



Research and Evidence-based Practice That Advance the Profession of Education Administration

Fall 2012 / Volume 9, No. 3

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AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice
2011-2013

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Published by the

American Association of School Administrators

1615 Duke Street

Alexandria, VA 22314

Available at www.aasa.org/jsp.aspx

ISSN 1931-6569

When Districts Drive Leadership Preparation Partnerships: Lessons from Six Urban District Initiatives

Margaret Terry Orr, PhD
Faculty and Director of the Future School Leaders Academy
Educational Leadership Department
Bank Street College of Education
New York, New York

Abstract

This article is a cross-case analysis drawing on case study research conducted in 2009-2010 on six leadership preparation programs and their district-university affiliation, using research on consumer action and inter-organizational relationships to understand their relationships in developing leadership preparation programs. The six urban districts were encouraged, through foundation support, to become active consumers and directly influence the quality and nature of preparation that met their leadership needs. How districts became more active consumers, the different ways in which they engaged local universities, and structures needed to support their shared programs and relationships is described. Their strategies and challenges can be instructive in guiding districts and universities on how to best support and sustain such programs.

Keywords

partnership, leadership preparation, district, university

Introduction, Methods and Conceptual Backgroundⁱ

In recent years, urban districts have invested in leadership preparation as an important lever for improving schools and student learning. Often, federal and foundation funding support made such work possible.

One national foundation initiative (The Wallace Foundation) encouraged six districts to become active consumers and directly influence the quality and nature of preparation that met their leadership needs.

All six engaged universities in program design and delivery. How districts became more active consumers, the different ways in which they engaged local universities, and the structures need to support their shared programs and relationships are the focus of this article.

Their experiences can be instructive in encouraging other districts to be more proactive in shaping local leadership preparation and in guiding districts and universities on how to best support and sustain such programs.

This article is a cross-case analysis (Stake, 2006) drawing on case study research conducted in 2009-10 on these six programs and their district-university affiliations (Orr, King, & La Pointe, 2010).

Researchers collected data using a mixed methods approach to construct a case

study on each district's program and its university affiliation(s), based on in-depth interviews of school district and university officials, program directors and faculty, and candidates and program and district documentation.ⁱⁱ

Researchers conducted a cross-case analysis to identify themes and patterns in how districts enacted more consumer action and the nature of the organizational relationships that enable and sustain districts' affiliation with local universities for leadership preparation.

The analysis used institutional theory to understand organizational consumer action (Burch, 2007; Lubienski, 2003) and coupling theory (Weick, 1976) and research on effective collaboration (Langman & McLaughlin, 1993; Ring & Van De Ven, 1994) for explication of district-university relationships.

Key points from such research that are applicable to district involvement in leadership preparation with local universities are:

- The most important attributes of consumer action, particularly when entering or trying to influence a new field (Burch, 2007; Lubienski, 2003), were how districts create cultural and market forces—as consumers—to influence universities—as suppliers—or take action by becoming producers themselves in being innovative in preparing aspiring leaders.

ⁱThis article is based on a paper presented at the 2011 annual convention of the University Council for Educational Administration, Pittsburgh, PA, November 2011. For a copy of the full report, see Orr and others (2010), *Districts developing leaders* available at <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/school-leadership/key-research/Pages/Districts-Developing-Leaders.aspx>.

ⁱⁱFor more information the study's methodology, see the full report (Orr et al., 2010).

- Intra- and inter-organizational coupling attributes influence organizational outcomes (Burch, 2007; Langman & McLaughlin, 1993; Ring & Van De Ven, 1994; Weick, 1976). This research directed attention to the tightness or looseness of relationships around purpose and process between organizational units and between institutions, and clarity and agreement around goals, structures, roles and processes for effective relationships.

For purposes of this article, the relationships between districts and universities around leadership preparation are termed as an *affiliation* with the district and involve some form of formal arrangement for a university in a district-based program or a district in a university-based program. The results show that district-university affiliations require relationships within each institution and between the two institutions. They offer insight

into the potential for and challenges of greater district influence around leadership preparation and provide lessons for local universities in how to be more responsive to district needs and priorities.

About the Districts

The cross-case analysis focused on six districts and their university affiliates, as listed in Table 1.

Five were small cities with populations of 23-56,000 and one was a countywide metropolitan area of 92,000. Their schools ranged in number from 34 to 157. Five districts had not made Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) and the sixth district had several schools that had not made AYP, according to federal student progress requirements.

Five districts affiliated with one local university and one district eventually affiliated with four local universities as part of their grant supported leadership preparation. The nature of these affiliations is the focus of this article.

Table 1

Districts, Their AYP Status, Primary University Affiliates for Leader Preparation and Number of Candidates Prepared

School District	Number of Students	Number of Schools	DISTRICT MEETING FEDERAL ANNUAL YEARLY PROGRESS	Primary University Affiliate	NUMBER OF CANDIDATES PREPARED
Boston, Massachusetts	56,168	143	No	University of Massachusetts Boston	49
Jefferson County, Kentucky	92,000	157	No	University of Louisville initially, and later added Bellarmine and Spaulding Universities and Indiana University, Southeast	111 ⁱⁱⁱ
Providence, Rhode Island	23,344	52	No	University of Rhode Island	59
St. Louis, Missouri	30,000	84	No	University of Missouri–Columbia	41
Springfield, Illinois	28,000	34	No (for some schools only)	Illinois State University	35
Springfield, Massachusetts	25,233	55	No	University of Massachusetts Amherst	80

* AYP status of all schools and districts is for 2007-08.

ⁱⁱⁱ Some of these candidates were prepared through other affiliated institutions in recent years.

Findings

Type of consumer action

There were three ways that the six districts leaders asserted consumer behavior to encourage more innovative, district-aligned preparation approaches for better prepared school leaders:

- **Becoming a discerning customer**
This approach is defined by how much district leaders asserted clear expectations for school leader standards and competencies and used them to recruit and prepare aspiring principal candidates. Jefferson County used this approach when it met with local university officials over two years to create its own school leadership standards and then expected program personnel to use them to frame program content and delivery. Over time, most of the other five districts' leaders adopted some form of this approach for their own use and for their affiliated programs.
- **Becoming a competitor**
In this approach, district leaders created their own leadership preparation program aligned to their standards and reform priorities and in competition with other local programs. Boston, Providence and Springfield, MA used this approach. Offering their own leadership preparation programs gave districts the greatest control over outcomes but proved to be the most costly and time-consuming leadership preparation improvement strategy.

- **Becoming a collaborator**
In this approach, district leaders used contracts and other inducements (e.g., scholarships and designation of "preferred provider" or collaborator status) to induce local university programs' personnel to change selection criteria and customize content, instructional methods, internships, and assessment practices to meet their needs. Jefferson County, Springfield, IL, and St. Louis used this approach. Programs created by focusing changes in the universities proved to be more sustainable over time than were district-based programs.

Combining consumer approaches that clarified the district leadership preparation expectations and induced local university personnel to change to meet district needs appeared to have the greatest potential for broad-reaching, sustainable change in preparation quality and graduate readiness for school leadership, in these six districts. The university-based programs were still in operation after grant funding ended, but only one of the district-based programs was sustained.

Nature and types of relationships

An understanding of inter-organizational theory provided insight into the factors that enabled and sustained district-university relationships during the grant period, and for some, beyond.

A review of research showed that four factors influence the success of shared purpose among units within an organization or two or

more organizational affiliates (Langman & McLaughlin, 1993; Ring & Van De Ven, 1994).

These are:

- A shared commitment and complementary goals;
- Appropriate roles and clear responsibilities for their shared purposes;
- Processes to support decision making and problem solving;
- Shared resources.

Further, available research showed that the tightness and looseness in agreement and relationships between units and among organizations, as well as other local conditions, influence innovation, direction and sustainability of their shared endeavors (Weick, 1976).

Applying this research to district-university affiliations for leadership preparation

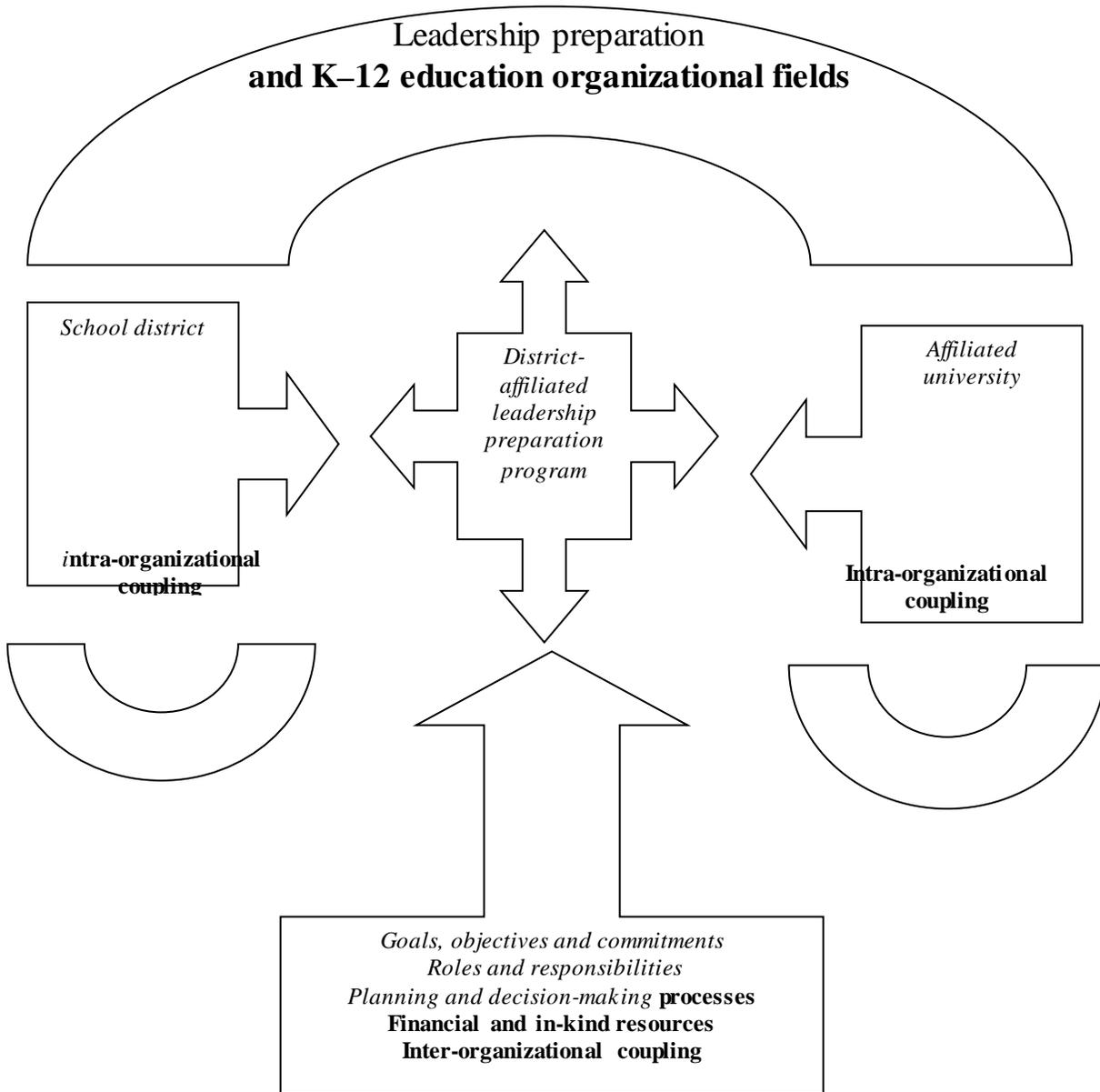
entailed examining three types of relationships:

- Inter-organizationally: between districts and universities.
- Intra-organizationally: between the program and other units of the district.
- Intra-organizationally: between the program and other programs and units of the university.

As shown in Figure 1, these three relationships, as discussed below, varied in goals, structures and processes, their degree of coupling, and how they were affected by their organizational fields.

The tightness or looseness of the relationships within and between each institution and the external context (such as state and federal accountability and fiscal climates) directly influenced program design and its alignment with other district units and university programs.

Figure 1. District-university affiliation for leadership preparation: Structures, processes, domains of coupling, and field influences.



Inter-organizational Relationship Between District and University

Whether the program was a district-initiated program with university input, a university-led program based on district standards and support, or cooperatively-developed and – delivered programs, each grappled with the four elements core to inter-institutional relationships.

Goals, objectives, and commitment

In all six school districts, leaders were committed to creating a district-focused preparation program as a component of their broader district reform initiatives. Similarly, by becoming affiliated with the local districts, the universities committed to supporting leader preparation tailored to local needs. How districts and their affiliated universities developed shared goals and objectives and made institutional commitments occurred in one of three ways:

- *Contractually developed partnership.* In Jefferson County and St. Louis, district leaders established priorities for program missions and objectives, which their affiliated universities agreed in their proposals to or contracts with the district.
- *Emergent collaboration.* In two districts, Boston and Springfield, MA, officials developed their programs' mission and objectives through a lengthy process during which they met with several local university faculties over time. Out of this process grew their programs' design and commitment to one university each. Providence selected one university as a partner but was active in program design and adopted the Institute for Learning

(IFL) principles and Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) modules for its program.

- *Co-constructed collaboration.* One district, Springfield, IL, and its affiliated university, ISU, constructed a shared program mission and objectives and collaborated on program design and delivery.

The cross-case analysis showed that the more collaborative the affiliation, the more likely the district and university shared goals, objectives and commitments for leadership preparation.

Roles and responsibilities

Regardless of approach, the district-affiliated programs had the following roles to support program design and delivery: bridge leaders, program leaders, frontline workers, and other contributors.

This finding was consistent with other partnership research (Goldring & Sims, 2005; Grogan & Robertson, 2002). In all six districts, at least one district staff member was responsible for the program and bridged between the district and university on program matters. In each affiliated university, there also was a designated person who had primary program responsibility and served as a bridge to the district.

In all six districts, program leaders were responsible for program oversight and coordination, candidate selection and assessment, and, at times, development and support of the coursework and internship experiences. They handled problem solving and tracking and reporting on candidates' progress. Who served as program director or coordinator depended on the type of affiliation. District-initiated programs had district staff members as

the program leaders. In districts that established standards but not programs, the universities' department chairs or program coordinators led the district-affiliated programs.

In more collaboratively developed programs, such as in St. Louis and Springfield, IL, program management was split between the districts and universities. In Providence, the bridge person, who was an adjunct at the affiliated university and worked in the district, served as the program coordinator.

The designated faculty member managed the program in cooperation with the affiliated district and facilitated partnership relations. Often this person was a former district leader or had other district experience (such as the program coordinators in the four district-affiliated universities in Jefferson County).

The faculty member may have had some autonomy to make program decisions, balancing district and university needs and priorities. Typically, these faculty members continued teaching and had other administration responsibilities within their departments as well.

To manage the processes for program delivery, the district and university staff formally shared the core work in one or more areas: candidate recruitment and selection, content and course development, course instruction, internship support, and assessment.

In most district-affiliated programs, district officials and staff took a more active role than university staff in candidate

recruitment and selection, internship assignment and supervision, and candidate assessment.

In the more collaborative relationship, these responsibilities were shared. Across most programs, much of the course instruction was provided by university-based faculty, with some district staff participation in some classes (as speakers or resources). In some programs, district officials and staff taught some courses independently (Springfield, IL) or co-taught courses with university faculty (Jefferson County).

Planning, decision making, and governance processes

The six district-university affiliations had limited formal, shared decision-making and governance processes. Four districts had formally defined and written agreements that stipulated inter-institutional arrangements, through contracts, Memorandum of Understanding, or a competitive grant process.

None of the district-university programs incorporated an advisory committee or established a formal meeting structure for shared governance, oversight, and problem-solving.^{iv} The more collaborative the affiliation, the more planning and decision-making processes were shared, although these were not highly structured and all six districts lacked formal shared governance.

In several sites, district and university representatives, when interviewed, talked about the "relationship" aspect of their shared work—how well they knew each other, and how they talked frequently and informally about program-related issues.

^{iv} Springfield, IL, did begin its program development with an advisory committee, but the committee disbanded after one year at the request of its members, who asserted that their assistance was no longer needed.

Financial and in-kind resources

In addition to foundation grant support (which typically paid for program director time and some program costs), districts and universities contributed other resources. District officials most commonly contributed human resources (specifically, bridge and program leaders for program design and operation), information and expertise on operations and procedures, space for course instruction, internship placements, and internship supervisors.

University officials commonly contributed faculty expertise in course development and instruction and internship support, credit and degree management, candidate support, and higher education resources such as libraries and career placement centers.

Sometimes university officials contributed further by forgoing potential income—by offering reduced tuition or waiving tuition altogether, or by granting course credit for district-delivered instructional experiences or credits earned at other institutions as part of the program.

In some cases, resource contributions (particularly universities') were spelled out in a contract or partnership agreement; in other cases, these contributions (particularly from districts) were added over time. Generally, the more collaborative the affiliation, the more district and university officials contributed financial and in-kind resources.

District contributions were primarily in-kind and thus more sustainable. The costs of universities' financial contributions (particularly forgone tuition) had to be weighed against the benefits as university officials evaluated sustained participation.

Intra-organizational Relationship: Program Fit within the Districts

How the district-affiliated leadership preparation programs fit with other district functions was similarly examined in terms of goals, responsibility, decision-making processes and shared resources.

Officials in the six districts created an overarching goal and commitment to leadership preparation as integral to their district reform work, but were not always explicit generally or in connecting preparation to all core units. Specifically, superintendents' attention to leadership preparation as part of their reform agendas varied from general to explicit and focused. These commitments changed over time, particularly with superintendent turnover.

How district responsibility for leadership preparation was managed in relation to other related district functions varied, as shown in each program's location on the district's organizational structure and articulation with district leadership-related systems.

Typically, programs were placed under one of three departments: human resources (HR), curriculum and instruction, or in a stand-alone office for leadership preparation.

Programs housed in HR departments appeared to be better positioned to connect with other leadership strategies, including school leader recruitment, selection, placement, support, and evaluation than where these responsibilities were divided across multiple district departments. This location influenced, in turn, how decisions were made about the program, how graduates were supported in their post-program careers, and the resources used to enhance program experiences and sustain the program as funding ended.

Intra-organizational Relationships: Program Fit within the Universities

How the district-affiliated leadership preparation programs fit with other university programs was similarly examined in terms of goals, responsibility, decision-making processes and shared resources.

As with districts, each university's program commitment varied in part by the strength of its broader commitment to local leadership preparation, from none (one university had no formal program) to extensive (with other local district partnerships).

Each university's commitment and goals were also derived from its mission. Most of the districts partnered with one public higher education institution (see Table 1). The exception was Jefferson County which branched out to partner with all four higher education institutions in its region—two public and two private.

Public education institutions made good partners for these school districts because of their comparatively lower tuition, public missions, and production of teachers and other education personnel for the region.

Most institutions also had community service in their missions, which by definition made them open to inter-institutional relationships.

For example, part of ISU's mission was for faculty to engage in "public service and outreach activities [that] complement the University's teaching and research functions." (Illinois State University, 2010) Its faculty actively sought diverse outreach opportunities, evidenced by prior collaborations with other Illinois school districts.

An extension of this community service orientation was an institutional willingness to affiliate, even when the institutions were not in close proximity. Personnel in four districts developed programs with universities that were located some distance away (25 miles for Springfield, MA, 30 miles for Providence, 75 miles for Springfield, IL, and 126 miles for St. Louis).

University officials overcame the distance primarily by rethinking ways of assigning and supporting faculty by locating the program at the district itself, rather than requiring candidates to travel to the university.

The other three districts worked with universities located in their cities—but even in these cases, some or all of the courses were offered on site in the district or their schools to improve candidates' access and connections to district work.

Within the universities, the development of a shared program mission and objectives was undertaken by the department of leadership preparation which in turn helped to integrate the program's fit with other departmental offerings.

Responsibility for the affiliated program differed in how centrally it was connected to other leadership preparation programs. Most US leadership preparation programs are within departments or programs of educational leadership in university-based graduate schools or colleges of education (Baker, Orr, & Young, 2007).

In contrast, only three of the district affiliated programs were master's degree or certification programs that were situated within departments of educational leadership at a university's school or college of education.

This arrangement enabled the departments to share program faculty with the program, (sometimes) mix candidates from multiple programs in common classes, and include the district-affiliated program in broader departmental planning, program improvement, and assessments, such as for national accreditation. Where the programs were housed in the universities determined, in part, who was responsible for decision-making, problem-solving and resource sharing.

Typically both the departments and the deans of the college of education shared in making decisions pertaining to faculty allocation, tuition, course and credit approvals, and degree requirements, because these depended upon institutional and state higher education policies. The exception was URI, which did not have a department or program for leadership preparation; resource contributions and decisions pertaining to the program were made by the school of education.

In three districts, programs were organizationally housed or connected with their universities' continuing education divisions (for credit management purposes), although they "borrowed" university faculty as instructors and program coordinators.

The continuing education divisions offered more flexibility for awarding credits and offering off-site program delivery. But, locating the program in the continuing education divisions appeared to limit the educational leadership department's broader involvement and potential benefits for its faculty, programs, and ongoing improvement work. It also complicated cost-benefit analyses of the university's resource investments because of the misalignment of faculty and credit management in different divisions.

Challenges

The primary challenges for districts and universities to sustaining the partnerships (and thus the programs) were leadership turnover and sustaining funding.

Turnover

During the six years since they were first funded, all six districts experienced superintendent turnover, including two districts that had four or more superintendents each during those years. In half the districts, the primary district official or staff member also changed positions, left the district, or retired during this period.

The districts with less superintendent and bridge-person turnover appeared to have had more sustained program development and implementation, with fewer changes in design and delivery and less disruption in service. The two districts with extensive superintendent turnover suspended their programs for at least a year during that period.

Universities also experienced turnover in leadership and key staff during these six years—in deans, department chairs, and faculty who were liaisons to or taught in the program.

However, the effect of these changes seemed less critical, as the pattern of working with the district had already been established. In some cases, faculty and university leadership turnover created new opportunities to reexamine courses and learning experiences.

The exception was St. Louis, where both the district and the university experienced significant leadership turnover, with the accumulated effect that the university lacked the faculty resources to offer the program under the contracted conditions.

Turnover in department chairs and deans of education limited the potential for institutions to learn from their affiliated program experiences and apply new ideas to their existing programs.

In addition, the year-to-year funding arrangements between some districts and their affiliated universities seemed to limit how much program work could inform universities' efforts to reform their other preparation programs. According to interviewed university faculty, uncertainty about funding made it difficult for them to plan in advance or to use this program development work to benefit their other programs.

Sustaining funding

The foundation support was significant to these district-affiliated programs, both programmatically and organizationally, but, was short lived. Without additional funding, many district-affiliated programs struggled with continuation, with some sources of support replaceable and some organizational arrangements more sustainable than others.

Some districts or affiliated universities were able to garner additional grant funds to support program operations and the internships. Sometimes district tuition support was shifted to the candidates and the universities reviewed how much they could sustain their reduced tuition support.

University-based programs were more easily sustained because some or all of the programs could be absorbed into existing programs and departments, while district-based programs lacked such infrastructure for continuation.

Discussion and Conclusions

These cases offer critical lessons for districts as they undertake similar partnerships. First is that

districts should take an active role in defining their leadership preparation needs to potential university partners.

Second is that districts should develop partnership agreements, either formal or informal, that define both expectations for the program content and delivery and the roles, responsibilities and resource contributions of both partners.

Third, districts should integrate leadership preparation with other leadership expectations, programs and priorities, including recruitment and retention strategies, leadership development and supervision. Through alignment and coherence, districts can maximize the potential benefits of developing leaders that fit their local conditions and school improvement needs.

The experiences of these six districts show that district leaders have the capacity to articulate and assert their leadership needs and priorities with local universities. Becoming more active consumers, by articulating these priorities and working with local universities to change program designs, appears to be most influential and potentially sustainable.

The benefits, for districts, in articulating these priorities, however, depends upon the extent to which district leaders use these priorities internally to connect new programs to other related district units, particularly those pertaining to school leader selection, support and evaluation.

Many of the six district-affiliated programs examined here were similar to the district-university partnerships documented in previous research (Browne-Ferrigno, 2004; Goldring & Sims, 2005; Grogan & Robertson, 2002). Like these other cases, the more collaborative the relationship between district

and university, the more likely shared goals, objectives and commitments, designed roles and responsibilities, shared work, planning and decision making processes and resource contributions existed, all characteristic of effective inter-organizational relationships (Langman & McLaughlin, 1993). In these six districts, however, only some of these organizational structures were formalized.

The coupling lens (Weick, 1976) provided insight into how these programs were successful without more formalized inter- and intra-institutional structures.

The cross-case analysis showed that looser, informal district-university relationships appeared to be better suited for addressing ongoing program issues, decision making, and adapting to changing expectations and priorities with leadership turnover.

However, such informality appeared to hinder systemic input or formal program review, monitoring, and feedback. Tighter coupling arrangements appeared to be critical to facilitate communication, particularly when program leaders were not co-located, and to monitor program accomplishments and make

decisions pertaining to sustainability. Generally, the more transparent the collaboration, the more sustainable they are when faced with leadership changes and other challenges.

How the programs fit within the affiliated universities had both structural challenges and mission-related opportunities. Since most affiliated universities were public institutions with missions were consistent with program outreach, they appeared to be willing and able to be flexible as district partners for leadership preparation.

However, this “flexibility” often meant finding ways to *work around* the existing institutional structure—such as offering the program through the continuing education division—rather than *adapting* the structure.

The extent to which the universities used their program affiliation experience to rethink their approach to school leadership preparation generally seemed to be restricted by the resource contribution demands to sustain the affiliation, and the disruption caused by leadership turnover and changes in institutional direction.

Author Biography

Margaret Terry Orr earned her PhD from Columbia University and is a faculty member of Bank Street College of Education in New York, NY. For over 20 years she has prepared school and district leaders and engaged in research on effective preparation and its benefits for leaders and schools. E-mail: morr@bankstreet.edu

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Making an Impact Statewide to Benefit 21st-Century School Leadership

Kimberly Kappler Hewitt, PhD
 Assistant Professor
 Department of Educational Leadership &
 Cultural Foundations
 University of North Carolina, Greensboro
 Greensboro, NC

Ann W. Davis, EdD
 Clinical Assistant Professor
 Department of Educational Leadership &
 Cultural Foundations
 University of North Carolina, Greensboro
 Greensboro, NC

Carol A. Mullen, PhD
 Professor
 Department of Educational Leadership &
 Cultural Foundations
 University of North Carolina, Greensboro
 Greensboro, NC

Carl Lashley, EdD
 Associate Professor
 Department of Educational Leadership &
 Cultural Foundations
 University of North Carolina, Greensboro
 Greensboro, NC

Abstract

How can institutions of higher education, local education agencies, and departments of education partner to build capacity for 21st-Century school leadership? The model (IMPACT V) we describe utilizes a systems-wide partnership approach to cultivate shared leadership within influenced middle and high schools statewide to leverage technology as a catalyst for school reform. The model supports online cohort-based graduate programming, leadership coaching, ongoing professional development, and technical assistance across the state of North Carolina. This professional commentary describes theory related to the coordinated school–university partnership context. Also discussed are practicalities regarding how this approach prepares practicing school leaders more innovatively for the challenges of 21st-Century leadership.

Keywords

21st-Century school leadership, systems-wide partnership, technological innovation, professional development

Technological innovation calls for leadership practice that anticipates exponential change for which educators (teachers, school administrators, and all school staff) alike must prepare.

In an effort to build capacity for 21st teaching and learning in schools, leaders will need to help teachers use technologies to effect desirable change for learners and help communities understand new approaches to teaching and learning.

A second element of change involves re-familiarizing how everyone (educators, students, parents) conceives of time as a learning resource. Learning occurs 24/7, not just during the school day.

A third change necessitates refashioning how educators think about assessment so that it can be much more authentic, which raises expectations for students as they receive latitude and freedom in producing projects and other assignments.

A fourth change involves helping educators think differently about the tools of learning because traditional tools, such as workbooks and textbooks, paper and pencil, will be replaced by technologies such as computers, smart phones, laptops, and smart boards. Knowledge itself is expanding at a “breathtaking pace” given that “new technical information ... is predicted to double every 72 hours by 2010” (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 4).

The future of public education necessitates an approach to technology leadership that fosters robust partnering efforts among schools, universities, and funding agencies. As university faculty who carry responsibility for preparing future school and district administrators, we must implement the

shared goals of school and district administrators and educational entities alongside our partners. We are all being challenged to prepare leaders and PK–12 students for a future that is difficult to grasp and for which we need to link the preparation and research needs of public schools to higher education institutions while preparing future leaders through state-of-the-art interventions (English, Papa, Mullen, & Creighton, 2012).

As such, we must accept the challenge to “rethink education and what it means to be educated in a time of rapid change” (Warlick, 2012, p. vii). Rethinking the classroom and the roles of educators and administrators allows for momentum beyond the limitations of traditional education.

The charge for educational leadership programs then is to prepare “for a new generation of learners within a new information environment for a future that we cannot clearly describe” (Warlick, p. vii).

Digital Education

Becoming critically aware as educators

Challenges of the digital era have profound implications for how we “do” schooling in anticipation of tomorrow’s world. Critically aware educators argue that we have no choice but to *disrupt* public education as we know it. Educators who are concerned with issues of power, democracy, and diversity ask critical questions about how marginalized students are being educated, prepared, and funded in America’s schools. These educators are aware of the need to educate all students to high expectations for academic performance.

Disrupting education means pushing past traditional ways of thinking, interrupting routines of practice, and unsettling the work of teachers and students to stimulate new ways of learning, organizing schools, and thinking about the purposes of education. As Darling-

Hammond's (2010) data-based trends attest about these ideas, "The new mission of schools is to prepare students to work at jobs that do not yet exist, creating ideas and solutions for products and problems that have not yet been identified, using technologies that have not yet been invented" (p. 2).

Using digital tools in teaching

Classroom teachers must prepare students for their global futures by using digital tools to help achieve key educational goals (Christensen, Horn & Johnson, 2008; Zucker, 2008). Effective and thoughtful uses of digital tools allow students the "opportunity to interact with their educational world in a way that most closely mirrors the rest of the society" (Lehmann & Livingston, 2012, p. 76). The digital revolution in schools can help deliver on the promise of transforming education for all stakeholder groups (McLeod & Lehmann, 2012).

Redesigning teaching and learning

The magnitude of these technological changes in schools is unparalleled: "The limitations of space, pace, and time have been dissolved with today's anytime, anywhere, on-demand work spaces and high-tech tools designed to help us synergize our talents and passions" (Sabella, Valesky, & Isaacs, 2012, p. 125). By 2014, a predicted 22 million learners will take online coursework (Asselin, 2012).

Online teaching is about "more than translating what we do as instructors in a face-to-face (f2f) format to an online learning interface and platform . . . Creating impactful and successful 21st-Century online programs entails radically redesigning teaching and learning" (Hewitt, Lashley, Mullen, & Davis, 2012, p. 49).

Christensen, Johnson, and Horn (2008) predict that within a decade half of all courses

at the high school level will be delivered online and that a customized personalized approach to learning will maximize student success. They are not projecting that 50% of students will be taught outside of schools but rather that 50% of coursework will be taken online at school. The teacher's dramatically changing role will be to supervise, tutor, assist, and mentor the online learner.

Digital Leadership

Such profound and rapid change at all levels of teaching, learning, and leading requires specialized leadership: "Issues of instructional strategies, classroom materials, professional development, hardware and software acquisition, data-based decision tools, and security require a knowledgeable leader/manager and an institutionalized commitment to appropriate cutting-edge technology usage" (Brown, 2011, p. 55).

Not only does technology leadership require new knowledge and skills, but it also necessitates a fundamental shift in leadership to become participatory and collaborative. Because of the infusion of technology in our schools, leadership as we presently know it will experience further transformation. The gap between autocratic and participatory leadership must grow even wider if we are to successfully use technology for maximizing teaching and learning (Creighton, 2011).

Leading with technology innovators

Creighton (2011) attests that technology initiatives in schools often yield in-groups and out-groups. A problem is that "in-groups are usually composed of technology consultants and coordinators partnered with teachers possessing adequate to exemplary skills and interest in using technology" (p. 15), whereas out-groups lack the necessary expertise and commitment. A school technology team ("in-group") is a collection of school personnel who

are interested in technology utilization and who experience professional development about technology implementation. This group becomes the “go to” for the school staff in that it contains the key technology users and innovators within the environment or learning domain. This group’s task is to introduce technology utilization to the remainder of the school staff while advocating for the adoption of widespread technology innovation.

The “out-group” contains personnel who are unfamiliar with technology, slow to adopt, resistant, or committed to other innovations. Effective technology leaders address this in-group/out-group disjunction so that cliques do not form and they promote participatory leadership and collaboration among faculty and staff beyond the building level.

Building leadership capacity

Leadership preparation must cultivate leaders’ ability to respond innovatively to these new demands for technology leadership. The IMPACT V model we briefly discuss is an innovative partnership approach to building leadership capacity within and beyond school campuses to leverage technology as a catalyst for educational reform.

To set the context, we describe how leadership preparation faculty can build capacity for school and classroom leadership in schools with the highest need. *Impact V: Building 21st-Century School Leadership* reflects our commitment as scholars and practitioners to work with 12 such schools across North Carolina. Our goals as a faculty leadership team revolve around the conceptualization and intent of this 2-year project (Year 2 concludes summer 2013). The focus is 21st-Century public school leadership development through a fully online Specialist

in Education (EdS) degree. Pedagogical delivery, a team approach to instruction, 2f and online individualized coaching, and partnerships with schools, districts, consortia, and agencies are all vehicles that were identified for satisfying statewide goals through the IMPACT V grant project.

Theoretical Compass

Identifying some unresolved issues

Schools and universities have a history of acting as separate entities for which symbiotic, coordinated school–university partnerships are strongly advocated as a remedy.

The value of connected, systems-wide partnerships has been well established, as in: “Policy makers and others hope that ... educational partnerships can generate the innovative thinking and systematic actions necessary” (Clifford & Miller, 2008, p. 3) for educational reform.

Whereas many researchers, practitioners, and policymakers promote the benefits of partnerships among educational entities, there is no unified understanding of what these partnerships should look like or how they can best be structured: “Writers frequently make the case for building stronger working relationships between schools and universities, but a coherent and commonly accepted framework for understanding partnerships remains elusive” (Baker, 2011, p. 41).

Indeed, even the terminology around partnerships is variable, if not confusing. Clark’s (1988) list of partnership terminology makes the point, citing such terms as network, consortium, collaboration, inter-organizational agreement (IOA), collective, and cooperative. He concludes that “different terms are used to describe similar activities, and on the other hand, different meanings are attached to the same term” (p. 33).

Outlining partnership characteristics

Despite inconsistencies in the terminology and understanding of what constitute partnerships, Baker (2011) identifies six characteristics of successful partnerships:

- (a) focusing on the common purpose of teacher and student learning;
- (b) monitoring top-down arrangements in favor of greater mutuality;
- (c) developing boundary spanning roles that assure continuity and sustain commitment;
- (d) creating a climate of commitment and accountability for all partners;
- (e) fostering trustworthy relationships between and among all actors; and
- (f) making sound plans for crucial support of key resources—fiscal, space, and personnel. (p. 43)

As systems-wide partnership advocates, we concur with Baumfield and Butterworth (2007) that partnerships are enlivened through “radical collegiality” that supports “teacher to academic dialogue in the process of mutual transformation” (p. 411).

Describing a partnership taxonomy

Specifically, Baker’s (2011) taxonomy encompasses single-tier, multi-tier, and complex-brokered partnerships. Single-tier partnerships involve university faculty working directly with classroom teachers to provide technical expertise.

In contrast, multi-tier partnerships involve active participation by many actors at various levels of authority and decision-making. Professors and teachers are still involved, but many others have joined the partnership. The focus has shifted away from primary interest in the classroom to a more complex consideration of both the classroom and the whole school. Greater interest from the district translates into new responsibilities and

duties for principals (Baker, 2011).

Importantly, as Baker attests, multi-level partnerships connect professional development and school improvement, which leaders of these initiatives agree are strong values.

Although in single-tier and multi-tier partnerships the “expertise for professional development is located squarely inside the university,” in a complex-brokered partnership “university leaders ... hire experts who bring their expertise to both university and P–12 educators” (Baker, 2011, p. 55).

From this perspective, systems-wide collaborative initiatives like IMPACT V are complex-brokered partnerships. Practitioners from outside the partnership network who have desirable expertise (in the case of IMPACT V this is school coaching and innovative technology specializations) are integral to the team.

Practical Compass

As revealed, IMPACT V theoretically embodies a complex-brokered partnership approach to school reform. The focus of the IMPACT V model is to build leadership capacity with the building principal and teachers so that school staff can leverage technology as a catalyst for change. Partnership among the NC Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI), state institutes of higher education (IHEs), expert technology leadership executive support coaches, and local education agencies/school districts (LEAs) channels the support for educators to cultivate and strengthen leadership capacity.

The model links three domains of reform: leadership development, coaching, and technology leadership.

IMPACT V: Contextual Evolution

IMPACT V itself is the fifth iteration of sustained efforts by the NCDPI's Division of Instructional Technology to use technology for improving student learning. Program evaluation components for IMPACT V draw upon findings from previous models to inform greater effectiveness in subsequent iterations of IMPACT.

Major lessons from IMPACT I and II were that sustainable change involving technology requires more than funding for the technology itself (infrastructure, hardware, software, and peripherals) and initial professional development about the technology and how to use it instructionally.

IMPACT III, therefore, included a coaching component to help participating school teams translate professional development into changed pedagogy. IMPACT IV demonstrated that even coaching and high-quality professional development are insufficient for sustained improvement without a vision of strong principal leadership and technology as a change catalyst.

Additionally, prior iterations of IMPACT revealed that public school staff need ongoing technical support. As such, IMPACT V focuses on building technology leadership capacity for a team of school leaders, including the principal or assistant principal, a team of teacher leaders representing core content areas, the media specialist(s), and the district technology director.

This team is responsible for leading efforts within the schools to develop and implement an action plan for school-wide

improvement that leverages technology to transform the way teachers teach and students learn.

IMPACT V: curricular focus

As a faculty group at a High Research Activity Carnegie institution in North Carolina, we take seriously the preparation of practicing school leaders more innovatively. The curricular focus that propels this online leadership preparation initiative emphasizes three major goals:

- (1) engaging in leadership development through coursework, institutes, and enrichment activities within a social justice framework (Normore, 2008);
- (2) promoting practice-based leadership coaching through internship experiences, with the aim of modeling school team/democratic decision making and empowerment in schools (Papa & Papa, 2010), and
- (3) anchoring these goals through school improvement specifically aimed at technology leadership throughout the system (Schrum & Levin, 2009).

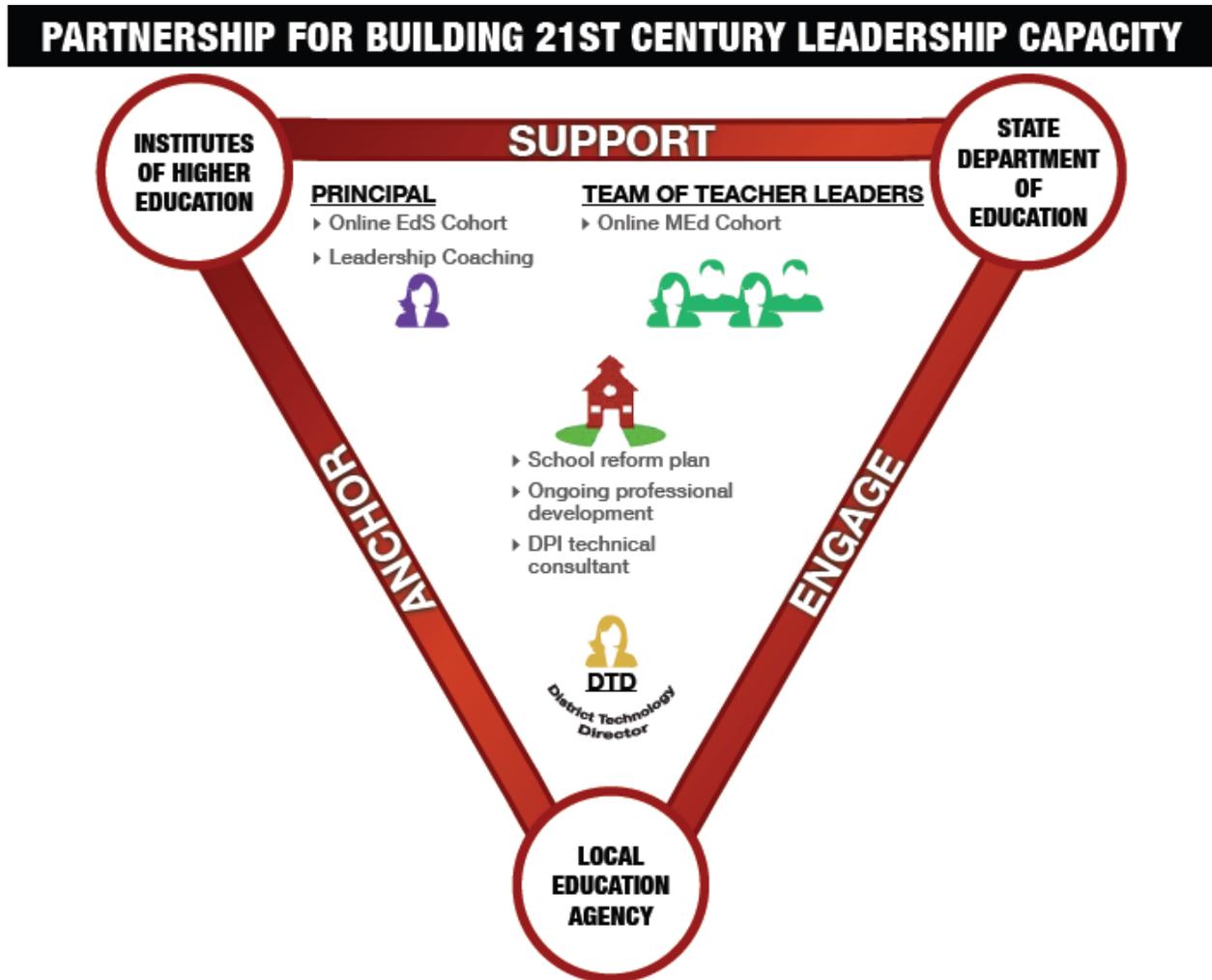
Impact V has positioned technology integration as a strategy for school improvement.

Model components

The IMPACT V model creates partnerships among NCDPI, IHEs, and LEAs. These entities coordinate for the purpose of supporting select schools as each building staff engages in developing leadership capacity through technology as an influencer of change.

Figure 1 illustrates this project-based intersection of coordinating entities.

Figure 1. Partnership for building 21st-Century leadership capacity.



Program participants

School staff eligible to apply for IMPACT V funding included all highly influenced middle and high schools without instructional technology and/or curriculum support, serving populations from families in poverty qualifying for free and/or reduced meal prices.

The eligible schools qualified to receive other financial support, such as Title 1 funding. Selected schools are not classified by the state as a *priority* school. Because they are not deemed low performing on state assessments, the staff in them do not receive the state's *school transformation support*.

Additionally, all school members in the partnership experience are influenced by compounding challenges. These include high teacher turnover rates; principals fairly new to their role; inability to hire highly qualified staff or employ instructional technology or curriculum support personnel; changing demographics; large concentrations of English Language Learners; and—in some cases—physical remoteness in rural counties. All school personnel that met these criteria were invited to apply for the program; in total, 12 schools within 9 LEAs were selected to participate.

The school's IMPACT V project team has responsibility for leading efforts to develop and implement a school improvement action plan focused on reform through technology.

To mobilize this team capacity, the teacher leaders participate in a cohort-based, fully online masters in instructional technology program from a sister institution that focuses on leadership development, instructional technology, and sound pedagogy through technology. The principal or assistant principal (AP) for each school joins a cohort-based, fully online EdS program, delivered through our department. The program focuses on leadership coursework within a culturally relevant schooling framework supported by data-based trends in education (e.g., courses that focus on critical perspectives in education, leadership, and culture). In addition, the entire team including the district technology director and the media specialist(s) participate in professional development activities provided by NCDPI instructional technology consultants.

Principals and APs also participate in leadership development institutes every other month at our university that guide them to analyze their own leadership styles, strengths, and growth areas. They develop a personal

professional growth plan to lead this type of reform initiative.

Additionally, their coaches, each of whom has extensive experience as an on-site and system technology leader, visit these building leaders at their campuses monthly during the first year and every other month during year 2.

Coaches help principals reflect, problem-solve, and assess progress on their personal professional goals as well as the school's IMPACT V improvement action plan. Coaches encourage the brokering of identified needs to various entities—senior-level district leadership, district technology leadership, community agencies, and NCDPI consultants, aiming to support sustainability. Thus, these experts guide principals/APs to apply the culturally relevant and substantive leadership development and coursework they are receiving.

Each participating school focuses on implementing and assessing its improvement action plan and receives ongoing IMPACT technical assistance from the NCDPI consultants. Of grant funds awarded to each school, 25% must be allocated for professional development of all school faculty, including but not limited to a train-the-trainer leadership approach by the IMPACT V leadership team.

The IMPACT V model counters the dominant culture of isolation in schools by emphasizing collaborative work at the micro and macro levels. At the building level, the IMPACT V leadership team meets regularly and collaboratively oversees the school improvement action plan, designs professional development for the school, and leads the entire implementation effort. At the macro level of the program, NCDPI, IHEs, and LEAs work together to provide the fullest range of support

possible for school staff to enact substantive and enduring change.

For example, LEAs extend support by supplying policies and procedures needed by IMPACT V schools, including enhanced acceptable-use policies that feature proactive segments about the use of tablet computers as personal learning devices. NCDPI provides direction, support, curricular resources, and technical expertise to the district and/or school. The IHEs are shifting their programs to offer responsive, relevant, and coordinated coursework.

Leading this effort, faculty members from two accredited universities in North Carolina have been coordinating the research courses for the educational leadership (EdS and Masters in School Education [MEd]) degrees. The principal/AP and teacher leaders cooperatively carry out the culminating project for both programs—an action research project directly related to the school improvement plans.

Grant support

IMPACT V funds to the participating schools included a Year 1 allocation of \$186,000 for technology infrastructure, hardware and software, and professional development. Year 2 allocations, based on average daily membership, ranged from \$92,000 to over \$300,000. The grant also covered within the designated allotments financial coverage allowing each school's leader to earn an EdS in our university program and its teacher-leader team (i.e., of four core teachers) to earn a master's in instructional technology, which another university in the state is fulfilling.

Participants were candid that the financial incentives for themselves and their school staff for joining the IMPACT V

partnership influenced their commitment to the program.

Takeaways from the Partnership: Year 1

Our experiences as faculty leaders responsible for planning and implementing the educational leadership components of this coordinated statewide partnering effort have yielded important lessons about working together, preparing for and sustaining leadership, and experiencing technology as a vehicle for school change.

Four major takeaways from our joint reflection about this program follow.

Encouraging involvement by partners

Greater involvement by schools, universities, and public agencies is better than lesser involvement. The bureaucratic structures in 20th-Century hierarchical systems impede innovation and change in the school and specifically in the classroom to influence student achievement, motivation, and engagement.

The Director of Instructional Technology at the NCDPI developed IMPACT V in consultation with key individuals from institutions of higher education and regional technology consultants who had played important roles in prior iterations of the IMPACT program model. As such, the model was created to include partnerships among the state Department of Education, local education agencies, and institutions of higher education.

Because of the way the model was developed, it was originated and rolled out in an expedited "top down" fashion. Thus, it lacked the benefit of grassroots participation from school personnel in particular.

Due to funding timelines and various pressing state-level internal demands, expediency clashed with bureaucratic IHE structures leaving school/district staff applying for and implementing a program initiative still under development. Innovation, change, “breaking down” barriers, and “molding” bureaucracies require dedicated forward-thinking partnerships that reach across macro and micro levels.

Greater involvement from the program’s inception would have set a firmer foundation for innovation in the schools, assured district support, and clarified working parameters among the partners.

Fostering school control

The success of an educational technology innovation depends on a school’s staff sense that it is in control of its own participation and school-wide directional change. Likewise, district-level leadership and support are essential to the viability of initiatives that school personnel select.

Although in many instances the decision to apply for and participate in the IMPACT V program was made at the building level with district support, leaders in several participating school staff were unaware that their district technology director was applying for the program on their behalf. In these cases, the decision to participate in the program was made exclusively at the district level, and as such not all school educators involved in the program had strong support for it at the outset in their buildings.

Because IMPACT V is a school-level change initiative and because the participating school staff already experience significant uncertainty on a daily basis, site-based administrators and teachers must be integrally involved in planning processes.

When educators faced the challenges evident in these schools, district leaders tried to access every possible resource. In some cases, these efforts overwhelmed the school and ran counter to their good intentions. The same was true for several of the school staff that opted to participate without the direct knowledge of senior-level district leadership.

The school’s educators wanted the additional funding to support teaching and learning without thoroughly vetting the political or district-level support needed for bringing about substantive change.

School-level educators need the support from district leaders so they can attract the infrastructure and technical support required for technology integration and inclusion. Without appropriate understanding and planning in district administration for this type of initiative, school staff face roadblocks for satisfying the desired goals.

Identifying motivations for participation

Ascertaining school personnel’s motivations for engaging in change-based initiatives plays a role in determining where to focus resources. For some participating educators and particularly for the leadership team whose graduate programming was grant supported, financial benefits were the primary motivation for program participation, not the use of technology as a catalyst for substantive school reform. Likewise, some school leadership teams saw the funding source as a means to purchase more technology equipment for their school without consideration of the time commitment required of high-quality professional development—i.e., coursework, coaching, leadership institutes, and NCDPI professional development requirements—leaving some funded team members overwhelmed and overcommitted. Untangling the motive to access funding from the motive

for change requires serious study before project implementation.

Maintaining strong communication

In any collaboration, the need for high levels of communication among partners cannot be underestimated. A unified vision with shared goals that allows for creative and adaptive strategies must be effectively communicated to all constituents.

Ongoing communication among the program partners (DPI, IHEs, and LEAs) has been difficult to establish and maintain. Also, the different interpretations by partners of the project's vision and goals have led to frustrations and inconsistencies.

The different entities do not always know what each other is doing or who to turn to for answers to questions. This lack of strong, consistent, and visible coordination coupled with a focused vision undergirded by shared goals is a continuing concern amongst partners and participating school personnel.

Steps are being taken to ensure that all partners are involved in ongoing dialogue and are informed of important steps and changes. For example, all partners recently together created a focused vision with shared goals and key steps for year 2 of the project. In addition, staff from NCDPI were selected and assigned specific responsibilities for overseeing and providing direction as well as communication for various components of the initiative.

In order to ensure maximum success and sustainability of the desired change, collaboration and communication are the responsibility of all partners involved in the project. Collaborating partners should look to the breakthroughs that information technology, social networking, and web-based conferencing

offer for possible communication modes. High-tech communication has the added benefit of teaching school personnel about the world their students will soon shape.

Heading into the Next Phase: Year 2

A fundamental purpose of schooling is stretching beyond accountability toward innovation, creativity, critical thinking, and empowerment. The IMPACT V project brings the school and university together with other partnering entities to offer opportunities for improvement in schools that have been stigmatized as failing.

The merger of preparation programs with the challenges of practice in these schools allows for community engagement and activism that promises to make a difference.

Whereas the project we describe was certainly strengthened through grant funding, readers should be encouraged that such partnering changes are possible with strong collaboration and therefore not predicated on external funding.

Funding for technology hardware and some professional development is a necessity for school change; however, in our opinion external grant funding is not a requirement for achieving the scale of changes we have described.

If a school or district staff decides to create change through technology utilization, funds for purchasing equipment, software, and training time will need to be found. Various local and state sources as well as federal funding have funded many of these projects.

For the context described in this essay, the grant facilitated two major goals: (1) it provided the technology funding and hardware as well as the professional development needed

for the schools (training, laptops, etc.); and (2) the funding provided the additional incentive for involvement by practicing school principals and teachers to enroll in advanced coursework and thus experience professional development in technology knowledge and skills, and collaboration and participation.

We have learned together just how chaotic school improvement can be and think that strong communication systems offer an antidote to the confusion participants experience. We see that appreciation is deepening of the people who are a school's greatest resource.

Investing in these synergists creates possibilities and hope for better school

environments, which has meaning for district superintendents who can get ideas from the program we have described for their own contexts.

We look forward to learning more during year two of this project about how to benefit 21st-Century school leadership. How are others currently organizing programs for school improvement through technology innovation?

Are other program reformers also connecting leadership development, leadership preparation, and school improvement? If so, how? What do the most productive partnerships for school reform look like?

Endnote: This work was supported by a funding agency, the citation of which follows: Mullen, C. A., & Davis, A. W. (Principal Investigators). (2011). *IMPACT V: 21st-Century school and classroom leadership*. Enhancing Education Through Technology (EETT), Title II-Part D and NCLB funds from the State of North Carolina; North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI), NC [grant funding # 205457]. (Lashley, C., Project Director; Hewitt, K. K., Professional Development Coordinator)

Author Biographies

Kimberly Kappler Hewitt is an assistant professor in educational leadership at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. She specializes in the ethical and efficacious use of data to inform change and on leadership for curriculum and instruction. Email: kkhewitt@uncg.edu

Carol A. Mullen is professor of the Department of Educational Leadership and Cultural Foundations at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Her specializations include democratic mentoring collaborative initiatives and professional development innovations in the leadership field. Email: camullen@uncg.edu

Ann W. Davis is clinical assistant professor in educational leadership at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. She specializes in school transformation with technology-infused curriculum, instruction, professional development, and change leadership. Email: awdavis@uncg.edu

Carl Lashley is associate professor in educational leadership at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. His specializations include education law and policy, technology, and community-engaged scholarship. Email: c_lashle@uncg.edu

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“Looking Through the Eyes of the Learner” Implementation of Building Blocks for Student Engagement

Suzanne Cordier D’Annolfo, EdD
Assistant Professor
Departments of Education and Educational Leadership
University of Hartford
West Hartford, CT

Jeffrey A. Schumann, PhD
Superintendent of Schools
Enfield Public Schools
Enfield, CT

Abstract

The Building Blocks for Student Engagement (BBSE) protocol was designed to provide a consistent framework of common language and a visual point of reference shared among students, teachers and school leaders to keep a laser-like focus on the instructional core and student engagement. Grounded in brain-based learning and implemented in urban, suburban, and rural districts, this pilot study sought to investigate to what extent students, teachers, and school leaders perceived the BBSE to be an effective strategy for enhancing student engagement. Designed to “look through the eyes of the learners” through the articulation of what students need to know, understand and be able to do, participants in the study perceived the BBSE as an effective strategy for student engagement.

Keywords

student engagement, triad model, student-centered

At our weekly Community of Practice meeting we invited our middle school grade level teams to go on an in-building field trip through their students' empty classrooms while they were at lunch.

The purpose of the field trip was for the teachers to walk silently from classroom to classroom and to "look through the eyes of the learner" by carefully reading and critically observing the posted protocol of what students were expected to know, understand, and be able to do (KUD).

At the end of the field trip, the teachers commented not only on the diversity of the knowledge and skills required of their students, but also on the potential for making connections and engaging students across content areas. By "looking through the eyes of the learners," they observed the different ways teachers phrased KUD for students and saw how they could help unravel some of the mysteries of learning that many students experience.

They began to better appreciate the sum of all the parts of students' day and the opportunity they have to engage students in more holistic ways.

At the 2011 AASA National Conference, the authors suggested that students who are not engaged in their learning are deprived of the opportunity to achieve at high levels.

Boykin and Noguera (2011) identify two interrelated inequities: children's background, and school practices that limit the opportunity for all children to learn. They further assert that "closing or at least reducing the opportunity to learn gap is essential if disparities in achievement are to be lessened" (p. 185). Schmoker (2011) advocates that the power of simplicity, clarity and priority is

needed now more than ever, given the number of Common Core Standards teachers need to address. Willis (2010) posits that the goal is to keep all students engaged and participating because the person who thinks, learns.

The *challenge* for many teachers is synthesizing standards in student-friendly language to define explicitly what students need to know, understand and do, thereby providing an *equitable opportunity for all students to engage in their learning*. Students who are engaged (1) find their learning personally meaningful; (2) believe the learning tasks are challenging and accomplishing them is worthy of their time; and (3) are focused on optimum performance, and are persistent even when they encounter difficulty. (Schlechty, 2011).

In 1993, the primary author worked closely with her superintendent to create "The Learning Triad," a triangle that provided a graphic representation of connecting curriculum, assessment and instruction.

To more effectively connect students to their learning, the Learning Triad was applied in the classroom by teachers posting these three components. *What I need to know; what I need to understand, and what I need to be able to do*. This was followed by implementing a schema activator at the beginning of each class to promote student engagement.

As this practice took hold in each classroom, students began talking about the connections they were seeing between their classes and teachers became more eager to apply educational neuroscience into classroom practice.

The Learning Triad evolved to become the Building Blocks for Student Engagement (BBSE) which has been successfully implemented in urban, suburban, and rural

environments. It has provided a common language for students, teachers and administrators: has kept the focus on what students need to know, understand and do; and has enhanced vertical and horizontal

articulation of content standards. The BBSE provides a consistent framework for engaging students in their learning through a visual posting that is easily identified when they enter any classroom.

The BBSE protocol consists of five components. Each component is designed on a brightly-colored paper and is posted in the classroom. Adjacent to each specific component, the teacher posts learning expectations for daily lessons in student-friendly language. Students' brains are trained to reference the BBSE *immediately* upon entering the classroom.

1. **The Schema Activator:** (bright fuchsia)
Engages students immediately in a task that requires the use of prior knowledge and provides the connection to the day's lesson. Based on brain research about the reticular activating system, educators know the value of engaging students in focused, relevant work immediately upon entering the classroom.
2. **The Essential Question/Enduring Understanding:** (bright yellow)
Keeps students focused on the big picture or big idea of the lesson/unit. It is referenced throughout the learning experiences as students work toward constructing meaning and understanding in order to answer the deeper essential question.
3. **What I need to KNOW and REMEMBER:** (green)
Provides students with the basic level of Bloom's Taxonomy regarding the factual information needed for the lesson/unit. Students' foundational content knowledge, *including vocabulary*, is made explicit in this component.
4. **What I need to UNDERSTAND:** (blue)
Provides students with the second level of Bloom's asking students to articulate what they understand because of what they know and remember. This component further contributes to constructing meaning through the development of conceptual thinking.
5. **What I need to DO:** (orange)
Articulates "what students will be able to do because of what they know and understand." These tasks can range from Bloom's third level, application, to higher-order thinking skills (analyze, synthesize, evaluate and create). This component defines what constitutes the *evidence* of student learning. The designed tasks are tiered in order to provide the opportunity for students to demonstrate their learning in a variety of increasingly challenging ways.

Review of Literature

In the formal development of the protocol, the authors examined a variety of research on how the brain learns and on student engagement. (Hunter, 1982; Gardner, 1983; Anderman and Midgley, 1998; Bruer, 1999; National Research Council, 2003; Bransford, Brown and Cocking, 2003; Willis, 2006; Conley, 2007; Sousa, 2006, 2010, 2011; Marzano and

Pickering, 2011; Schomaker, 2011; Boykin and Noguera 2011; Schlehty, 2011)

The long-standing divergence of thinking among neuroscientists, cognitive psychologists and educators has shifted to a convergence of research demonstrating there is a common ground within their three respective fields. Sousa (2010) states, "teachers are in a profession of changing the human brain every

day. As neuroscientists continue to discover the inner workings of the brain, as cognitive psychologists continue to look for explanations of learning behavior, and as educators continue to apply research to improve their teaching, they can greatly improve the quality and effectiveness of educational experiences for our children.” (p.23)

School leaders are expected to help teachers determine what strategies to employ in their classrooms. The Public Education Leadership Project (PELP) at Harvard works with district teams to improve educational outcomes. The focus of the framework is on the triangular connection among the student, teacher and content referred to as the instructional core. More specifically from a leadership perspective, the implementation of strategies designed to keep a focus on what matters and the degree to which these strategies enhance the instructional core must have a positive impact on student achievement (2007).

Equally as important is the need for a common vocabulary, consistent practice, and a common point of reference that are shared among students, teachers, and school leaders

that keep a laser-like focus on the instructional core and student engagement (City, Elmore, Fireman, Teitel, 2009).

Methodology

The purpose of this pilot study was to investigate the use of the BBSE: to understand its impact on the instructional core and to what extent students, teachers, and school leaders perceived the BBSE to be an effective strategy for enhancing student engagement.

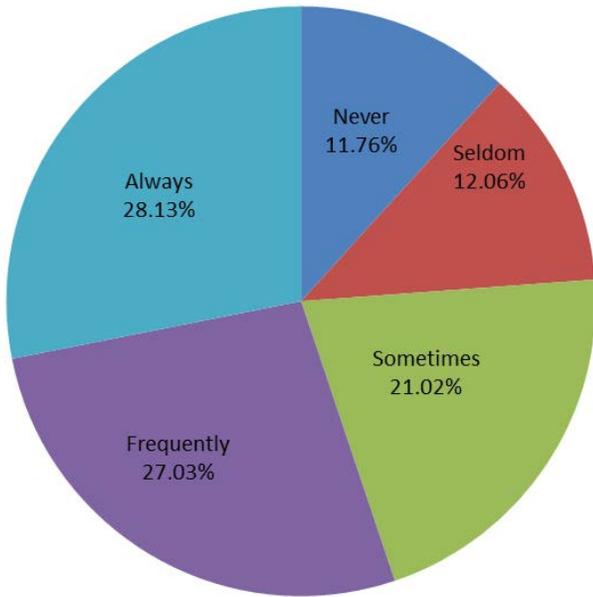
The research team collected data using a one page survey which included questions with Likert scale responses and questions with short open-ended responses. Separate surveys were created for students, teachers, and school leaders.

The surveys were administered in four schools in three school districts in Connecticut: 6-12 interdistrict magnet school with a predominantly urban population; two 5-8 middle schools in the same suburban district; and a single 6-8 middle school in a smaller suburb. The total N was 2030 students, 91 teachers and 10 school leaders.

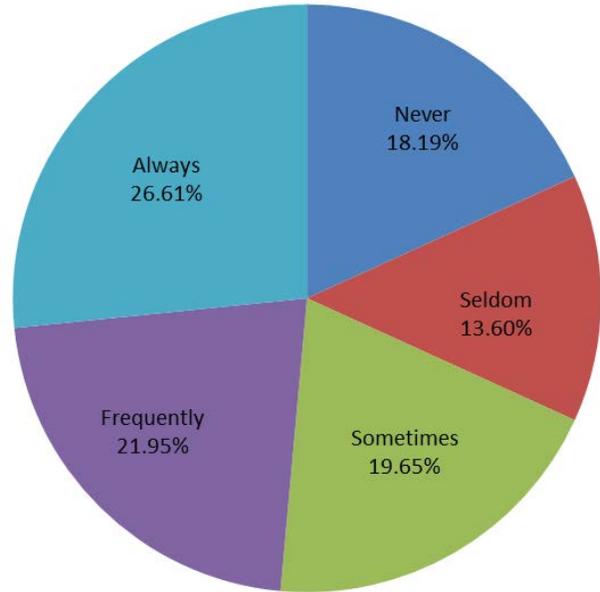
The quantitative responses are summarized in the following pie charts:

STUDENTS

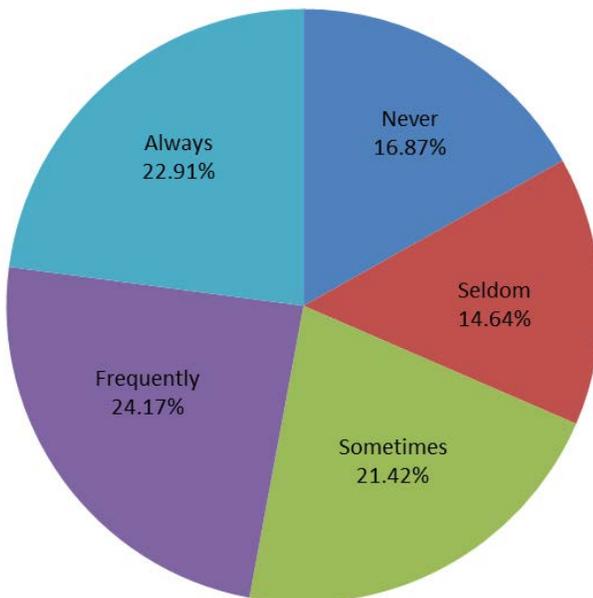
Does the schema activator help you connect to the content of the lesson?



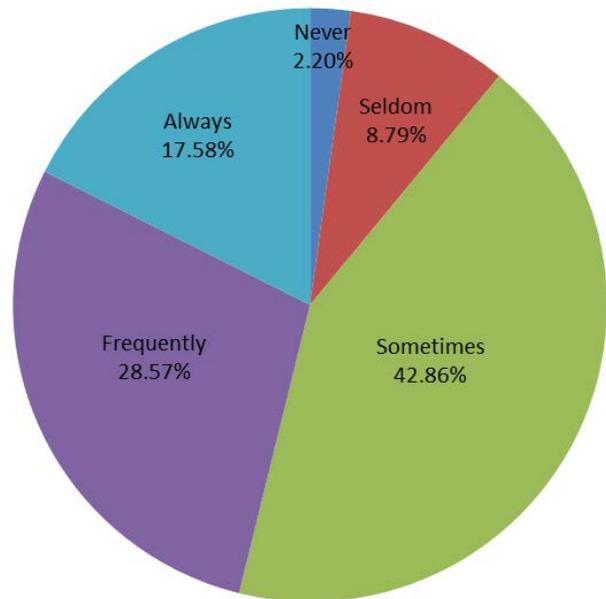
Do you find the KUD useful/helpful in your class?



Does your teacher refer to KUD during class?



Do you (teacher) refer to the posted KUD during your lesson?



The survey data displayed in the pie charts indicate students believe the schema activator and the Know, Understand, Do (KUD) are useful and helps them connect to their lessons.

Interestingly, when students and teachers are asked about referencing the KUD in class, the combination of responses of *always* and *frequently* are nearly identical ; and differ in the remaining three responses (*sometimes, seldom, never*), suggesting an area for further exploration.

Qualitative Responses

The qualitative responses bulleted below summarize the short answer survey questions.

Students

- Reported that they clearly understand the purpose of the schema activator (i.e. “gets our brains engaged and working;” “connects to what we will be doing in class;” “gets us focused;” “requires us to connect to our prior learning;” “makes us think”)
- Reported that the schema activator helped them to connect to the content of the lesson.
- Reported that when the KUD is articulated and posted; it makes it easier to understand the lesson and helps them to assess what they have learned “in a big way.”

Teachers

- Reported that they make the schema activator meaningful to students by providing them with an engaging activity (i.e. incorporating pop culture references in student friendly terms to help them connect on a personal level) that requires accessing prior knowledge, linking it to the lesson of the day, and advancing students to the next level.
- Reported that they design their KUDs to be standards-based, but that they give a

lot of thought to writing the KUD in language that students can understand and is relevant to them.

- Reported that they can assess how much students have learned when using the KUD through measureable target evidence on quizzes, verbal checks, discussion, participation, classroom questions, assignments, exit tickets, homework, formative and summative assessments, performance assessments, and subsequent schemas.

School leaders (department chairs, assistant principals, principals)

- Reported that the BBSEs are embedded in the structure of the school and are posted in each classroom.
- Reported that the BBSE is one of the first things they look for when they walk into a classroom (with or without students).
- Reported that the BBSE is part of the observation process or classroom walk-through/instructional rounds process.
- Reported that the impact of KUD on student learning has been informally assessed through conversations with students and teachers.

Students, teachers, and school leaders’ responses collectively indicate the BBSE protocol is an effective strategy for student engagement. Upon entering classrooms, the BBSE is an immediate focus for students and school leaders. Teachers report that they design their schema activator and KUD to be standards-based and easily understood by students.

Educational Significance of Study

The BBSE provides consistency for students, as they transition from classroom to classroom as well as from grade level to grade level. For students, the BBSE protocol helps them engage in their learning and brings clarity to what they

need to know, understand and be able to do. Teachers' use of the protocol helps to promote a common vocabulary for lesson design which is also referenced in their grade level and K-12 professional discourse. Building-based leaders have a consistent model for "looking through the eyes of the learner" to effectively monitor the connection of the content standards and the learning environment..

Recommendations for Further Research

The data collected in this pilot study strongly indicates more structured research should occur to validate the initial findings presented here. More specifically, the evidence of the impact of

BBSE on student learning needs to be researched. The data from this pilot study suggests the BBSE protocol engages students. Further research should attempt to quantify these levels of engagement.

In sum, where the BBSE protocol is implemented with fidelity, the students, teachers, and school leaders perceive it as an effective strategy for student engagement. By "looking through the eyes of the learner," and articulating "What I need to know, understand and do," educators can create an equitable opportunity to students to construct meaning in their learning. The authors invite and welcome further inquiry about the BBSE protocol.

Author Biographies

Suzanne D'Annolfo has 38 years of public school education experience as a teacher, coach, and building and district level administrator. She is a Milken National Educator Award recipient and has been a principal of two national award-winning secondary schools. During her years in public schools, she served as an adjunct in educational leadership at Central Connecticut State University and currently teaches full-time at the University of Hartford where she serves as the college of education's coordinator of school partnerships and director of the Center for Education and Professional Learning in the Institute of Translational Research. E-mail: dannolfo@hartford.edu

Jeffrey Schumann has 32 years of public education experience, 17 as a teacher and 15 in building level and central office administrative positions. He has presented at state, regional, and national conferences on data-driven decision making, teacher evaluation, and effective teaching strategies. His ground-breaking doctoral research in predictive analytics was one of the first to employ data mining tools used in the business world to predict the academic performance of schools. He is also an accomplished triathlete having completed over 100 triathlons at the state and national level. E-mail: jschumann@enfieldschools.org

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Want to Teach about SuperPACs? What We Can Learn from Stephen Colbert

Jeremy Stoddard, PhD
Spears Distinguished Associate Professor
School of Education
College of William & Mary
Williamsburg, VA

Abstract

The emergence of the SuperPACs in American politics is a major issue in the current election. SuperPACs, and the media campaigns they fund, also present a major challenge for media and democratic education. This article explores the issues surrounding SuperPACs and the rise of media in elections and politics in general, and presents some starting points for addressing these challenges in K-12 school curriculum and policy. Key areas addressed include: the need for more issues - centered and deliberative curriculum that engage students in examining the complexities of contemporary issues; a focus on media literacy in the social studies curriculum; and the potential for using popular culture, such as Stephen Colbert's segments on SuperPACs, to engage students in current debates.

Keywords

social studies education, media education, popular culture

There is a lack of media education and student engagement with controversial issues in American schools. This seems to run concurrently with a lack of in-depth curricula and teaching about the dynamic nature of our political system in general and the evolving issues in this country.

The creation of an informed citizenry that questions the status quo, as envisioned by some like Thomas Jefferson, seems to have been replaced by memorizing facts and figures needed for a high stakes test.

Dissent, questioning, and strategizing solutions to ill-structured problems are fundamental goals of educators to prepare citizens to participate in a democracy and engage in a media rich world. These are also knowledge and processes that cannot easily be measured on a selected-response exam.

This current context of education, and social studies education in particular, has led to a narrowing of the curriculum with a focus on static sets of facts as the measured outcomes, and an overall reduction of teaching social studies in those states that do not require end of course or graduation high stakes social studies assessments (Au, 2009).

As a result of the focus on tested subjects teachers have less control over what they can teach and, in some cases, how they are able to engage students in the classroom.

Similarly, media education is also marginalized, often placed in the English Language Arts curriculum, in isolated moments in the social studies curriculum, or not addressed at all, as it is a skill that is difficult to assess using a selected response (multiple-choice) exam. This is especially problematic as students likely encounter important issues of

the day, such as the ongoing war in Afghanistan and the upcoming presidential election, superficially as a current event and not through sustained and engaged inquiry and deliberation. It is difficult for our future citizens to question the status quo of current politics if they do not study it deeply.

SuperPAC

Another timely current issue not discussed in meaningful ways in social studies classes, and the one that I focus on in this article, is the rise of the “SuperPAC” in American politics.

These SuperPACs, which have emerged from the US Supreme Court *Citizen’s United* ruling, present a major challenge for voters and the US political system. Despite the importance of this issue, it is lightly covered on the nightly news, and is likely not presented as an issue of importance in social studies classrooms.

The US Supreme Court decision, officially known as *Citizen’s United v. Federal Election Commission* (FEC) (2009), poses a major challenge to our democratic processes and institutions and amplifies the need for media and democratic education.

In *Citizen’s*, the court ruled that corporations have the rights of citizens during an election and that money is akin to speech and should not be limited. This enables corporations, unions, and other organizations or wealthy individuals to support issues campaigns and candidates with unlimited funds through “SuperPACs” or super political action committees (501(c)(4)) with less transparency than traditional donations.

The impact of the *Citizen’s* ruling is omnipresent in the current presidential election, as a small group of wealthy individuals is able to sustain candidates and attempt to influence the electorate through broadcasting

advertisements and documentary films.

Candidates and their partner SuperPACs spent at least twenty million dollars in the Florida Republican primary alone, and Newt Gingrich's campaign was kept alive through millions of dollars provided by one long-term supporter to the "Winning our Future" SuperPAC (Confessore, 2012).

Not just national elections are being influenced by wealthy individuals' donations to these SuperPACs. Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker was able to raise approximately twenty-five million dollars to fight against his recall from office, with two thirds of this money coming from donors outside of the state (Kaufman, May 24, 2012).

This is unprecedented money for a gubernatorial race in the state and on par with the fundraising of some presidential candidates.

Citizen's is a complex ruling that has led to complex and serious implications for our political system. Further, this issue has been largely absent from the mainstream media and the high school social studies curricula.

Most K-12 social studies curricula focus on a theoretical or "textbook version" of the election processes and devotes a little time to election advertising.

The curriculum and textbooks often do not provide the materials or experiences necessary to equip students with the critical media literacy skills; these are skills needed to separate fact from fiction or to develop an understanding of the dynamic ways in which special interest groups and candidates use the media in the 21st century.

Further, students often view this theoretical textbook version of our current elections system as dull and irrelevant. The

SuperPAC topic is perfect for engaging students in deliberation and media literacy activities.

Issue-Oriented Curriculum

Teachers should use contemporary issues to engage students in the content and concepts of the curriculum. The study of issues can make content more relevant and help to model to students one aspect of how to become an informed citizen.

Teachers could use the issues that arise from the *Citizen's* case to engage students in examining the history and policies of election finance and the role of the media in politics as part of a civics or government course.

Or, *Citizen's* could be used as a relevant entrée to examine the history of elections and the influence of money in such comparison cases as the Tammany Hall era of corruption in politics in New York and the role of 19th century industrialists who attempted to sway the political process for personal gain.

Aspects of the *Citizen's* case and aftermath could serve as examples to teach concepts such as political speech and electioneering communication, or to investigate how the ruling in the case reflects particular political ideologies.

Resources for SuperPACs

Given the difficulties of finding curriculum to teach about current events and issues, and the lag that occurs as formal curriculum producers develop materials, where can teachers go to find information and resources to help teach about SuperPACs and the *Citizen's* ruling?

Although there has been a recent rise in the mainstream media coverage of SuperPACs, the best source for learning and even teaching about the ramifications of *Citizen's* may be Stephen Colbert, comedian and faux news

anchor. Colbert is not in the business of education, at least not in the traditional sense.

However, he and fake news counterpart Jon Stewart might serve a more powerful role than the “real” news they satire by exposing the technical functions and severe implications of *Citizen’s*. His show, *The Colbert Report*, is also extremely popular with young demographics.

In 2011 Colbert introduced Trevor Potter, “former FEC Chair, general counsel to John McCain’s 2008 presidential campaign, and my personal lawyer,” to announce and explain the formation of his Colbert SuperPAC, “*Americans for a Better Tomorrow, Tomorrow*” (Moreschi, March 30, 2011).

This episode was one of a number of stunts used to illustrate the powerful impact of the *Citizen’s* ruling and the lack of regulation and transparency in campaign financing that has resulted. His “Heroes,” primarily audience members, have donated over a million dollars,

and several days before the Iowa Republican Caucuses his SuperPAC ran its first ads.

In later episodes, Colbert handed over control of the SuperPAC to Stewart so that he could explore running for “the President of the United States of South Carolina,” with Potter again explaining the technicalities. This clip illustrates that Stewart, despite working in the same building and being a business partner of Colbert’s, could legally run the SuperPAC without “coordinating” with the candidate.

In a later clip Potter explained that Colbert does not need to disclose any of his donors to the IRS until after the 2012 election under current law for 501(c)(4) “social welfare organizations.” This clip highlights the more limited transparency under the post-*Citizen’s* election campaign.

The clips with Mr. Potter get to the heart of the issue and are richly informative (See Table 1 for a list of linked clips from the *Colbert Report* related to SuperPACs).

Table 1

Colbert Report Selected SuperPAC Episodes

Date	Clip Description	Link (copy and paste into web browser)
March 30, 2011	Potter sets up ColbertPAC.	http://www.colbertnation.com/the-colbert-report-videos/379369/march-30-2011/colbert-pac---trevor-potter
May 11, 2011	Potter files an exemption so Colbert can talk about his PAC on air.	http://www.colbertnation.com/the-colbert-report-videos/386086/may-11-2011/corp-constituency---trevor-potter
May 31, 2011	Colbert files for a SuperPAC.	http://www.colbertnation.com/the-colbert-report-videos/386467/may-16-2011/stephen-files-super-pac-request
September 29, 2011	Potter helps Colbert set up a shell corporation to make SuperPAC donations secret.	http://www.colbertnation.com/the-colbert-report-videos/398531/september-29-2011/colbert-super-pac---trevor-potter---stephen-s-shell-corporation
January 12, 2012	Colbert transfers control of his SuperPAC to Stewart.	http://www.colbertnation.com/the-colbert-report-videos/405889/january-12-2012/indecision-2012---colbert-super-pac---coordination-resolution-with-jon-stewart
April 3, 2012	Potter explains that Colbert's SuperPAC does not need to disclose donors with the IRS until after the election.	http://www.colbertnation.com/the-colbert-report-videos/411674/april-03-2012/colbert-super-pac-shh----501c4-disclosure---trevor-potter

These clips also present a perspective on *Citizen's* and SuperPACs that are an alternative to the “horse race” coverage of national polls and fundraising tallies that too often dominate national news coverage of elections, coverage that does not help viewer-citizens to really understand the issues in the election or to reflect on the powerful role that this media framing has on the national political stage.

Instead of reporting how much money candidates and their surrogate SuperPACs raise, Colbert and Potter provided an insider view as to how these organizations can operate within existing policies legally in ways that also strike many Americans as being antithetical to our beliefs about fair elections and political speech.

I am not necessarily advocating that we should start showing the *Colbert Report* in middle school or high school civics classrooms. Much of the content is inappropriate for young people, and teachers would have a hard time justifying viewing clips that are more politically partisan or vulgar in nature.

Teachers need to be thoughtful about the curriculum and media that enter their classrooms. Being thoughtful, however, does not mean banishing popular culture and political satire from the classroom, as we know this is the way that many young people learn about politics and political issues.

Media and Issues

Instead, we need to think about what role media such as the *Colbert Report*, *The Daily Show*, or even animated but politically savvy series like *The Simpsons* might play in teaching students media interpretation and the concept of political satire and social criticism. Older series, such as the *Twilight Zone*, serve as historical artifacts of this same concept and reflect issues from the early Cold War era.

The use of media to raise and examine the coverage and representation of issues can help students learn important concepts from the social studies.

Similarly, teachers and parents could learn several things from Colbert’s election coverage: 1) democracies like ours are ever evolving, dynamic systems and need to be taught as such, even with the complexities they present; 2) young people need to be engaged in controversial issues in an informed way, and teachers need to take advantage of media that can help them engage students actively in these important current debates; and 3) humor can be a powerful and motivating medium for engaging in important content, especially if the humor is not directed at one political group or another but instead functions to illustrate the issue itself with the goal of understanding and hopefully advocating change.

Too often teachers select videos or documentary films that present a particular perspective, often matching their own views, but show them as unquestionable fact (Stoddard, 2010). These are often not radical films but films that are approved by school administration or follow district policy.

Teachers, students, and the public in general tend to selectively view politically related media and select out what they want to see or what supports their existing beliefs (LaMarre, Landreville, & Beam, 2009; Stoddard, 2009). This is largely the result of the way that we view media, and documentary style media in particular, as a form of knowledge that is objective instead of as a value driven perspective supported by evidence (Stoddard, 2013).

School administrators and boards often rely heavily on network web filters or the use of educational video databases such as

Discovery Streaming to limit access to media deemed inappropriate for the classroom. These policies, however, may increase and not decrease the beliefs of teachers and students that media from sources such as Discovery are objective or more legitimate and can be used without question or critique.

Instead, we should focus on developing students' abilities to critically view and critique media, thus also promoting students' understanding of media as constructed knowledge that contains particular viewpoints (Buckingham, 2000; Hess, 2007).

In essence, the *Colbert* clips and SuperPAC produced media are great mediums for both learning concepts and content as well as for developing skills in media literacy and deliberation.

Conclusion

The *Citizen's United* ruling and rise of the SuperPACs provides opportunities for social studies teachers to help students develop skills in engaging in discussions of controversial issues and in critical media literacy.

Having students "vote" in class or fill out voter registration cards are useful activities for training the next generation of citizens.

In today's media saturated political environment however, we also need to go a step further by asking students to research, analyze, and engage in deliberations of the issues surrounding the elections, and to gain an understanding of how campaigns use media to sway voters.

Deliberations engage students in viewing an issue from different perspectives and using evidence to take or support a position, key habits and skills for effective citizenship (Hess, 2009).

The development of media literacy includes both teaching explicit skills in decoding and analyzing the veracity of media as well as examining the media within a particular historical, social, and political context (Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 2012).

For example, media produced by SuperPACs could be examined in a dynamic way by asking students to research the production of the media: (a) Who made it and who paid for it?; (b) What is the purpose of the media?; (c) Who is the intended audience and what is the intended message?; (d) How have audiences responded to the media?; (e) How has the news media and other groups responded?; and (f) How does the media reflect particular cultural influences in society? (Adapted from Hoechsmann & Poyntz, 2012, p. 66).

Students should then produce media of their own and advocate for evidence-based positions that emerge out of these activities, either about a particular issue or about how they view the current role of SuperPACs or the role of media in politics.

School administrators, curriculum directors, and teachers should consider how popular media may serve as sources for engaging students in important and relevant debates in ways that will benefit them as 21st century citizens. Thoughtful policies and curriculum should be constructed that incorporate 21st century media analysis and production skills with content that is relevant and vital for an informed citizenry.

Teachers should be held accountable for their media and curricular choices, but must be given leeway to use media in their classes to engage students in constructive activities focused on developing these knowledge and skills necessary for the future.

Shows like the *Colbert Report* should not be treated as trustworthy news sources, but sometimes they get to the heart of an issue in a

way that provides entrée to teaching concepts such as advocacy, propaganda, objectivity, and “truthiness” like no other sources can.

Author Biography

Jeremy Stoddard is the Spears Distinguished Associate Professor of Education at the College of William & Mary in Williamsburg, VA. His research and teaching focus on the intersection of media education and history and democratic education. The author thanks Paula McAvoy and Wayne Au for feedback on an earlier draft of this article. E-mail: jdstod@wm.edu

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World Class Learners: Educating Creative and Entrepreneurial Students

by Yong Zhao

Reviewed by:

Michael Ian Cohen, EdD

Vice Principal

Curriculum, Data Analysis, and Professional Development

Tenafly High School

Tenafly, NJ

Let me get right to the point: Yong Zhao's *World Class Learners: Educating Creative and Entrepreneurial Students* is a must-read for any school administrator who desires not only a fresh perspective on the testing and standards debates, but also a host of practical recommendations for how we might reform education through promoting and nurturing our students' native strengths and creative propensities. With just the right mix of reports on quantitative studies, engaging qualitative examples, and evidence-based commentary, Zhao's book is a good read.

For those who might equate entrepreneurialism with the act of starting a business, Zhao carefully notes that the term encompasses much more. "Financial profit," he shows, "does not have to be the sole pursuit of an entrepreneur" (p. 77). A social entrepreneur, for example, might create a not-for-profit enterprise that addresses a societal problem such as poverty.

An entrepreneur does not start her own business; she works within a larger organization and, through risk-taking, dissatisfaction with the status quo, and innovative thinking, creates something useful or profitable—the way Post-It notes were designed by two chemical engineers who

worked for 3M. And then there are policy entrepreneurs: those who solve problems creatively in places like state and municipal governments. Yet no matter the setting, entrepreneurs are confident, they recognize opportunities when they come along, they respond well to setbacks, they collaborate—often globally—and they can carry their innovative ideas to fruition.

Zhao makes one of his most powerful points early in the text: there is a statistically significant negative correlation between countries' scores on international exams (e.g., PISA, TIMSS) and their tendencies to cultivate entrepreneurial capabilities among their students. (Note: when I share this fact with friends and colleagues, I usually say it twice—it's that provocative).

Although correlation is not causation, and one cannot say that high test scores cause low entrepreneurial capabilities, the data—all drawn from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)—suggest "the possibility that the mechanisms that lead to higher test scores could lead to lower levels of entrepreneurship" (Zhao, p. 13). Put simply: traditional schooling, the kind that prepares students for high-stakes tests might discourage creativity.

For those who want more data, Zhao provides it. Longitudinal studies show sharp declines in American students' creativity from the age of kindergarten through high school and adulthood. Perhaps even more disturbing are the declines in creative thinking have been especially prevalent during the last twenty years, just as the standards movement has gained more traction, homogenizing our system through national standards and the development of common assessments.

As we look toward China with envy, admiring their test scores and growing economy, China looks toward us, emulating the decentralized education system we used to have. Quoting fascinating excerpts of Chinese educational policy documents, OECD analyses, and critics from within the Chinese system, Zhao reveals something that few Americans probably know: since the 1990s, China has been working on "reducing the amount of time devoted to academic studies" so that students will have more time to pursue individual interests (p. 121).

According to critics from within and outside the Chinese school system, although Chinese students might know their subjects and excel on tests, they "may not have learned *how* to learn" (Zhao, p. 126; emphasis mine). Chinese critics are worried that they will never produce the next Apple or Google if they do not overhaul their education system.

In the meantime, the United States spends billions of dollars standardizing its curricula and assessments. Despite more than a century of successful child-centered schools and curricula (see John Dewey and Maria Montessori); despite what we know about the diversity of human intelligence and native talents (see psychologists like Howard Gardner and Robert Sternberg); and despite a wealth of empirical research in cognitive science that shows how students are motivated best when

they are given the chance to learn through engaging experiences that capitalize on their individual strengths, the traditional, homogenized paradigm of education still reigns because it "gives a sense of orderliness and control" (Zhao, p. 160).

Counter to this paradigm, Zhao offers extended descriptions of what he calls "product-oriented learning," a more developed version of project- or problem-based learning (PBL). Zhao features several schools around the world to illustrate what happens when students are "making things for real audiences" (p. 193) and crossing disciplinary boundaries. We see the learners shift "from the recipient[s] and consumer[s] to the creator[s] and provider[s]" (p. 240) as they build products and enterprises as diverse as user-friendly textbooks on economics to sustainable and environmentally-sound chicken farms in poor, food-insecure communities in South Africa and Cameroon.

No matter the project, students are learning how to recognize what other people need, extending their campuses globally, becoming aware of their own strengths and weaknesses, and learning the fundamentals of the various disciplines in meaningful contexts.

World Class Learners would be a provocative text for teams of administrators and teachers to read and discuss as part of their professional growth programs. Educators who are concerned about the perverse consequences of a prescriptive, standardized curriculum will find in Zhao's text an array of convincing arguments against the current, test-based form of accountability—arguments they might use in their advocacy efforts. Crucially, however, they will also find a collection of illustrative examples and indicators of a child-centered pedagogy, one that empowers students to learn in a way that will make them care.

Reviewer biography

Michael Ian Cohen is vice principal of curriculum, data analysis, and professional development at Tenafly High School in Bergen County, New Jersey. He is also an adjunct instructor at Montclair State University, Department of Educational Foundations, where he teaches a graduate course in research methods. E-mail: michaeliancohen@gmail.com

World Class Learners: Educating Creative and Entrepreneurial Students is written by Yong Zhao and published by Corwin Press, Thousand Oaks, CA, 288 pages, softcover, \$29.95.

References

Mission and Scope, Copyright, Privacy, Ethics, Upcoming Themes, Author Guidelines & Publication Timeline

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11. School reform policies
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Length of manuscripts should be as follows: Research and evidence-based practice articles between 1,800 and 3,800 words; commentaries between 1,600 and 3,800 words; book and media reviews between 400 and 800 words. Articles, commentaries, book and media reviews, citations and references are to follow the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, latest edition. Permission to use previously copyrighted materials is the responsibility of the author, not the *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice*.

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- Name and affiliation of reviewer
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Christopher H. Tienken, EdD, Editor
AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice
christopher.tienken@shu.edu

To contact the editor by postal mail:
Dr. Christopher Tienken
Assistant Professor
College of Education and Human Services
Department of Education Leadership, Management, and Policy
Seton Hall University
Jubilee Hall Room 405
400 South Orange Avenue
South Orange, NJ 07079

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