. The high-potential assistant

principal group was represented by three African-Americans and two Caucasians. It was another

downtrodden moment to scour our leadership selection data and find a lack of Hispanic or Asian

representatives. Even more troubling was a lack of representatives with elementary school

experience. All of the participants were serving as assistant principals at either the middle or

high school level.

Data Collection

While the impetus for this project was based largely on quantitative data that helped

provide the context for the problem, most of the data from the action research team was

qualitative in nature. There is a rationale behind this. Through surveys, selection data, turnover data, and even third party analysis of the district it had been pointed out that leadership development was a pressing need. Despite having at our fingertips an overwhelming case for change related to how we supported and developed school leaders, the message never registered enough alarm to drive systemic change. As I started this work, it became clear to me that collecting more quantitative data about need and/or performance would be redundant. What was needed from this action research study was the stories of leaders in the trenches. Although we survey district principals once a year, rarely were assistant principals asked their opinions about their own needs and/or the support structures in place for their position.

Because of the need for these stories, I utilized discussion protocols in small focus groups to capture the stories of both the action research team and the participants within the development program. Every agenda included an opening activity that forced invividuals to share reflections related to leadership challenges. Protcols were used throughout the study to pull out implications related to case studies and literature. At the conclusion of each session, participants were asked to provide feedback using the I Like, I Wish, I Wonder protocol which provided a non-threatening way for participants to share what was working, what needed improvement, and to pose unanswered questions related to their leadership challenges and the curriculum that was presented.

By collecting data on the interactions between the district leaders, their reactions to the leadership competencies, and the process of developing a leadership curriculum, I was able to better understand "programs and policies through the perspectives of those who enact them" (Simons, 2009, p.4). Because of the highly bureaucratic and political climate of the district, studying the interactions of others in "specific socio-political contexts helps to understand not

only how socio-political factors influence the actions of individuals but the impact of these factors on the individual and the case itself" (p.4).

Interventions

The analysis of district data in my role as coordinator of talent management lead me to ask several questions of my direct report, the executive director of talent management. Through these conversations, we were able to clearly articulate the lack of professional development for leaders in the school district. During the onboarding phase of my current role, I asked my direct report if support would be given for an action research study aimed at building the capacity of high potential candidates in the district. He agreed.

As the work around leadership progressed, we conducted an in-depth review of our current processes for leadership selection, including the scoring of candidates as they participate in the screening and interview processes. Three realizations took place from this review: 1. There is a lack of principal-ready candidates in the district, 2. The candidates entering the interview process lack the technical and adaptive capacity to be successful, and 3. There is a lack of support for high potential candidates to prepare them for the rigors of the modern-day principalship.

I immediately went to work on the development of agendas and topics for the action research team meetings. Meetings were planned with a goal of meeting at least once per month, so coordinating schedules was a top priority to ensure participation from all A.R.T. members. Setting the agenda topics and developing/selecting appropriate protocols for discussion was another focus area. Because there was tension amongst some of the group members, the opening meetings focused primarily on establishing group norms. To level set, early meetings aimed at

building capacity on adaptive leadership theory. If the action research team members could not understand their own role in the complexity of our leadership problem, then it would be impossible for them to think about how we could provide meaningful development for our high potential leaders.

The next stage after norm setting focused on developing a better understanding of our own leadership competencies. We took a journey into unfamiliar waters, and worked toward consensus about the competencies and the behaviors that would exemplify each competency. This work had not been done before, but leaders had all been asked to buy-in to the existing competency framework despite the lack of conversation about the framework. The graphic below (Figure 8) displays the totality of the intervention timeline:

Figure 8. Intervention Timeline

This timeline was an important step in the process, because as our action research team got underway, there had to be continual updates provided to executive members of the district about our progress and our plan. As other factions and departments continued to show interest in leadership development, our timeline of interventions helped paint the picture for a long-term plan towards a sustainable model rather than an overnight solution.

As we worked with the action research team to build their capacity on the adaptive leadership framework, review our district leadership competency framework, and determine next steps for systemic leadership development reform, I also started developing curriculum for our future participants. One pitfall that the action research team wanted to avoid was an overly prescriptive curriculum that was too narrow in focus. In previous attempts at developing leaders, a session may only focus on one technical topic like budgeting. Budgeting has various technical and adaptive components, but we sought to create sessions that incorporated a multitude of tools, strategies, and experiences that built a range of competencies.

In order to create this experience, we relied heavily on the adaptive leadership framework. The series of professional development sessions followed the flowchart (Figure 9) below:

Figure 9. Adaptive Leadership Framework – Curriclum Flowchart

Using this curriculum flowchart as the guide, the curriculum became a combination of multiple tools aligned to the spirt of the conceptual framework that guided this study. During each session with the high-potential assistant principals we incorporated self-reflection activities, business analysis and decision-making tools, experiential case studies, and design thinking elements. The sessions no longer became a narrowly focused professional development seminar, but rather a forum for discussing the application of multiple tools to authentic problems in our schools.

As an example, participants in the "Diagnose the System" session, read a brief article about using a S.W.O.T. analysis, debriefed the article using a School Reform Initiative Protocol, partook in a group S.W.O.T. analysis related to a common data set, reviewed a case study from the SAGE Journal of Cases Educational Leadership related to a new principal diagnosing problems in their school, and were given an empathy field to conduct empathy interviews with stakeholders in their school about a problem of practice. This blend of educational, business, and design thinking tools built the leadership toolbox of participants and hit a range of leadership competencies that had been defined by the action research team. The graphic below (Figure 10) displays how different session topics were supplemented with a range of tools, research, and experiential tasks to build a wider range of competencies for each participant:

	Topic	Resources	Activities	Competencies	Taking it Home
Meeting Two	• Case Studies, and Problems • Adaptive Leadership: Diagnose the System	• (2015). O'Malley, M., Long, T. & King, J. "What do You Do All Day?!": Navigating the Challenges of School Leadership as an Early Career Principal	• Case Study HW Review • Cohort Building • Case Study • SWOT Analysis (Padlet for Group Share) • Empathy Interview Guideline	• Drives for Excellence • Establishes Strategic Direction • Cultivates Networks • Conducts General Data Analysis & Evaluation • Leads Change • Leads Through Vision & Values	• Review Conducting Open-Ended Interview Guide • Conduct Empathy Interviews with three stakeholders (Share Results on Slack)
Meeting Three	• Define and Ideate • Adaptive Leadership: Diagnose the Adaptive Challenge	• Technical vs. Adaptive One Pager • Technical vs. Adaptive Resource Guide • Car Mechanic Design Thinking Lap • Case Study • POV Outline • Connections Protocol	• Connections • Norm Review • Brainstorm • Dot and Narrow • Car Mechanic Lap • POV Mad Lib • Technical vs. Adaptive Venn Diagram	• Promotes Collaboration & Empowerment • Establishes Strategic Direction • Conducts General Data Analysis & Evaluation • Leads Change • Leads through Vision & Values • Pursues & Passes on New Learning	• Adaptive and Technical Venn Diagram based on P.O.V. • Case Study: Tipping Point Leadership (Post Responses on Slack)

Figure 10: Curriculum Session Outline

This table demonstrates how an adaptive leadership topic (Diagnose the System, Diagnose the Adaptive Challenge) led to the introduction to various resources, exposure to leadership behaviors, and the requirement for experiential and real-time tasks in each participant's school. It is important to note that one of the stronger elements of this curriculum was the weaponization of adaptive leadership theory. Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky (2009) provide a masterful guidebook in their joint work titled, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World*. This book moves beyond theory and provides practical steps to engage in adaptive work. This text was used as a guidebook and participants were given tactics, derived from my own summarizations of the text, to use to engage "on the balcony or on the practice field."

Along with the adaptive leadership and business tools used, there was a major incorporation of design thinking tools in the curriculum. Having previously been involved in a partnership between local public and private schools in conjunction with alumni from Stanford University's d.School, I was able to leverage content, training materials, and tools that exposed participants to an unfamiliar yet productive framework for solving school-based problems. The use of educational and non-educaitonal case studies was another pivotal piece of the project and the action research team was an important driver of the decision to incorporate both. During their work with the University of Virginia for school turnaround efforts, members of the A.R.T. were exposed to a wide range of both types of case studies to help district and school leaders understand and solve school-based problems.

In each session, case studies were used in the session or as a homework assignment between sessions. Throughout the program, participants were required to use an online posting forum, SLACK, to respond to questions posed in the case studies, discuss their use of different tools, and ask questions from cohort members related to their own leadership challenges. This proved to be an effective way to continue the dialogue started in sessions as a support and reiteration of the content. Protocols were also used to allow the researcher to "pursue emergent issues, probe topics or deepen responses, and to engage in dialogue with participants" (Simons, 2009, p.43).

Data Analysis

The large amounts of qualitative data that was collected through the audio recordings of action research team meetings and professional development sessions for high potential assistant principals was immense. Leech & Onwuegbuzie (2011) agree, "with large data sets, conducting

qualitative data analysis manually typically is not practical or desirable" (p.71). In order to maximize time and provide the research study with the most pertinent analysis possible, this action research study used available technology resources to code the qualitative data collected. Specifically, the qualitative data was analyzed using the NVivo 11 software package. Using this tool allowed "multiple types of analyses, so that the underlying theories and relationships in the data could emerge" (p.71). This type of software package is helpful when considering the methods being used, because "regardless of the type of qualitative data (e.g., interview data, survey data, observational data, personal journals, diaries, permanent records, transcription of meetings) or the type of research design, NVivo can be used to conduct the analysis" (p.73).

This action research study drew upon on multiple sessions from the action research team and the professional development sessions. Audio recordings were transcribed word-for-word and loaded into the NVivo software tool. After loading the transcriptions, strands of text were coded based on emerging themes; technical vs. adaptive challenges, leadership vs. authority; individual leadership competencies, and district leaders vs. assistant principals. Because of the potential for the emergence of these themes and others, the use of NVivo will "allowed for consistent coding schemes and tools to query and audit the coding processes...and more robust interpretations of data" (Bergin, 2011, p.12). In addition to using the coding and query tools in NVivo, there were also key word searches conducted to hone in on important concepts and topics. Because each action research team meeting and professional development session included the use of the I Like, I Wish, I Wonder protocol, these became quick hit items that espoused a significant amount of important data related to the pros, cons, and improvement areas for the program and the curriculum.

CHAPTER 4

CASE STUDY

Positionality Statement

As a practitioner within the system, I had the unique ability to work on school leadership selection and school leader professional development. The duties and responsibilities of my position gave me immediate influence and access to leaders and potential leaders within my school district, as well as the space and support to engage these individuals in sustained professional development. My role allowed me the opportunity to interact with the Board of Education, the superintendent, the District cabinet and other district and school staff including administrators and teachers. One of the advantages that I still maintain is my previous school experience. Having been a high school teacher and a high school administrator grants me a certain level of automatic credibility that others at the district level have to work for years to attain.

In addition to the titles and environments I have served, I have also been able to lead projects at the school, learning community, and district level that granted me credibility and access to a wide network of individuals within the district. This too, has added to my political influence within the current system. Culturally, I reap the benefits of being a young, upper-middle class, Caucasian, heterosexual male in the southeastern United States. Knowing that I come from a privileged background has made me ever cognizant of other social groups that may or may not experience the opportunities that I have.

Although I was in somewhat of a middle-management role and having never served in a principal position, I had a great deal of influence on the work of other departments, my immediate colleagues, and the district as a whole. Because I was in charge of updating and aligning data and Board policy, my voice carries weight regardless of the meeting and those in attendance. My interaction with others can often be bullish if I believe it has cause, but I consistently worked to develop meaningful relationships with others so that we can work together to offer input into problems and/or projects.

An interventionist and problem-solving philosophy drive my relationships, attitude, and goals. I have strong opinions about the role educators play in the life of a child, and I firmly espouse that public schools, and the employees who work in and for them, are not doing enough to move the needle for underserved populations. Because of my strong opinions on this topic, I tend to focus on issues of inequity, achievement gaps, and cultural competency. These are not popular topics in the current system, but there is a growing coalition of educators and industry professionals within the district who are starting courageous conversations on these complex issues. Having access to data that can highlight these issues within the current system, as well as the ability to shape and drive policy change, position me as a leader in the area of change management. Because of my political stature, growing experience level, and focus on intervention, I was able to easily navigate the action research process and build a strong action research team. As Heifetz (1994) suggests, "Social progress may require that someone push the system to its limit" (p.21).

Context of Case

With over 200 principal seat changes since 2011, this district is in need of serious

intervention to curb the growing gap between what principals are expected to do and what they

can do. Even more concerning than the alarming number of principals vacating the job, is where

the vacancies continue to occur. This district has always existed as two polar opposites, the

north and the south. As socio-economic disparities, student social and emotional needs, and

school performance gaps continue to widen, concerns about principal turnover in high-

needs/high-risk schools will undoubtedly follow. The graphic below (Figure 11) displays a

graph demonstrating how often principals in the most high-risk schools are leaving at a faster
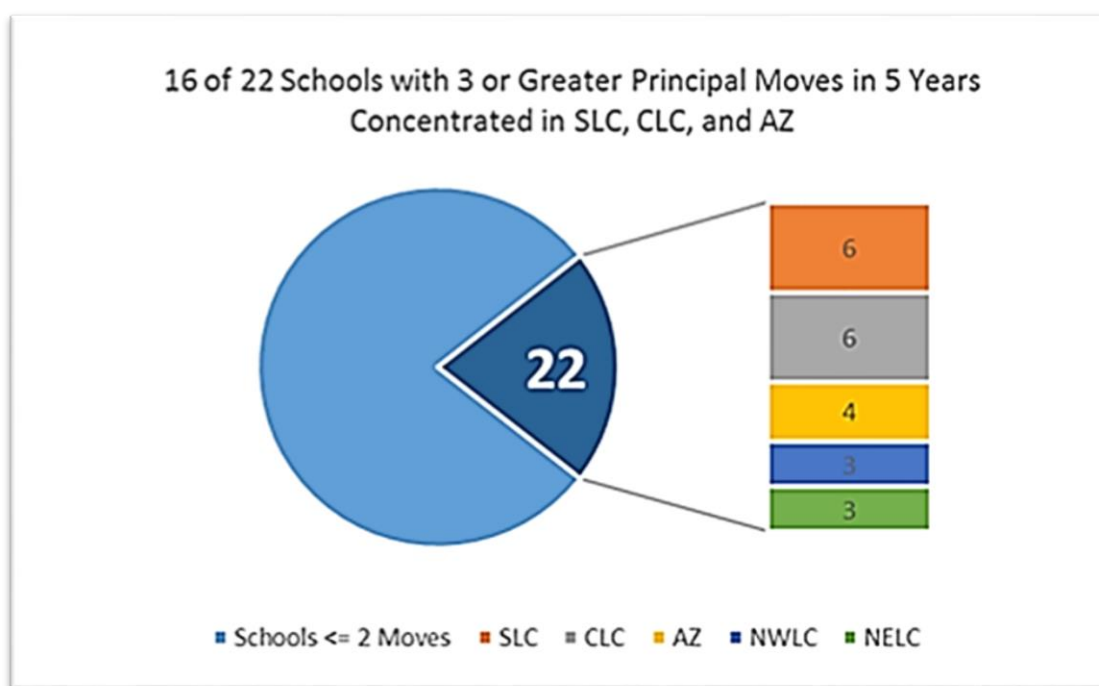
rate than their higher-performing counterparts:

Figure 11: Principal Turnover Disparity Chart

This chart demonstrates that sixteen of our most high-risk schools have had more than three principals in a five-year span. That kind of continued turnover continues to glorify and give credence to the pervasive notion within the district of the "have and have nots." In addition to these disparities, there is growing systemic dysfunction at the central and learning community levels. Recent third-party reviews have continued to highlight an ever-evolving siloing of district departments and a lack of communication between central office and the school house. The graphic below (Figure 12) demonstrates the vicious cycle that exists that is preventing progress towards sustainable efforts to support school and central office leaders:

Figure 12: Cycle of Systemic Dysfunction

As the chart demonstrates, there is a growing disparity between leadership groups (Cabinet, Executive Staff, Academic Leadership Team, School Leaders) about what constitutes effective leadership. School leaders are held to different standards of communication, performance, and accountability while sub-par performance at central office can sometimes lead

to promotion. This creates imbalance and unpredictability at both levels that is unsustainable. An added problem is the competition between district and learning community departments. There are several satellite leadership development offerings as well as partnerships with neighboring post-secondary institutions, but none of these programs and/or offerings are aligned to the district leadership competency framework. Additionally, these offerings and partnership are spread across multiple departments that strive to outperform others. While some competition can be healthy, the current state is more cannibalistic in nature and is detracting from progress. Most importantly, there is a mounting reality that leadership development efforts are being added onto existing job responsibilities rather than given specific staff and/or budget line items. These added tasks are not being given the attention they deserve, leading to poor program development and a lack of sustainability.

Importance of Case

The relevance of this case in the educational landscape cannot be overlooked. During the course of this action research case study, there were several opportunities to meet, discuss, and share the problems we face as well as our potential solutions with public, private, charter, and for-profit consultants. The need for improved school leadership is not specific to the district within this case study, but is a growing issue nationwide in all schools. In all of our interactions and presentations of this work, we were met with nods of understanding and confirmation that we were on the right path. The unfortunate reality is that the problems and barriers related to limited resources and politics are not our issues alone. In every instance, the curriculum and process we used during this case study was applauded, but everyone from Denver to Los Angeles shrugged a confused shoulder when asked how to better navigate the resource and politics issue.

This brings back the growing importance of the adaptive leadership theory as a solution for not only systemic change, but potential worldly change. By engaging in the process of truly identifying our part in the problem and by then engaging each other in dialogue about the technical and adaptive issues we face, we may be able to foster better solutions. This is not a problem for one organization, but for educational organizations as a whole. There are continued conversations with consultancy groups, non-profit organizations, and charter organizations as a result of this case study. The hope is that they can use some of steps we took to navigate their own political environments or even highlight the need to disband the bureaucracy that we all face in our mission to make education better.

As the work to disband bureaucratic barriers takes place, it is important to note that the success of the case study depended largely on the ability to brand the work. By calling the action research study a pilot, we were able to create enough political cover to proceed. By branding the project within the context of other talent management programs, we were able to leverage the success of those other pgorams in order to move the work forward. The graphic below (Figure 13) displays the GO L.E.A.D. graphic used to brand the action research case study:

Figure 13: GO L.E.A.D. Program Graphic

The GO (Growth & Opportunity) is part of a larger brand of talent management programs including student teacher placement and development, recruiting, performance management, alternative certification, and new teacher induction. These programs existed at different levels of implementation before the action research study began, but this graphic was developed to symbolize a new effort towards systematic leadership development. The words below the graphic depict the overarching goals of the program to address the needs present with the district. This graphic was used to brand agendas, presentations, strategy guides, and social media posts to raise awareness about the project. Without a solid branding platform, efforts to build programming within large bureaucratic structures are doomed to fail.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

Findings Related to Research Questions

Through review of the transcripted sessions with both the action research team and the professional development sessions, several themes emerged. More importantly, the yielded answers to the following research questions:

1. How can an action research team made up of former principals develop a leadership competency framework and curriculum that requires participants to engage in adaptive work?

2. How can a social learning model that requires participants to engage in adaptive work develop the competencies of high-potential assistant principals?

3. How does building the competency of high potential assistant principals help create adaptive leaders who are more principal-ready?

In relation to question one, it was determined that although an action research team can create opportunities for learning, staying power is difficult in a large bureaucratic system. In the time that I have transitioned out of my role on the talent management team, the GO L.E.A.D. program is on shaky ground. Notwithstanding my transition, the talent management division as a whole has lost ground as a thought leader in the district with the development of the new district strategic plan. Bad relationships and poor treatment of staff has led to a devaluing of the division's effectiveness, therefore devaluing all of the existing programs.

Question two focused on competency development for high-potential assistant principals, but the case demonstrated that leadership competency can be very subjective. However, increasing exposure to different leadership tools has substantial value. The conversation about competency, skill, trait, and responsibility was constant during this case study. Despite the buffers we created to secure our own district leadership competency framework, outside influences and philosophical continue to shift the focus away from a competency framework and more towards a list of job responsibilities.

Question three proved to be the most provocative and utopian. Through the analysis of the data and the results of the case study, it can be determined that in dynamic systems with varying school needs, principal-ready is a misnomer. Site-specificity, supervisory support, community involvement, and a number of other factors were discussed as potential factors related to principal success. As much as we discussed the effectiveness of the development sessions and how we could improve, the conversation always came back to an amibigous answer about how well a candidate would perform as a result of the development. Future researchers would have to conduct a longer range study analyzing multiple factors of principal success to determine how effective a professional development series might be, but in order to do so, there would have to be agreement on what the success factors are.

In addition to answering the research questions, several themes emerged from the data that are important to the case study. The following table (Table 2) depicts what themes emerged from the action research team and the professional development sessions:

Table 2: Emerging Themes from Action Research Team and Professional Development

Action Research Team Findings	Professional Development Findings
Safe Space for Practice	Engaging Stakeholders
Technical and Adaptive Leadership	Collaboration in Small Group
Collaboration	Appreciation of Leadership Tools
Role Definition	Time for Reflection

As the table demonstrates, there were several themes that emerged from the data. Each of these themes are discussed at length in the subsequent pages of the findings chapter. It is important to note that the findings were separated based on the transcripts from the action research team (Fall 2016) and the professional development sessions (Spring 2017). Members of the action research team were present and participatory during both the action research team meetings and the professional development findings.

Action Research Team Findings

Safe Space for Practice

Review of the A.R.T. transcripts provided fruitful qualitative data about the nature of the district, the need for systemic change, and exposed substantial gaps for providing professional development for leaders. One of the emerging themes that was present during data analysis was a shift in thinking for district leaders and the action research team about how we provide safe spaces for leaders to reflect. When discussing the environment we create for principals, one participant exclaimed:

So think about it in the context of our schools. Are we giving people a chance to regroup when they mess up? Are we putting the different things that we expect school leaders to do in scenarios where they have the opportunity to fail? Are we reframing failure in a way that is not as serious or high accountability or high stakes?

This was an especially important point of view from one participant on the action research team. Rarely have we provided opportunities for leaders to come together and engage in any process of shared decision-making or reflection without the fear of high-stakes accountability. By rethinking our modalities for leadership development, and by providing a safe space for reflection, we could potentially give leaders a stronger chance to succeed amongst the myriad of challenges they face. Beyond the number of challenges that our leaders face, there was a genuine concern about how we provide safe space when challenges grow in their complexity. Another member of the research team stated:

As the complexity grows, there is more of a chance of failure. How are we going to re-frame that for our people? How are we going to provide that avenue that safe space in practice so that they understand that we have an opportunity to regroup, pull everything back together, continue down the path of complexity but continue to work towards a solution and getting better?

The idea of providing safe space was present in the dialogue of the A.R.T. meetings, and was incorporated into the norms set by the group at the onset of the A.R.T. meetings. As we continued to dive into adaptive leadership theory and the discussion of how our professional development sessions would flow, the need for safe space became a non-negotiable. The

following statement demonstrates a consensus point amongst the group about what would be provided for the participants in the program:

> So I think the beauty of that is by bringing these people in together and having less people in the room and telling them and showing them that they do have the freedom to actually go out and try some things in their school. We have the ability to try to provide some of this safe space for practice for the people who come to this program. By bringing them in and allowing them to share their experiences, give them real time feedback, and build upon those experiences with each other, I think we can start to create some of the safe space for practice.

This was a crucial element of the program. High-level executives in the district readily admitted that the stakes were too high, but pushed the group to think about how we could provide our school leaders with an opportunity to meet, discuss, and learn without fear of retribution. There was general concern about the organization's readiness for this type of step, but the action research team agreed to keep the meetings safe from evaluation and/or punitive measures.

Technical and Adaptive Leadership

Another emerging theme came from the continuous debate about technical and adaptive leadership. As we worked to redefine our competency framework, members of the team describe behaviors they expected to see in principals and classified those behaviors as either technical or adaptive. The results of this activity yielded a better-defined list of specific leadership behaviors for the entire district. What became clear though is that while there were heavy leanings towards

the adaptive side, there is still a need for technical leadership functions. One participant expressed the following about balancing technical and adaptive leadership:

> So in order to execute on a plan you really have pull out of both buckets. That is a pretty big interpretation right there. In order to execute, you have to make sure you have sound technical processes, and make sure that your transactional management is taken care of. You also have to engage in adaptive work of changing beliefs, changing attitudes, changing opinions.

As the group deciphered between the adaptive and technical aspects of school leadership, it became clear that the adaptive leadership theory was extremely relevant. In fact, one participant expressed that "this is a way that we can start to frame our supports." What was very clear is that leadership requires both. During the exercise to define the district competencies, the action research team identified 17 required technical behaviors, 35 adaptive behaviors, and 12 behaviors that could be classified as both technical and adaptive. The following table (Table 3) displays how the action research team classified leadership behaviors using the technical and adaptive definitions:

Table 3: Leadership Competency Framework Defined Behaviors

Leadership Competency Framework Defined Behaviors				
Leadership Competency	Technical	Adaptive	Technical & Adaptive	Grand Total
Builds the Organization's Talent		3	4	7
Conducts General Data Analysis and Evaluation	4		1	5
Cultivates Networks	2	5	1	8
Drives for Excellence	1	4		5
Ensures Strategic Execution	3	4	1	8
Establishes Strategic Direction	1	3	2	6
Leads Change	1	6		7
Leads through Vision and Values		5	1	6
Promotes Collaboration and Empowerment	1	4	1	6
Pursues and Passes on New Learning	4	1	1	6
Grand Total	17	35	12	64

Both technical and adaptive behaviors were identified as important, but there was still discussion about the organization's values for each and how those values shape decisions about personnel. One participant interjected the following:

> What do we actually expect with people who run our buildings? You see numbers like that, but what we say we expect might differ from what we actually expect? Alternatively, maybe we are not always the ones controlling who stays and who goes? Therefore, what are the systemic values about what we expect because we may be saying that we expect adaptive leadership, which we have seen right? Majority of what we expect is adaptive, but again how many of our principals have been fired for technical?

Much of the conversation revolved around the concept of organizational values. The action research team, made up of district leaders was not inclusive of all of the decision makers in the district. One thing that became abundantly clear was that power players throughout the organization hold different views on technical and adaptive leadership. Because of the wide array of thoughts and philosophies about leadership, the A.R.T. believed it was important to build both capacities. The following synopsis from one participant expresses the need to build both capacities:

> Because the challenges are so complex, because they are so ambiguous in our organization, they require both technical approaches and adaptive approaches. We cannot just have one person who is standing on the rooftop saying, "This is what we're going to do." If we do that, we run the risk of isolating people. Our leaders end up standing by themselves because they have not promoted

collaboration. They have not built the organization's talent, so they are standing by themselves.

The idea of standing alone came up in conversation many times, and it was stated that a principalship might be the loneliest job in the district. The problem that causes is that the team truly expects leaders to engage with internal and external stakeholders as they work through the challenges they face. This became a key focus area in the development of the professional learning sessions. The A.R.T. purposefully sought out protocols and leadership tools that required high-potential assistant principals to think about a wide range of stakeholders, engage each other in thought partnering about school-based decisions, and seek out advice from members of the action research team.

Collaboration

Requiring collaboration might seem like paradox, but the action research team identified the lack of collaboration as a major issue in the district. When asked why we do not require new principals to engage in shared decision-making or collaborative inquiry, one member stated, "Because that's not our culture. Our culture is not one of true collaboration and building up as we have a cultural norm of intense competition." What this truly exemplified was a lack of trust amongst leaders in the district. If one leader is engaging in a promising practice, the likelihood of that practice being shared has been minimized by a culture that promotes the top performer, not the collaborator.

This realization pushed the team to think about how we deliver professional development to our prospective leaders. We wanted to break the mold and move away from direct instruction

techniques that focus on one skill, at one time, and with no conversation between participants. One member of the team suggested the following to ensure a better experience for our leaders:

> The result of that is you start to build a competency mastery, so rather than just coming in and working on one competency, we engaged in activities that are hitting a number of competencies. Because it is both collaborative, they are doing that with us and with their peers, and they are doing it in their schools and receiving real-time feedback.

Promoting collaboration and empowerment is one of the defined and expected leadership competencies in this district, but it continues to be a competency that we ignore. As the action research team continued their conversations, it became apparent that we were going to push the envelope and ensure that we were getting people together and engaging in collective inquiry.

Role Definition

"Have we done a good job of defining the principal role?" What became quite clear during our action research team meetings was that the principal role needed clear definition. As one member of the team stated, "that's not how that is written into those leadership roles." The organization continues to put emphasis on managerial and operational task management, but the work continues to evolve. When discussing the leadership competency framework, one member of the team stated, "Now you have your two columns, right? You have a set of technical standards and you have a set of adaptive standards, which even to me, even looking at the old framework versus that is a hell of a lot better." Although simplistic, breaking down the school leader role into two distinct yet broad buckets provided clarity for the team. Immediately, district leaders began using the adaptive and technical adjectives to determine strengths and

weaknesses of their current principals. This was not a punitive task, but the verbiage and understanding of the differences created clarity of expectations.

In addition to using the framework of technical and adaptive leadership, the meetings also inspired conversation about traditional vs. non-traditional routes to the principal role. Traditionally, the path to the principalship took an individual from classroom teacher, to department chair, to administrative assistant, to assistant principal, and finally to principal. As the roles and responsibilities in the district have become more vast and specialized, it became clear that we needed to think differently about paths towards leadership. The other problem is that roles dictate access work. For example, the first time a school leader is able to access budget information is when that school leader becomes a principal. This creates problems as people are then expected to learn, manage, and succeed in areas that are brand new. As one member of the team pondered, "How do you develop peoples' leadership competency regardless of the role they are in? That is what we need. That is what we need. Because right now, it's resting on, "You have to get this position before you get any glimpse into anything."

The lack of clarity about roles extended beyond school principals. One member of the team suggested, "Unclear role definitions are a problem, not just at the principal level but at all levels. Who is supposed to do what in terms of leadership and what does that actually mean." This idea helps shine light on one of the main problems that exists within this district. Nobody steps up and owns leadership development. Ownership is spread thin across various divisions, departments, and personalities and the result is a lack of clarity about what principals should do and even less clarity about who holds principals accountable.

As the conversation about role and clarity emerged through the adaptive and technical leadership frameworks, the next part of the conversation shifted to identification and selection. One district leader pondered, "You do not have to be in a role, you do not have to have followers to be a leader. Therefore, as we think about creating a pipeline for leadership roles in our district, we need to determine how we tap people. How do we know that people are leading if no one is following them? How do we identify those individuals?" This was an especially important discovery as we have encountered several individuals who think they are ready to be a school leader, but their interviews and demonstrations of leadership skills are severely lacking. The result is confusion for that individual, confusion for the people who have mentored that person, and district-wide morale declines, as everyone wonders why that great person did not move into a principal job. The problem is that we have not defined the role. What one leader states is principal-ready does not match another person's definition.

A lack of clarity about the principal role was linked to more than a lack of clarity. As the group continued to discuss the role, one member stated, "And so that is big, that would be a big culture shift in the organization as a whole to start breaking through those concepts of what does it actually mean to lead. It has nothing to do with your role; it depends on your level of technical capacity and your level of adaptive capacity." The concept of breaking through an organizational norm of murkiness was an important one, and one that carried the group to begin working with a small group of high-potential school leaders.

Professional Development Findings

Engaging Stakeholders

The adaptive leadership framework forces leaders to consider the perspectives of various members of an organization. Because of the strong focus on shifting behaviors, attitudes, and opinions of the collective organization, much of the professional development for the high-potential school leaders focused on identifying different stakeholders and analyzing potential pitfalls of each group. At different times throughout the training, we asked participants to explain how the training shifted their thinking about how to engage at work. One participant stated the following:

> This helps me identify the people who are knowledgeable who have power and influence over what is going on. In addition, it may not be band parents, but its parents or community members, or a board member, or a teacher in our school. Therefore, you have to think about all those potential actions before you immediately go and do that deep analysis before you immediately jump to action without taking some of these things into consideration.

This statement solidified our thinking about how we structured the professional development series. Rather than over engaging in theory, we were able to put the theory into actionable protocols and decision-making tools that participants could then put into practice. The tools we created posed a significant difference between traditional school leadership in the district and a new ideal for the adaptive leader. As another member professed,

> This is a shift in that the administrator is actually taking time to solve a problem specifically based on them as a person. That is what this is. This is not, hey, we

are going to buy this new shiny thing. Hey, we are going to roll out this program. This is about people. By even coming up with some technical solutions to some of these issues, you are going to be changing your culture underneath by engaging your people. It is huge work.

One of the case studies used in the professional development posed questions about staff performance management. The scenario, which put the participants in the principal's seat dealing with external and internal pressures to fire a teacher inspired interesting conversation. As expected, members immediately jumped to solutions. Some talked about creating a corrective action plan, some discussed the individual conversations that they would have, and some started pointing the finger at others who may or may not be responsible for the teacher's behavior. What none of them did was ask about how any decision could affect organizational health or individual groups of stakeholders. That is where we pushed. We gave them a table that required them to list all of the stakeholders in the situation.

What this did for the group was forced them to slow down. It forced everyone to start thinking about how one action can have a ripple effect that could undermine future and past successes. After listing the stakeholders, their motives, and their values, one member recanted their previous ideas and said, "I think there are lots of groups to consider before you take any action." That change in thinking represented what this professional development series overall goals and objectives. We wanted participants to move away from the quick-fix technical solution, and to start thinking bigger about their decisions. We did discuss how some decisions required a technical answer and even the dangers of over-analysis, but what became clear was a new focus on thinking about the organizational whole rather than the crises that present themselves every day.

These awakenings embodied more about the participants understanding of change management as well. As one member suggested, "the principal can't make a decision based on a small group of kids and leave out all the other areas. I do not think that is a wise decision just because you have a group of parents who are vocal and think you need to make a change." Concisely, this statement resonated throughout the room as a beacon that our thinking needed to get bigger. Members started to understand that "adaptive leadership meant navigating loss or preparing people for loss, rather than just saying we are going in a completely different direction." Rather than take this approach, members of the group started to discuss how they could "start to model and actually show our people where we are going and acknowledge that we are going to ask people to make some changes."

More important than the discussion in the sessions was the infield practices that emerged. One member of the group discussed a problem-solving session that they led at their school, and stated that they "engaged a range of stakeholders to actually identify the real problem and a range of possible solutions. We went through a clear process and protocol to get to one thing that we are going to try right now for you, the person who told us about the problem." This comment, and several others like it, suggested that we cracked traditional viewpoints about leadership in the district. As we progressed throughout the semester, other members shared similar triumphs as they engaged stakeholders who may have been invisible in their schools before.

Collaboration in Small Group

As we probed for feedback from participants, one emerging theme was the need to keep present and future leadership development groups small. The group, which included members of

the action research team, never went above ten people. As Lencioni, (2012) positions, "inclusivity should be achieved by ensuring that the members of a leadership team are adequately representing and tapping into the opinions of the people who work for them, not by maximizing the size of the team" (p.23). The size of the group played a huge part in the interactions that took place. It became very uncomfortable, and actually impossible, for members of the group to stay silent during presentations or discussions.

One of the ways that the group worked to build an atmosphere of trust and open feedback was through the creation of group-defined norms. As one of the district leaders stated after the second professional development session, "I think that these are certainly some of the most unique norms that I have seen." The group norms that were established are as follows:

- Listen with a Willingness to Change

- Put Your Passion Out There!

- Be Willing to Jump on Someone Else's Island!

- Encourage Meaningful Disagreement

These norms were created by the group and were used to guide all discussions. Members of the group corrected each other when the norms were not being followed, and took on the roles that the norms defined. By having a small group, we were able to create norms that worked for and that encouraged rigorous and deep conversations. If the group were too large, I do not think that the norms would have stood up to difficult conversation. As one member stated at the closing of a session, "I like the challenge to think differently. To hear from other people and to

hear about their passion, from their heart that requires all of us to think about the work differently."

It was specifically stated by all members of the group that the "benefits of the professional development series would fade if the group became larger." Members asked if future cohorts could also be kept small so members could continue to "build on the ideas of others." As many district-led programs use a large group structure, it was beneficial to hear from the group that a smaller setting allowed for more depth in conversation and honesty amongst members.

Appreciation for Leadership Tools

One component of the leadership development sessions that was monumentally important was the use and sharing of specific business and leadership tools. Taken and adapted from the theories discussed, the action research team worked to action-orient the theory by integrating known tools and by creating some others. The use of tools and protocols in every meeting kept the meetings active and allowed members to leave with a tangible process that they could apply at their local school. This emerged in the data as an important piece of the work as one member stated, "I like the exposure to different tools. The opportunity to try them out a little bit. I have already used like that things are framed around our schools and I like that I am getting the sense now of what we are trying to do here. We are experiencing the tools so that we can build into our repertoire for leadership."

The applicability of the tools was also worth noting. Participants were given homework assignments using many of the tools so they could build the capacity of others at their school, and work to solve both technical and adaptive problems. One high potential leader reflected

about the tools by professing "All of the tools that we are sharing, using in the course of this work, the hope is that we start to connect those to our day-to-day. Yeah, we are not entirely comfortable using a SWOT analysis, but now it is a tool that we could potentially use if confronted with a problem." The lack of knowledge about the tools incorporated into the professional development sessions was astounding, but also indicated that they were effective. Many of the high-potential leaders confessed to having never heard of or used the tools presented in the sessions. By leveraging the power of some analytical and problem-solving tools, we armed our participants with new leadership levers that they could pull in their schools.

The exposure to tools sparked interesting insights about the leaders' abilities to solve problems in their schools. One participant exclaimed, "It is the answer to how do you solve problems. How do you solve problems? Right? If you only have one tool, we all know that is going to lead to less than stable solutions. The more tools we have in our toolbox, the more we can get to solve this problem or that problem or whatever problem you are facing down the line." Leaders in today's schools have to leverage different tools to solve different problems. By building the leadership toolbox of participants, we felt that each member felt empowered to do more in their settings. These tools did not necessarily solve problems, but they did push members to get the right information, to analyze for trends, and to pinpoint action steps rather than rushing to an ill-fated technical solution.

Time for Reflection

An emerging theme from the group was the importance of thoughtful reflection during the professional development sessions. Reflection time for case studies, current problems of practice, individual session topics, and general leadership practices was incorporated into every

session and strongly protected in the meetings. During a reflection activity, one participant

identified the importance of reflection as follows:

> This gives you a framework. If you stay within these realms, they will hit multiple
> frameworks after you go through and experience a day, a year, think about your
> technical problems that you have not solved. How did you do it? Think about
> your data. How did you react to it? What were your strengths? What were your
> weaknesses? Going through all of those questions, were you able to bring people
> in and discuss it, or did you hold it so close that you let it not be collaborative?
> These tools provide that kind of framework, to allow one to be reflective in
> multiple lenses.

Through our discussions and activities, we all came to realize that being reflective about

our practices was the most important part of the work. In a way, we began to view reflection as

the strongest tool available to us as educational leaders. One contributor described reflection as a

sort of exercise that all leaders should do by asserting the following:

> I think what you are going to learn here that you have muscles, but in order to
> work that muscle, you have to be reflective. That is working the muscle. You are
> going to leave here with the tools and the knowledge, but you have to work it just
> like if you are going to build your body, you have to work that muscle. In
> addition, you work it through reflection; because you are going to encounter
> someone, something, or some problem, and you are not going to get it right. And
> that is okay as long as your reflect on the steps you take.

More than reflecting on actions and decision-making steps, the sessions also helped participants reflect on the actual problems. Rather than immediately jumping to solutions, we pushed everyone to slow down and go deeper in their analysis of problems. Members were asked to separate the technical and adaptive aspects of different issues so they could actually determine what actions needed to be taken. Many times, there was confusion on this issue. Members would mistake a technical issue for an adaptive issue or vice versa. By reflecting and using some of the protocols and definitions, members were able to see that their solution did not match the challenge they were trying to solve. One member of the group asserted the following about the importance of reflecting on the problem itself:

> So there are a couple of different points here, right? One is the idea about really digging deep into what the real issue might be. What is the actual issue with this scenario, because if I assume I may miss it. We hear root cause analysis, but do we ever really do that or do we start reeling off potential solutions? Sometimes we spend too much time thinking about potential causes to the problem, but additionally thinking about all the different stakeholders who are potentially affected by the decision you make may help shine a better light on what is going on.

Providing sacred time for leaders to reflect is not a norm in this district, but this group was given that time and meaningful conversations about the needs of our schools emerged as a result. In every meeting, participants were asked what they appreciated and every time the opportunity to reflect with colleagues emerged in the discussion.

Refined Thinking

My entry into the district office was an interesting one. As I left the schoolhouse and began my work as a program specialist supporting twenty-four schools, I was consistently told that the next step in my career path would be the role of assistant principal. As I worked throughout that year, I had experiences beyond the scope of an assistant principal. My supervisor at the time, an area executive director, advised me that I could better serve the district in my role as a program specialist and that I would lose my ability to drive wide-scale change as an assistant principal.

A year later, when I was asked to apply for a coordinator role in the accountability department, that same area executive director, who was now in line for an area superintendent job, told me that the role I was applying for was a dead end. This was my first realization that the district had serious misconceptions about leadership, and was overly focused on title and/or role, rather than true leadership capacity. Through conversations with some trusted colleagues and advisors, I decided to take the job in accountability.

That role provided me with the opportunity to work with a supervisor with a different mentality and thought process about leadership. I was exposed to meaningful work, allowed to share my opinions, my work was marketed, and I became a true thought partner. The work we completed was noticed, and after a year, he was promoted to an area superintendent role. It was at this time that I moved into my current role as coordinator of talent management.

It is important to tell this story because both of my former bosses hold two of the highest positions in the district. Both have been successful principals, and both were asked to be a part of the action research team for this study. While there are similarities in job titles, these two

individuals are polar opposites in their approach and philosophy. As predicted, the reaction to this study from these individuals was completely different. One jumped in with both hands and never missed a meeting. The other chose not to participate. This was not a personal attack or admonishment of the work, but a lack of willingness to give up control and challenge the status quo.

As I worked on this action research project, I did find champions for the work. People who were engaged and people who were willing to challenge their own status if it meant the betterment of leadership development practices in the district. The project did not come without challenges. Bureaucracy, imagined lines of ownership, and the desire for power and control crept into decision-making conversations and caused delays, personal and professional frustration, and a resource vacuum. Confusion about definitions, competencies, roles, and timelines took place outside of the action research team meetings. Despite communication efforts and an unwavering ideal for the work, some claimed that the project lived in a silo.

These challenges should not be a surprise. We were changing role definitions, support structures, and conversations that have been perpetuated for decades. Regardless of these external factors to the project, we did manage to build the capacity of both district leaders and our high-potential assistant principals. The frameworks and tools used have spread beyond the confines of our small cohort as the district leaders involved have asked for more school-based leaders to read, practice, and reflect using the adaptive leadership framework.

My story has changed since this study has concluded. I am no longer in the talent management position, but have been appointed as a principal within the district. This shift, beyond being the biggest in my professional career, has proven that traditional role definitions

can be challenged. I am the first principal in this district who has not been an assistant principal beforehand. In various roles inside and outside of the school, I was able to hone my craft, build a strong network, and challenge the status quo enough to be recognized as an ideal candidate for an elementary school principalship. Now, I sit in a different chair and experience the lack of support, role complexity, and bureaucratic incompetence that I tried so hard to change. With these frustrations in mind, I continue to push forward and use the tools, protocols, and resources that were created and collected to build the leadership capacity of my teachers, coaches, and students. If the district is too slow to move and support a growing coalition of leaders, then building that coalition from the ground up is the only remaining option.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION/IMPLICATIONS

Promotion of Participants

One of the more important implications of this action research project rests in the fact that 50% of the professional development participants accepted principal positions within 90 days of completing the program. Spread across the district geographically and by level, these leaders have now moved into the most difficult position within the district. These three have joined seven other new principals in the district, but have already taken a stance during new principal cohort meetings to introduce concepts and practices that were shared during the development sessions for this action research project. Although not selected, the remaining three high-potential candidates have all participated in school-based interviews for open principal vacancies since the end of the project. These candidates remain diligent and await their opportunity to put the tools discussed into practice.

The selection of participants into principal roles is a strong indicator that the program reshaped the work of our building leaders. However, the district still struggles with the concept of principal and school fit. As we worked to build the technical and adaptive capacities of leaders, and would like to align these leaders to any school, there is still a propensity for placing candidates in interviews based on geography and work experience. In future, it would be ideal to conduct a study to determine if geographic placement and work fit have a lasting impact on a principal's success.

Vetting of Project

One of the more difficult pieces of this project was the continued vetting of timelines, program requirements, and curriculum. Different points of view are always welcome, but true to form, some district leaders fell in love with specific pre-existing programs or frameworks. While some of these competency frameworks did provide amazing insight into the skills, traits, and values that individuals might hold, they did not provide additional support or curriculum materials to build upon the competencies and/or skills of participants. This lack of background knowledge led to a cycle of starts and stops during the ramp up to start the program.

What started as a small action research project also gained the attention of cabinet-level members of the district who were interested to see what outcomes were promised. As we progressed through the work, the talent management team presented an overall update to the board of education about current programs and structures. This action research project, which was branded GO L.E.A.D. (Leadership, Equity, Action, Data), was originally in the presentation that was to be shared with the board of education. At the last minute, the slides outlining the program were struck from the presentation, leaving all involved deflated and somewhat defeated. In spite of this setback, we pushed forward and received enough backing from members of the academics and talent management team to move forward.

Another competing factor was simultaneous leadership development studies. The district has already invested, through the professional learning department, a significant amount of monetary resources with a couple of local post-secondary institutions to build leadership development content. The immediate question that came up when our project was presented was, how does this program align with the post-secondary programs? In an act of bravery, bordering on defiance, we claimed that our program did not align, but was actually intended to

supplant both partnerships. We presented factual information about the structure of our professional development series, which drew upon the adaptive leadership theory, experiential learning, and design thinking and compared with the traditional sit-and-get model being pushed by the existing partnerships. We demonstrated, effectively enough, that our program drew upon promising practices for adult learning and we were able to sell the program as a pilot study to determine what could work in the district.

Consultancy with Other Professional Organizations

Another way that we built momentum for the program was to invite outside organizations in to provide feedback about our professional development model. One consultant, who conducts a majority of their business with the University of Virginia's school turnaround efforts, visited us twice to discuss our plan for implementation. At the beginning of the process, this consultant helped us strategize selection of participants, gave us tips about navigating the political environment, and confirmed that our model was aligned to promising practices present in the current research about leadership development.

We contracted with this group during the program to conduct behavioral event interviews with all of our GO L.E.A.D. participants, so that we could provide an additional source of feedback and performance data for each candidate. This proved helpful, as we were able to look and discuss the data about the interviews with each individual and as a group. Additionally, this gave each participant two sets of defined leadership competencies to view their capacities. This consultant came back at the end of the program to discuss next steps in the district's implementation of a leadership development program.

In another effort to seek feedback about our work, my direct supervisor and I took a high level overview of our program, the obstacles and barriers we faced, and aggregated feedback from the participants to an education summit in Los Angeles. At this meeting, members of public school and charter organizations discussed leadership challenges they faced. We presented our initial findings and program outline, and received several suggestions for navigating the political waters in our district to continue the work of the program.

Through these external vetting experiences, we received feedback on how to continue the push in our district. More importantly, we received an incredible amount of validation about the structure of our program, the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings, and the overall goals of the program. By incorporating this feedback into our defense of the program, we were able to leverage a greater network of support to push our work. The endorsement of the two organizations solidified the position of leadership development as a necessity in the district, which I will discuss later.

Removal of Old Structures

At the conclusion of the first cycle of action research, my supervisor and I presented the findings from the action research team and outlined our plan for the professional development series. During that meeting, we provided a timeline for the next cycle, presented the high-potential leader selections for the program, and discussed emerging themes from the group. One of the more pertinent themes that did emerge was that the old structures for leadership development, and especially new principal development, should be disbanded and replaced with our model. It was suggested that cohorts of new principals participate in a more formalized principal onboarding experience to cover the technical aspects of the job (systems, payroll, etc.).

For development, the group wanted to require all new principals to complete the GO L.E.A.D. program as a requirement for their continued employment as a principal in the district.

This idea gained immediate traction as executive leaders in the district affirmed that our current model needed replacement. Even with this early momentum, the removal of old structures has not taken root. Because of a lack of an existing onboarding structure and a shift in focus at the superintendent level, the existing new principal development program continues as it has for years. This program has its benefits, but does not tap into the adaptive skills required for today's leaders. As a current participant in the program, I have been subject to content and curriculum structure that defies promising practices for adult learning theory. There is a lack of relevance in the program, and new principals are being exposed to compliance-related tasks rather than pushed to lead strategically to reshape their organizations.

Strategic Plan Implications

Not all is lost despite the persistence of older leadership development structures. As the district has just recently revealed the new five-year strategic plan, the superintendent and others made it a point to include leadership development as a key component of the district strategy. What remains to be seen is where the ownership and structure for leadership development will come from. Will several groups still vying for ownership of leadership development, there has been little word about the theoretical and/or conceptual frameworks that will be used to lead a new wave of principal for the future.

Current sessions are being held behind closed doors to determine what initiatives will be implemented under the focus area of leadership development, but all the while, the old structures persist. In addition to a lack of understanding and communication about what this pillar of the

strategic plan may mean, principals still struggle under the yoke of leaders who do not exhibit strong technical or adaptive capacities. Best practices for adult learning and current research on ways to develop strong leaders are used sporadically at best, and are even ignored. Our desire to provide the best possible outcomes for students, teachers, parents, and community members will rely heavily on the efforts of the district to align its practices for leadership development. My only hope, is that this alignment occurs before current and future waves of high-potential educational leaders throw their hands up in disgust and leave the profession entirely.

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APPENDIX A
SAMPLE A.R.T. AGENDA

GO L.E.A.D. Project – Action Research Team Meeting

September 2, 2016 (1:00PM-3:00PM)

A G E N D A

1. Welcome and Agenda

2. Informed Consent Document

3. Group Norms

4. Scope of Work: Problem, Theory, Purpose

5. Text Protocol: (2004). Heifetz, R. & Linsky, M. *When Leadership Spells Danger*

6. Homework: Leadership Competency Review

7. Calendars

Quote of the Week!

"It must be noted that collaboration takes tremendous work, flexibility, time and a willingness to serve and receive from colleagues. Collaboration goes beyond chit-chat, nor is it simply getting along with others. I define it as 'dialogue that will influence or alter instructional techniques, resulting in an impact on student learning in the classroom.'"

Dr. Jeff Rose

APPENDIX B

PRESENTATION EXCERPT OF PROJECT OVERVIEW & PROPOSAL

The Work

GO L.E.A.D. Project Timeline

1st ART
Problem, Purpose, Theory

3rd ART
Adaptive vs. Technical
Competency Chalk Talk

Clearview Consultation
Program Feedback & Validation

Spring Leadership
Selection Round

| August | September | October | November | December | January | February | March | April | May | June | August |

2nd ART
Behaviors and Bias

4th ART
Data Debrief
Program Outline

1st Leadership Bootcamp
Cohort Meeting
Bi-Monthly Meetings (10 Total)

Conclusion of Cohort One
Start of Cohort 2 (Spring Selections)

Leadership Bootcamp Cohort One
Continuation of ART Program Review

Emerging Themes and Learnings from ART

- Immediate need for standards-based leadership support/development program
- Technical and Adaptive Leadership provides school leaders with effective framing for increasingly complex work (SLC & AZ Experience)
- Principal candidates need a safe space for collaborative and experiential learning
- Support needs to focus on next round of principal candidates (existing pool)
- New framework should replace existing principal development (develop leadership onboarding)

APPENDIX C
SAMPLE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

Cohort One – Meeting Three

March 13, 2017 (4:30PM-6:30PM)

A G E N D A

8. Welcome

9. Connections – *Social Learning*

10. Review Group Norms – *Social Learning*

11. Adaptive Leadership Framework – *Adaptive Leadership*

12. Empathy, Define, Ideate – *Design Thinking*

13. Point of View Statements – *Design Thinking*

14. Taking It Home – *Adaptive Leadership*

15. Case Study – *Social Learning/Experiential Learning*

16. I Like, I Wish, I Wonder – *Design Thinking*

Quote of the Week

"Sometimes, you need to turn to less-obvious people at your company to come up with solutions."

-Erica Dhawan