



*Research and Best Practices That Advance the Profession  
of Educational Administration*

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## A Message From the Editor

**Frederick L. Dembowski**

*Retired Professor  
Southeastern Louisiana University*

Dear Colleagues,

This is my final issue serving as the editor of the *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice*. I have served as the editor of the Journal since 1995. During that time period, many changes have occurred. The Journal changed from a printed Journal to an online Journal. This has increased the readership greatly. Over the years, I have been blessed by working with many outstanding educators. The Board of Editors experienced many changes, but every board member (there have been over 50 of them!) has done outstanding service. I thank all of them!

I have worked at three universities while serving as editor: the University at Albany in Albany, NY, Lynn University in Boca Raton, FL, and Southeastern Louisiana University in Hammond, LA. Each of these universities has provided resources for publishing the Journal including office space, graduate assistants, mailings, postage and travel funding to meetings of the editorial board and to meet with AASA staff. These contributions deserve recognition and thanks. The many graduate assistants I have worked with have been invaluable and I could not have produced the Journals without their able assistance. I thank them also.

I have enjoyed working with AASA over the years. Kudos especially go to Dr. Joe Schneider in the early days, and more recently Claudia Mansfield Sutton and Barbara Dean. I strongly believe that the Journal provides an important link between the academic community and educational practitioners. So I am pleased that the Journal will continue under the editorship of Dr. Christopher Tienken of Seton Hall University. You may contact him at: [tienkech@shu.edu](mailto:tienkech@shu.edu).

I will continue being active professionally, serving as the president of the International Association of Organizational Innovation. I look forward to the possibility of working with you again in some way. If you wish to contact me, my permanent email is: [drfdembowski@aol.com](mailto:drfdembowski@aol.com).

Thank you for the opportunity of serving as editor of the Journal. It has been a very rewarding experience and I have enjoyed it very much!

Fred Dembowski

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## Designing Principal Preparation Internships To Strengthen School Leadership

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The purpose of this study was to analyze changes made to the design of the principal preparation internship. The study is based in part upon findings of a previous study on internship practices in Illinois administrator preparation programs (Tripses, Philhower, Halverson, Noe, & Morford, 2005) which found discrepancies in the design of internship programs based upon the state standards for principal preparation programs.

Revisions were based upon a review of the current literature and faculty analysis of student performance under the previous internship design. Revisions involved clarification of expectations for students through the design of the internship, creation of effective assessments connected to these expectations, and finally employing sound instructional pedagogies to create the kind of leaders American society deserves.

### Description of Internship and Rationale for Changes

The founder of Bradley University was a visionary entrepreneur who envisioned the institution would “teach its students the means of living an independent, industrious, and useful life by the aid of practical knowledge of the useful arts and sciences” (Upton, 1994, p. 49).

The life story of Lydia Moss Bradley reveals her views outside the mainstream of her time in terms of equity for women, African Americans, and other disadvantaged groups. The program described here continues the legacy of Lydia Moss Bradley today through its commitment to prepare future school leaders by providing strong connections between knowledge of schools and society, practical administrative skills, and a strong sense of the

democratic values of equity and justice. Striving to contribute to the legacy of Lydia Moss Bradley, the educational leadership internship intends to serve local schools while training the graduate student.

The revision process was based upon current research on the internship. Changes in the internship program focused on providing connections between theory and practice to develop leadership capacities of graduate students.

Course objectives for the internship were designed to provide graduate students opportunities to develop leadership capacity and administrative skills as addressed in the ELCC/NCATE standards.

“The internship provides opportunities for candidates to synthesize and apply knowledge and practice and develop skills identified in Standards 1 – 6 through substantial, sustained, standards – based work in real settings, planned and guided cooperatively by the institution and school district personnel for graduate credit” (Educational Leadership Constituent Council [ELCC], 2002).

Internships designed to provide future school leaders adequate preparation should clearly link theory to the real world problems faced by school leaders. Focused on standards, program and course designers have a responsibility to coherently sequence and align programs under these three constructs.

Assignments for the revised internship require students to:

1. collaborate with a practicing administrator (mentor) and university faculty member to design two projects to be completed during the internship. The projects must demonstrate leadership, benefit the school setting, and include the development of skills new to the student. Upon completion of the internship, the student will have applied theoretical knowledge of administrative leadership developed in previous coursework to educational leadership (ELCC 7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4, 7.5).
2. develop outcomes for the two internship projects and specify measurement of accomplishment of goals for each project (ELCC 7.4, 7.5).
3. develop problem-solving expertise through application of issues and problems reflective of schools in a democratic society (ELCC 7.1, 7.4, 7.5).
4. complete a minimum of one required activity for ELCC Standards 1-6. Activities are designed to be more managerial and observational than the two projects (ELCC 7.3).

Developing the capacity of graduate students to seek out a mentor and participate effectively in a mentoring relationship is a new emphasis of this program.

Changes in the seminar format of the internship required students to meet with their

mentor three times during the semester to talk about ill-structured problems encountered by the mentor in the realms of personnel, parents, and special education. Mentors were asked to submit both a formative mid-term and a summative final evaluation at the conclusion of the internship.

Four campus seminars supervised by a university supervisor are designed to develop problem solving expertise through application of knowledge and skills to typical ill structured problems in schools based upon the work of Leithwood and Steinbach (1995). Students worked together during each seminar to develop a problem solving strategy for a case study and then submit reflections after each seminar about the case studies that were reviewed.

### **Theoretical Framework/Context**

Design of effective internships requires maintaining a balance between application of theory to practice and management over leadership while simultaneously attending to issues of equity, social justice, democracy and community. Moving beyond management to leadership, Pounder, Reitzug and Young (2002) propose educational leadership programs develop leadership knowledge, skills and dispositions that promote school improvement, democratic and collaborative community and social justice.

The internship phase of educational leadership preparation programs should provide the core of the experience for graduate students, providing students with opportunities to serve as apprentice administrators and solve real school problems. Well-designed programs include extensive mentored internships that integrate theory and practice and progressively developing administrative competencies through a range of practical experiences (Pounder et al., 2002; Capasso & Daresh, 2001; Hale & Moorman, 2003).

Leadership focused on student learning for all students requires expert problem solving. “We now know that expert educational administrators think about their professional problems in ways that are substantially different from their nonexpert colleagues. They find and define problems to spend their time on

problems that have greater potential to be productive for their organizations” (Leithwood & Steinbach, 1995, p. 311). The purpose of this component of the internship was to develop within students a stronger capacity to apply knowledge defined in the ELCC standards around real world problems confronted by principals.

While the mentor is recognized as a critical player in the success of internship experiences (Wilmore & Bratlien, 2005), there are factors that limit the effectiveness of the mentor. Graduate students may have limited choices in a mentor or fully qualified mentors can have other circumstances that interfere with quality assistance to the graduate student. The focus of this program change sought to simultaneously support and encourage the role of the mentor while at the same time develop capacities of protégé graduate students to engage in effective mentoring relationships.

### *Designing effective internship experiences*

The process of instructional design by Wiggins and McTighe (2006) contains three stages: desired results, acceptable evidence and the learning plan (p. 256 -270). The creation of the capable school leader begins with a clear definition of desired results centered around three themes of school improvement; democratic and collaborative school community; and social justice (Pounder et al., 2002). Connecting these with consideration for the individual graduate students’ experiences and readiness is the goal.

Students, in collaboration with university and site supervisors/mentors, develop specific goals for the internship. The development of clear criteria for goals rests with university faculty. Successful internship design includes using the ELCC standards to identify desired results in the internship, careful consideration of the extent to which programs are “real-world” and connected to the realities

of school accountability (Fry, Bottoms, & O'Neill, 2005; Levine, 2005) and the expectation that students engage in leadership behaviors as opposed to simply attending or observing school improvement initiatives.

Learning experiences on site should be defined to a large extent by the goals and evidence of accomplishment designed by graduate students under the support and direction of university faculty. Other critical learning experiences include regularly scheduled seminars between interns and university supervisors to develop skills and reflect upon their experiences (Milstein & Krueger, 1997, p. 110). Continuing in their role as designers, university faculty develop student problem-solving expertise using case studies and reflection upon the problem solving process (Leithwood & Steinbach, 1995).

### **Methodology**

Based upon the previous study of Illinois internship practices, review of the literature, and analysis of prior student performance in this program, changes were made in the internship program. This action research study analyzed student performance including student proposals, evaluations of projects students complete based upon their goals, completion of required internship activities, and evaluation of student performance during seminars through student reflections and problem solving (Sagor, 2000; Mills, 2000). The data analysis of student performance included in this study included two semesters based upon the work of eleven graduate students.

**Results** Results are based upon an analysis of the changes described over a period of two semesters. Analysis of student proposals revealed the majority of graduate students collaborated effectively with mentor principals to develop two projects that were relevant,

provided service to their school, and emphasized leadership. Students' abilities to develop outcomes clearly aligned with goals for each project were more challenging. Most students required coaching from university faculty to develop measurable, attainable, and reasonable goals.

Students were required to meet with mentor principals midway through the semester for a formative evaluation of progress on each of the two projects.. Analysis of these formative reports revealed that in only one case did a mentor principal respond to all three questions on the written form turned in by students. Ways to engage mentor principals more actively in the growth and development of graduate students seems indicated.

At the conclusion of the internship, all projects were finalized including evidence of accomplishment of goals and reflections upon each project. The reflections revealed that students learned a great deal about the process of accomplishing projects through teacher committees and in one case, with an outside group of local engineers working with several high schools. Students wrote about a strong sense of accomplishment in working through frustration, overcoming unanticipated obstacles, and a new found realization of the complexities of a principal's job. All mentor principals were very positive about the work of the graduate student.

Development of student capacity for problem solving was another goal of the internship revisions. Student reflections after each seminar revealed first of all surprise that others might have different approaches to problems presented in class. By the end of the semester, students were more open in their writing to the perspectives of others and at the same time, expressed more confidence in their particular solution.

Analysis of student work leads the authors to conclude the changes in the internship achieved the original goals of providing connections between theory and practice to develop the leadership capacities of graduate students. The internship experiences strengthened student leadership capacity in two significant ways: (1) experience in developing

and implementing leadership projects and (2) the experience working with others to develop problem solving expertise. Areas that require attention are strengthening the commitment of mentor principals to provide specific feedback to graduate students and developing our capacities to teach the proposal process to students.

### Author Biographies

Michael Risen joined the department of educational leadership at Bradley University in Peoria, IL in 2004. His current research is centered on analyzing the behaviors of principals who have demonstrated they are effective social change agents. He has presented numerous times on the topics of quality and technology at various state and national education conferences over the past 10 years. Prior to joining the faculty at Bradley, Risen served for 30 years in K-12 education as an elementary principal and superintendent. He earned his doctorate in educational administration from Illinois State.

Jenny Tripses also teaches in the department of educational leadership at Bradley University in Peoria, IL. In addition to her administrative courses, she teaches two courses on spirituality, leadership and justice, and women in leadership. Her current research interests include women in leadership, classroom assessments, and the connections among spirituality, leadership, and justice. Her research on leadership focuses on the nature of values in the decision-making processes used by leaders. Tripses has collaborated in developing a two-day leadership development workshop for principals.



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## The Development and Validation of the Diversity Dispositions Index

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The population of the U.S. is becoming increasingly more diverse. Yet, administrators and teachers in the U.S. are predominantly “European Americans from middle-class backgrounds who speak only English. Many of their students are racial and ethnic minorities, live in poverty, and speak a first language other than English” (Banks et al., 2005, p. 237).

The “No Child Left Behind Act” signed into law in 2002 requires school districts to hire highly qualified teachers who possess the necessary dispositions to ensure that all

children learn (Center on Education Policy, 2002). School administrators and teachers must understand students’ backgrounds and experiences, and they must possess the necessary dispositions to work with students from diverse backgrounds (Villegas & Lucas, 2007).

The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) (2002) defines dispositions as “the values, commitments, and professional ethics that influence behaviors toward students, families, colleagues, and

communities and affect student learning, motivation, and development as well as the educator's own professional growth" (p. 53). Some researchers have defined dispositions as the values, commitments, or ethics that are internally held and externally demonstrated (Cudahy, Finnan, Jaruszewicz, & McCarty, 2002), while others have defined dispositions in terms of the interpersonal relationships needed to negotiate the context of schooling (Edwards & Edick, 2006).

A review of the literature on administrator and teacher dispositions failed to identify a perceptual instrument that measures the dispositions needed to work with students from diverse backgrounds (Schulte, Edick, Edwards, & Mackiel, 2004; Schulte & Kowal, 2005).

In response to this need, students in an educational administration doctoral level applied statistics course and a graduate level teacher education course worked together to develop and validate an assessment instrument that measures the dispositions practicing educators need to possess in order to work with students from diverse backgrounds. This article discusses the processes involved in the development and validation of the Diversity Dispositions Index (DDI): adopting a

framework; developing items; providing evidence of content validity; conducting a pilot study; and analyzing data (DeVellis, 2003).

### **Adopting a Framework**

The first step in the scale development process is adopting a framework, which serves as the blueprint for item development. The three propositions of culturally relevant teaching—conception of self and others, social relations, and conceptions of knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 1994)—served as the framework for the DDI.

The propositions of culturally relevant teaching ensure that educators engage students by teaching subject matter in meaningful ways, connecting it to students' lives (Villegas & Lucas, 2007).

The DDI assesses the dispositions of effective educators across the belief, relations, and knowledge indicators specified by the three propositions of culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1994) (see Table 1, page 13). Through culturally relevant teaching students (a) "experience academic success, (b) develop and/or maintain cultural competence, and (c) develop a critical consciousness" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 160).

Table 1

*Diversity Dispositions Index Framework***Proposition #1: Conception of Self and Others**

- 
- BELIEF 1** Teacher sees herself as an artist, teaching as an art.
- BELIEF 2** Teacher sees herself as part of the community and teaching as giving something back to the community, encourages students to do the same.
- BELIEF 3** Teachers believe all students can succeed.
- BELIEF 4** Teacher helps students make connections between their community, national, and global identities.
- BELIEF 5** Teachers see teaching as “pulling knowledge out” – like “mining.”
- 

**Proposition #2: Social Relations**

- RELATIONS 1** Teacher-student relationship is fluid, humanely equitable, extends to interactions beyond the classroom and into the community.
- RELATIONS 2** Teacher demonstrates a ‘connectedness’ with all students.
- RELATIONS 3** Teacher encourages a “community of learners.”
- RELATIONS 4** Teacher encourages students to learn collaboratively. Students are expected to teach each other and be responsible for each other.
- 

**Proposition #3: Conceptions of Knowledge**

- KNOWLEDGE 1** Knowledge is continuously recreated, recycled, and shared by teachers and students. It is not static or unchanging.
- KNOWLEDGE 2** Knowledge is viewed critically.
- KNOWLEDGE 3** Teacher is passionate about content.
- KNOWLEDGE 4** Teacher helps students develop necessary skills.
- KNOWLEDGE 5** Teacher sees excellence as a complex standard that may involve some postulates but takes student diversity and individual differences into account.
- 

*Note:* The DDI framework was adopted from work by Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995).

## Developing Items

The 15 students in the statistics and teacher education courses possessed the expertise to serve as the item development panel for the DDI. Their roles in the field of education included: professor, teacher, and administrator (principal, assistant principal, and program coordinator). Their years of experience in the field of education ranged from 2 to 28 years ( $M = 15.67$ ,  $SD = 7.92$ ). To develop the items for the DDI, the item development panel members read the article by Ladson-Billings (1995), “But That’s Just Good Teaching! The Case for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy.”

Then, the researchers presented the item development panel with information on culturally relevant teaching, including the propositions and their belief, relations, and knowledge indicators (see Table 1). The researchers provided an example of a possible item for the DDI along with the response scale, which was a 5-point Likert-like scale with words describing each number (i.e., “1” strongly disagree to “5” strongly agree).

Then, the members of the item development panel, the 15 students, broke into six small groups composed of two to three students. Each group brainstormed and developed items that operationally define the dispositions related to one of the culturally relevant teaching propositions. Thus, there were two groups for each proposition. Through the item development process, the item development panel generated 65 items that were reviewed for content validity.

## Providing Evidence of Content Validity

To provide evidence of content validity, 25 professional educators (master teachers, administrators, and professors) were recruited to review each of the items created by the item development panel. The content validity panel members’ years of experience in the field of

education ranged from 5 to 40 years ( $M = 18.84$ ,  $SD = 9.20$ ). They rated each item on a 3-point scale (“1” = not appropriate, “2” = marginally appropriate, and “3” = very appropriate). They were asked to provide recommendations for improving items they rated 1 or 2.

The students in the statistics and teacher education courses (the item development panel) reviewed the input from the content validity panel and made changes to the DDI items by considering each item’s ratings and recommendations for revision. Based on the input from the content validity panel, the item development panel reworded 33 items, eliminated 3 items, and added 1 new item. The 63 items retained from the content validity process were then pilot tested to provide evidence of reliability and construct validity.

## Conducting a Pilot Study

The participants in the pilot study were 136 graduate students who were representative of the final proposed respondents. Professors in graduate level educational administration and teacher education classes were asked to distribute the DDI to students in their classes who were educators in area K-12 schools. Of the 136 graduate students/educators who completed the DDI, approximately 90% were Caucasian, and 76% were females. Their ages ranged from 22 to 66 ( $M = 32.56$ ,  $SD = 8.82$ ). Their years of experience in the field of education ranged from 1 to 33 years ( $M = 7.23$ ,  $SD = 6.43$ ). Their certification levels included 44.4% elementary, 41.3% secondary, and 14.3% K-12.

## Analyzing Data

### *Factor and reliability analyses*

The data collected from the pilot study were analyzed by the students in the statistics class as part of their final examination in the course. Factor and reliability analyses were conducted to provide evidence of construct validity and

reliability (Kachigan, 1991). Exploratory factor analyses using a principal axis factoring method followed by a varimax rotation of the number of factors extracted and the

corresponding scree plot indicated that a three-factor solution best fit the data, accounting for 37% of the variance in the DDI items (see Table 2).

Table 2

*Diversity Dispositions Index Items by Factor with Factor Loadings*

<i>Factor 1 Items – Educators’ Skills in Helping Students Gain Knowledge</i>	<i>Factor 1 Loading</i>	<i>Factor 2 Loading</i>	<i>Factor 3 Loading</i>
1. I teach my students the skills to gain knowledge on their own.	.659	.197	.233
2. I work to develop my students’ critical thinking skills.	.577	.255	.181
3. I am successful at creating meaningful relationships between knowledge and new information.	.561	.322	.225
4. Students enter my class with excitement about what the day will bring.	.543	.306	.012
5. I use the teaching “moment” to enhance my students’ understanding of today’s world.	.542	.307	.187
6. I provide opportunities and structure for my students to work cooperatively.	.515	.238	.155
7. I possess a large repertoire of teaching strategies to help students access their prior knowledge.	.513	.302	.316
8. I create opportunities for my students to express their knowledge in a variety of ways.	.513	.359	.323
9. I create opportunities for and encourage my students to share their knowledge and talents with their peers.	.505	.217	.227
10. I differentiate expectations for individual students.	.496	.045	.271
11. I encourage my students to take responsibility for their own and their peers’ learning.	.490	.221	.056
12. I make an effort to build positive relationships with my students’ parents/guardians.	.485	.170	.369
13. I deliver instruction using an interactive process that enhances further discovery.	.481	.388	.097
14. Many of my lessons require my students to think critically.	.480	.007	.241
15. I determine where my students are and help them reach their potential.	.479	.307	.102
16. I help students understand their connection to global issues.	.478	.191	.140
17. I continue to reteach my students until they have an understanding of the content.	.448	.157	.093
18. I contact my students’ parents/guardians about positive growth.	.431	.188	.277

(Table 2 continued)

<i>Factor 2 Items – Educators’ Beliefs and Attitudes about Students and Teaching/Learning</i>	<i>Factor 1 Loading</i>	<i>Factor 2 Loading</i>	<i>Factor 3 Loading</i>
1. I believe that all students can succeed.	.024	.702	.102
2. I believe that all students can learn.	.094	.673	.192
3. I believe that students learn in a variety of ways.	.166	.638	.060
4. I demonstrate enthusiasm for the content I teach.	.266	.614	.075
5. I look for new ways to teach difficult material.	.326	.610	.111
6. I am enthusiastic about sharing knowledge with my students.	.347	.600	.141
7. I collaborate with others in order to learn and grow.	.137	.577	.267
8. I am reflective about how my actions affect student achievement.	.326	.527	.127
9. I can express myself creatively as a teacher.	.274	.517	.172
10. I continue to look for new information to share with my students.	.254	.513	.261
11. I learn from my students.	.236	.509	.267
12. I continually search for new knowledge within my content area.	-.003	.446	.263
13. I am responsible for creating an atmosphere where all students feel free to openly exchange ideas, thoughts, and opinions.	.186	.437	.051
14. I believe in setting high standards for all students.	.319	.436	.147
15. I am passionate about my own learning.	.138	.433	.199
16. I believe that diversity enhances student knowledge.	.399	.406	.319
<i>Factor 3 Items – Educators’ Connections with the Community</i>	<i>Factor 1 Loading</i>	<i>Factor 2 Loading</i>	<i>Factor 3 Loading</i>
1. I collaborate on providing community service opportunities for my students.	-.017	.181	.702
2. I plan instructional opportunities for my students to interact with peers, family members, and the whole community.	.159	.205	.624
3. I help my students make connections in their community.	.289	.040	.622
4. I encourage my students to give back to their community.	.169	.175	.545
5. I am involved in the community where I teach.	.205	.018	.531
6. It is important that I attend activities in my students’ neighborhoods.	.042	.027	.516
7. I see myself as a part of the community in my role as a teacher.	.088	.275	.511
8. I welcome community members into my classes to share their skills.	.185	.273	.503
9. I work to establish positive school-community relationships.	.303	.213	.449



Using a factor loading cutoff value of .40, items were retained that loaded on one and only one factor because the goal was to create relatively independent composite scores for further statistical analyses. The dominant factor had an eigenvalue of 17.26 and accounted for 27.40% of the total variance. It included items about educators' skills in helping students gain knowledge.

The second factor had an eigenvalue of 3.23 and accounted for 5.12% of the total variance. It included items about educators' beliefs and attitudes about students and teaching/learning. The third factor had an eigenvalue of 2.67 and accounted for 4.24% of the total variance. It included items about educators' connections with the community. As a result of the factor analysis, 20 items were removed, resulting in a 43-item DDI (see Table 2).

The reliability analyses for all three factors indicated that participants were consistent in their responses across items that measured the same construct (Crocker & Algina, 1986). Cronbach's alpha was .91 for Factor 1, .90 for Factor 2, and .84 for Factor 3.

#### *Other analyses*

The means and standard deviations for each factor were computed: Factor 1 ( $M = 4.26$ ,  $SD = 0.44$ ); Factor 2 ( $M = 4.61$ ,  $SD = 0.34$ ); Factor 3 ( $M = 3.87$ ,  $SD = 0.58$ ). Respondents rated themselves more positively on their diversity dispositions related to teaching and students than those related to their connections with the community.

Because multiple statistical analyses were conducted, a significance level of .01 was used for the inferential statistical analyses to

control for Type I errors. Correlation analyses indicated that participants' responses to the DDI were not related to their age or years of experience with all correlation coefficients less than .24.

Analyses of variance indicated that participants' responses were not related to their ethnicity or certification level. Independent t-tests indicated that female respondents ( $M = 4.33$ ,  $SD = 0.42$  (Factor 1);  $M = 4.69$ ,  $SD = 0.29$  (Factor 2)) rated themselves significantly more positive than male respondents ( $M = 4.06$ ,  $SD = 0.43$  (Factor 1);  $M = 4.38$ ,  $SD = 0.41$  (Factor 2)) on their diversity dispositions related to Factors 1 and 2 ( $t(134) = 3.197$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $d = 0.64$  (Factor 1);  $t(134) = 4.841$ ,  $p < .0005$ ,  $d = 0.89$  (Factor 2)).

## **Discussion**

The procedures and processes used to develop and validate the DDI resulted in a psychometrically sound instrument with many potential uses.

First, the DDI could be used as a self-assessment instrument in graduate teacher education and educational administration programs to help candidates become more aware of and develop the dispositions necessary to be effective educators with students from diverse backgrounds.

Next, faculty members could align activities, assignments, and assessments with the dispositions represented in the DDI items. Finally, universities could use the information from the DDI items to collaborate with school districts to develop programs to enhance and improve educators' abilities to work with students from diverse backgrounds.

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## Evaluation of School Principals Using Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards

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### Introduction

Although the school superintendent is accountable for a variety of responsibilities, which have been documented by numerous researchers (Bjork & Kowalski, 2005; Hoyle, Bjork, Collier, & Glass, 2005; McCabe, Cunningham, Harvey, & Koff, 2005; Sharp & Walter, 2004), there is an absence of discussion or research regarding the superintendent's essential role with regard to school principals: as supervisor and evaluator.

In fact, continuous, job-embedded, and sustained professional development is imperative for principals' performances to improve. This continuity and professional growth can best be provided by the supervisor who knows the work of the schools and is in frequent contact with the principals.

Thus, in order for superintendents to successfully guide principals in their professional growth, the components of an effective supervision and evaluation model must first be identified.

Supervision and evaluation are long-standing, recognized methods to guide growth and improve performance (Bolton, 1980; Castetter, 1971; Stufflebeam, 1988). In any system of performance evaluation, the evaluator must first identify desired competencies.

A clear picture of the desired outcome is necessary for both the evaluator and the professional being evaluated. Harris and Monk (1992) define evaluation as a three-phase process: (1) determine desired competencies, (2) describe performance in terms of the desired competencies, and (3) make judgments based on the gap or fit between desired competencies and performance.

Thus the foundation of an effective evaluation is determining the competencies or criteria for assessing performance. While others have documented performance criteria for evaluation of administrators, the data are primarily from the 1980s and the management by objectives movement (Bolton, 1980;

Blumberg, 1985; Castetter, 1971; Redfern, 1980; Stufflebeam, 1988). While these studies reflect the thinking of that time, we need to consider the different mandates, standards, and philosophy under which schools currently operate.

Educational expectations and demands on the principal have changed markedly over the past few decades, so an updated set of standards or competencies is needed to effectively evaluate school principals today. Increasingly, many states require that administrators qualify for the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) certification. In 2006, forty-three states reported using ISLLC standards in some way related to administrator licensure.

In Washington State, ISLLC standards set the direction and are the primary objective for developing course requirements and internship activities in principal preparation programs. Moreover, requirements for continuing certification for principals are job embedded, and based on ISLLC standards.

As a result, there is a potential disconnect between the superintendent expectations in evaluation and the ISSLC performance criteria encountered at universities through the certification process. The outcome may be confusion or frustration on the part of the school principal when he or she is evaluated using performance standards in the district different from those used in the continuing certification process.

### **Purpose**

Murphy and Shipman (1999) recognize that the information available on principal evaluations is exceedingly thin. They suggest that ISLLC standards might become an evaluative template for evaluation of school principals, and that these standards might become the new competencies for principal performance. This

study aims to discover the extent to which the ISLLC standards are used in the evaluation of principals in Washington State, and to identify strengths or problems in current implementations of those standards.

### **Research Questions**

1. To what extent are ISLLC standards used in the supervision and evaluation of principals in Washington State?
2. Why were the previous evaluation criteria changed to ISLLC standards criteria?
3. What strengths are reported by superintendents and principals using ISLLC standards for evaluation? What is the agreement between principals and superintendents regarding the strengths of using the ISSLC standards for principal evaluation?
4. What problems are reported by superintendents and principals using ISLLC standards for evaluation? What is the agreement between principals and superintendents regarding those problems?

### **Methods**

A database was developed identifying the 296 current Washington State school superintendents. A survey was e-mailed to each superintendent, asking to what degree he or she was familiar with the ISLLC standards. The initial survey was developed using recognized guidelines (Orlich, 1978; Yin, 2003).

The survey also asked superintendents if they used ISLLC standards as criteria in the evaluation of principal performance. Additionally, the survey provided an explanation of the purposes of the survey.

Eighty percent of the state superintendents responded. Of the 237 responding superintendents, 44.7 percent answered they were “familiar” with the ISLLC standards. An additional 12.2 percent responded that they were “somewhat familiar” with the standards. When asked if the ISLLC

standards were used to evaluate principals, 16 percent responded that they used the standards exclusively for evaluation of principals. Of all respondents, 28.3 percent indicated that they use the standards “somewhat” in evaluating principals.

An additional 8.9 percent indicated that they are “exploring the possibility” for using the standards in evaluation. However, a large number of the respondents, 41.2 percent, indicated that they had no knowledge of or familiarity with the ISLLC standards.

This study focused on the superintendents identified in the 16 percent who reported use of the ISLLC standards exclusively in the evaluation of school principals. A telephone interview was scheduled with each superintendent or the assistant superintendent responsible for principal evaluation in the districts.

Questions to be used in the phone interview were piloted. Minor modifications to edit questions for clarity were made based on the pilot superintendent response. The questions were consistently asked of each superintendent.

The interviews created a deeper understanding and illuminated the data in more depth. Following the data collection, interview responses were coded and counted using the methods described by Miles and Huberman (1994). Demographic information regarding district location and size was also obtained. The districts range in student population from 375 to 15,022, and represent all geographic regions of Washington State.

## Outcomes of the Study

### Why change to ISLLC?

Current Washington State law requires that principal evaluation “be based on the administrative position job description and shall include at least the following categories:

1. knowledge of, experience in, and training in recognizing good professional performance, capabilities and development; school administration and management; school finance;
2. professional preparation and scholarship;
3. effort toward improvement when needed;
4. interest in pupils, employees, patrons, and subjects taught in school; leadership; and
5. ability and performance of evaluation of school personnel” (RCW 28A 405.100).

This law is, in effect, so it is important to understand why these superintendents felt compelled to change their evaluation standards. In general, superintendents reported that ISLLC is “better.” Standards are preferred, they reported, and ISLLC specifically is preferred because it aligns with current responsibilities of school principals, and offers clearer and better indicators than previous criteria (Table 1, page 22).

Illustrative of superintendent comments, one superintendent reported that principals “did not have a clear focus on the importance of leadership versus management before. I found that these standards clearly articulate leadership.”

Table 1

*Why the Change Was Made: Superintendent Report*

ISLLC standards are	Ranking of item by frequency of mention
. . . clearer, aligned with current principal responsibilities, and better indicators than previous standards.	1
. . . standards based.	2
. . . preferred because we did not like the old evaluation form.	3
. . . consistent with new principal training.	4
. . . more meaningful for principals.	4
. . . preferred for changing to a districtwide supervision model.	4

*Strengths of ISLLC standards for evaluation: superintendents' perspective*

Superintendents interviewed cited strengths of using the ISLLC standards for evaluation of principals. The most frequently mentioned strength is the specificity of criteria and the alignment with school reform requirements (Table 2). This response is consistent with the reasons indicated for choosing or changing to ISLLC standards.

Several superintendents indicated that the standards provide consistency for conversations on performance across the district. Others indicated that use of the standards as a hiring and professional development tool was also beneficial as illustrated by this interview comment: "It's what I look for in a principal. I believe the ISLLC standards do the best job of addressing the true work a principal needs to be doing. The standards have provided direction and focus. It

reminds us of what we're supposed to be doing."

*Strengths of ISCCL standards for evaluation: principals' perspective*

Following the data collection and analysis from superintendent interviews, the 98 principals in these districts were surveyed. Using the lists of ISLLC strengths generated by the superintendents, the principals were asked to rate each item on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating strong disagreement and 5 indicating strong agreement. A mean score of all responses by principals was obtained.

Additionally, responses were disaggregated by school level (elementary, middle, and high), and compared. 47% of the principals surveyed responded. Overall, the principals appreciate the specificity of the standards, as indicated by this one principal's comment: "Past evaluations were general. We

were given a number with a generic comment. I like the ISLLC standards because this forces the superintendent to be more specific and spell out our areas of deficiency and needed growth.”

*Putting the perspectives of strengths together*

Superintendent priority rankings were compared with principals’ ratings (Table 2, below). Principals’ mean rating of items ranged from 3.74 to 4.22, indicating that they agree to some degree with the importance of all superintendent identified strengths in using ISLLC standards to evaluate principals. As the table indicates, principals and superintendents both agree that the greatest strength of using ISLLC for evaluation is that the standards provide a strong alignment with school reform demands and the leadership qualities necessary in today’s educational environment. However,

from there the agreement, while strong, is less congruent.

The superintendents ranked equally high the notion that specific criteria or performance indicators are provided by the standards. In contrast, this item is among the lowest principal level of agreement with the superintendents.

Some principals responded that the indicators are not adequate to provide specific feedback, nor are the ISLLC standards comprehensive in describing the necessary skills and abilities required of principals today. Ratings also indicate that principals, while agreeing there is an impact on students, do not see as strong a connection as do the superintendents.

Table 2

*Strengths of ISLLC Standards for Evaluation: A Comparison Between Superintendents’ and Principals’ Responses*

Item	Superintendents’ most frequently mentioned ISSLC strength ( listed in priority order).	Principals’ agreement with importance of superintendent responses ( 5=strongly agree)
Current/in alignment with school reform and leadership	1	4.22
Provides specific criteria/performance indicators	1	3.91
Focus is impact on students	2	3.91
Comprehensive	3	3.74
Provides common language	3	4.09
Provides direction, focus	3	4.17
New principals familiarity	3	3.93
Nationally comparable	3	3.93



The principals' responses were also disaggregated according to the school level of the principals. The ratings were similar, with these exceptions:

- High school principals indicated stronger agreement with the superintendents that the ISLLC standards are a comprehensive description of the principal's job.
- Middle school principals did not agree as strongly with the superintendents' belief that the standards provide direction, focus, and an opportunity to reflect, whereas both the elementary and high school principals agreed strongly that they did provide such direction.
- High school principals gave their strongest agreement to the perception that the ISLLC standards provide a comparison to national standards, while elementary and middle school principals indicated less agreement with this statement.

#### *Problems: superintendents' perspective*

Problems reported by superintendents were few. More than 50 percent of the items were identified by only one superintendent in the group. The problem most frequently mentioned by superintendents was that there is too much information, and that the topic of educational reform and leadership is very difficult to use in evaluation because of the sheer quantity of information. Moreover the difficulty of a principal's job under today's educational expectations was noted by several superintendents during the interview and is a contributing factor related to the large quantity of information to consider in evaluation.

#### *Problems: principals' perspective*

Principals also report that the current evaluation tool is often time consuming to use with too many and frequently redundant items. Comments indicate that while the specificity of the standards is beneficial, the ability of the principal to use the information to grow professionally is paramount. "No evaluation process I have been involved with has the power of my own self-evaluation and goal setting," a principal candidly commented.

Many principals indicated that the process is far more important than the content of the standards. Principals survey comments frequently mentioned that time for reflection, discussion, and problem-solving with the superintendent is valued. Additionally, professional development guidance from the superintendent, similar to the methods that principals use to guide teachers, was often mentioned as a desirable source of professional growth.

Elaborating on the importance of standards and indicators versus the interpersonal skills needed to evaluate, a principal wrote that, "There are too many indicators to strive for on a yearly basis. The reality is that sometimes evaluations are based on perceptions of the superintendent. Thus, the superintendent's ability to evaluate and to use the standards is the key."

#### *Putting the Perspectives Together*

The highest agreement between superintendents and principals regarding problems using ISSLC standards in evaluation is that the criteria are redundant. However, in disaggregating the responses it is clear that the elementary and high school principals indicate redundancy as a larger problem, while the middle school principals marked it as less

problematic than the evaluation instrument being experienced as a “cumbersome tool.”

What administrators meant when reporting problems of redundancy and “too much information” became clear after reviewing the evaluation tools provided by superintendents.

The evaluation tool typically lists all of the ISLLC standards and criteria and in many cases includes the dispositions. It might be difficult to translate this information into practice if one merely developed and used a form.

As one superintendent reported, “It’s not a check-the-box-and-move-on evaluation. You have to really think it through.” Superintendents did report in most cases limiting the yearly number of goals that principals identified to work on as a means of managing the numerous criteria but this may be an insufficient method to address the problem of an overabundance of information.

Comparing superintendents’ and principals’ responses, the perceived problem area with the most discrepancy between the two groups is the “principals fear of change.” Superintendents indicated this to be a larger problem than did the principals (Table 3).

Table 3

*Problems Encountered with ISLLC Standards Comparing Superintendents and Principal Rankings*

Item	Superintendent ranked responses by frequency of mention	Principals’ agreement of importance of superintendent responses ( 5=strongly agree)
Cumbersome: too, too many items.	1	3.20
Principals fear change.	1	2.29
Can’t use for other administrators.	1	3.09
Too time consuming.	2	3.09
Criteria are redundant.	2	3.30
Criteria are difficult to understand.	2	2.82
Visionary leadership hard to define and measure.	2	2.93

**Conclusion**

The superintendent as the supervisor of principals can greatly contribute to principal leadership, development, and growth through the evaluation process. Additionally, the evaluation of principals is in most cases a

legally required responsibility of the superintendent’s job. However, little evidence exists that superintendents receive training on supervision and evaluation, either on the job or in preparation programs. Thus the

superintendent's role in evaluating principals using the ISLLC standards has implications for training programs as well as for the principal's continued professional growth.

Moreover when principal evaluation is conducted it has not always been viewed as helpful to the principals perhaps in part because of the criteria on which the evaluation is based. Thus a discussion on the performance criteria on which principal evaluation is based is needed and timely. Most literature on the relationship of performance criteria to the evaluation of principals is from the 1980's and the Management by Objectives movement. The use of ISLLC standards as a performance and evaluation template is nascent. This study advances the conversation by identifying strengths and problems using the ISLLC standards in the evaluation of principals.

Another goal in the development of the ISLLC standards was to raise the quality of school leaders and the expectations of those who hire them (Murphy & Shipman, 1999). Interview data from those who use ISLLC in evaluation indicate that this is occurring. All superintendents during the interview commented that the standards had an impact on expectations by raising the quality of the performance standards. All had changed the performance assessment of principals because

of their belief in the credibility of the standards in comparison to previous vague standards.

ISLLC was envisioned in part as an effort to change the way educational administrators thought about leadership (McKerrow, Crawford, & Cornell, 2006). Although the ISLLC standards were not originally developed to be used in the evaluation of principals, a number of superintendents are using them for this purpose. Superintendents in Washington using the ISLLC standards for principal evaluation strongly believe that the standards are useful for this purpose, as indicated by this statement, "Probably the one and only reason I use the ISLLC standards is because I believe they do the best job of addressing the true work a principal needs to be doing."

Although the evaluation of principal performance is a legal requirement, an expectation, and a process by which school principals' performance can be improved, little has been written on the role of the superintendent as the supervisor and evaluator of principals. This study contributes to the work of those who describe superintendent responsibilities, by adding the responsibility of evaluating principals using the ISSCL standards in Washington State.

### Author Biographies

Mary Lynne Derrington is a former superintendent and principal. She is the author of publications in a wide variety of education journals and the editor of the *Washington State Kappan*, a journal for research, leadership and practice. She is co-author of the book, *Leadership Teaming: The Superintendent-Principal Relationship*, an upcoming publication in 2009 by Corwin Press. Her current research includes the effective evaluation of principals, barriers female superintendents encounter, and leadership teaming through the superintendent-principal relationship.

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## Superintendents' Knowledge of Teacher Evaluation Law

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Various sources have suggested that superintendents' knowledge of legal issues relating to school operation and teacher evaluation is important but inadequate. In explaining the value of superintendents' legal knowledge in general, Corkill (1997) observed: "Superintendents who are knowledgeable about the law, understand its application to the basic principle of school operation and insist upon ongoing training of site administrators are less likely to be mired in threatening lawsuits" (p. 6).

Ribas (2000), however, questioned the adequacy of their legal knowledge specific to teacher evaluation, asserting: "Few evaluating administrators understand the legalities of their district's evaluation procedures. They typically become aware of the specifics too late when one of their evaluations of a low-performing teacher is challenged on procedural grounds" (p. 585).

Inadequate knowledge of school law in general and teacher evaluation law specifically is due in part to the increased complexity of the superintendency. The superintendent has changed primary roles during the past century and a half, evolving from a 19th century clerk responsible for maintaining the "physical plants and the structural needs of the institution" (Burry, 2003, p. 4) to a 21st century "master juggler" (Glass, 2000, p. 6). The modern

superintendent must perform multiple duties as an educational expert, political diplomat, and financial advisor. Moreover, as Houston (2001) observed, a pair of divergent realities compound the complexity of the superintendency.

First, unrealistically high community expectations conflict with diminishing financial and personnel resources. Second, increased accountability on the state and national levels counter decentralized authority on the local level. Balancing such competing interests, the superintendent must exert political savvy and financial resourcefulness to create an effective educational environment for students.

During the past 30 years, research has shown that knowledge of teacher evaluation law is valuable to practicing administrators (Hillman, 1988; Lamorte, 1974; Zahler, 2001), however, case law experience has suggested that superintendents are deficient in this respect.

For example, Ribas concluded that "most superintendents have experienced the frustration of having a thoroughly completed, educationally sound, and accurate 'unsatisfactory' evaluation reversed because of procedural problems in the specific evaluation" (Ribas, 2000, p. 586). Similarly, Zirkel and Sullivan's synthesis of case law found that "errors in purely procedural matters can result

in reinstatement of a teacher despite the district's good-faith efforts at compliance" (1998, p. 369).

Additionally, teacher surveys suggest that administrators neither adequately understand nor accurately implement laws governing teacher evaluation. For example, the American Federation of Teachers (1996) surveyed its membership to ascertain their perceptions of teacher evaluation and dismissal. The vast majority (87%) of the respondents opined that administrators do not understand or follow the legally requisite procedures to remove an incompetent teacher.

Several studies to date (Almeter, 2000; Mata, 1998; Swikard, 1983; Velazquez, 1990; Zirkel, 1996), which varied in scope and jurisdiction, analyzed administrators' knowledge of teacher evaluation law, generally concluded that administrators lacked sufficient legal knowledge.

A limitation shared by these studies is their failure to assign numerical value to sufficient legal knowledge. Failure to do so makes any correlation among and between research studies unreliable, especially when the overall knowledge scores hover around 70%.

For example, Osborn (1990) assigned the overall mean score of 72% as a sufficient knowledge level based on feedback from a panel of legal experts, while Hirth (1989) regarded a mean score of 72% as an insufficient score based on the litigious and costly nature of special education. Both researchers arrived at a mean score of 72%; however, they reported their results in significantly different ways.

The primary purpose of this study was to determine the legal knowledge of Pennsylvania superintendents regarding

summative teacher evaluation and to determine whether their knowledge level was adequate. Pennsylvania was selected for this state-wide study of superintendent's legal knowledge of teacher evaluation for two reasons.

First, Pennsylvania is one of the leading states in terms of its litigation and has a representative set of legislation and regulations (Zirkel, 1996). Second, Mata (1998) constructed and validated a teacher evaluation instrument specific to Pennsylvania statutes and relevant case law. The secondary purpose was to ascertain whether superintendents' knowledge level was significantly different in terms of their years of experience.

### **Method**

The survey instrument, which was modeled after Mata's study, consisted of three sections: (a) demographic variable of years of experience; (b) 18 true/false items derived from Pennsylvania statutes, regulations, and court decisions; and (c) an opinion item pertaining to adequate knowledge levels for Pennsylvania superintendents.

For the purpose of utility, 10 randomly selected Pennsylvania superintendents pilot tested the instrument. For the purpose of content validity, three legal experts, each with a professional background in Pennsylvania school law, conducted a multi-step examination of the questionnaire items to determine content validity. Each of these two steps resulted in improvements in the item format and content.

The target population consisted of the 501 superintendents in Pennsylvania. The sample for this study consisted of 436 randomly selected Pennsylvania superintendents during the 2005-2006 school year. Of this group, 274 (63%) returned surveys, which met the requisite size for the target population (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970).

## Results

The respondents' mean score was 66.2%; yet, on average, they opined that the minimum knowledge score to demonstrate an adequate legal knowledge was 78.8%.

Table 1 presents the mean of the correct responses for each of the successive five categories of years of experience as a

superintendent and the F value resulting from the analysis of variance, or ANOVA.

An examination of Table 1 reveals that the mean scores for the five categories of years of experience differed significantly at the .05 level. The Scheffé post hoc analysis, however, did not reveal any paired comparisons that were significant at the .05 level.

Table 1

*Summary of the One-Way ANOVA for Years of Experience as a Superintendent*

Variables	M	SD	F value
Years			
0-3	70.2	13.2	3.32*
4-7	64.6	17.3	
8-11	63.9	16.1	
12-15	60.9	15.3	
16 or more	62.9	17.2	

Note. \* $p < .05$

## Discussion

In relation to the study's primary purpose, Pennsylvania superintendents achieved a mean score of 66.2% that was notably less than their perceived level of adequacy—78.8%. These findings raise two interrelated questions. First, why did Pennsylvania superintendents set a mean score of 78.8% as an adequate legal knowledge score, and second, why did they fail to meet their own level of adequacy?

Superintendents may have set a higher level of adequacy than they attained due to the high level of expectations they hold for

themselves and that school boards hold for them. Their readings are replete with repeated references to legal knowledge being a requirement for the successful operation of a school district (Bosher, 2004; Corkill, 1997; Ribas, 2000; Zahler, 2001).

Similarly, school boards use this criterion to evaluate the effectiveness of the superintendent (Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium, 1996; Norton, 1996). As Glass (2006) pointed out, this expectation is particularly acute with regard to teacher evaluation:



The dismissal of professional and support staff is probably the first or second most contentious community and legal issue confronting superintendents and boards. The superintendent's legal knowledge and ability to implement evaluation systems is extremely important. (p. 8)

Thus, the combination of job requirements, school board expectations, and national standards may all contribute to Pennsylvania superintendents' perception that 78.8% represents the appropriate knowledge level for adequacy.

Similarly, several factors may explain why superintendents in this study did not meet their own level of adequacy. First, in Mata's 1997 study of summative teacher evaluation law, Pennsylvania principals' average score was lower (56.8%) on a similar survey instrument.

Presumably many of these superintendents came from the ranks of these principals based on the typical career path of a superintendent (Glass, 2000), thus accounting for a knowledge level within the same range and, due to their accountability under Pennsylvania's teacher evaluation regulations, at a moderately higher level.

Second, the dismissal of teachers due to incompetence in the classroom is a relatively narrow legal issue that is professionally less frequent than dismissal for other grounds that are not connected to evaluation (Menuey, 2005; Reece, 1996; Roberts, 2000; Stamper, 1996; Tucker, 1997). Formal teacher evaluations identify the instructional strengths and deficiencies of a teacher's effectiveness in the classroom.

Teacher dismissals, however, occur more often based on what has occurred beyond

classroom instruction (Van Berkum, 2005). The distinction between dismissal based on incompetence and dismissal based on immorality, insubordination, or criminal acts was so compelling that several survey respondents pointed it out in unsolicited commentary.

For example, one respondent in this study, commented, "In fifteen years as a superintendent I can say that most of the teacher discipline ... cases in which I was involved were related to those 'sins' of the school code that did not deal with rating the competency of faculty." Thus, legal knowledge of other types of personnel issues superseded legal knowledge of teacher evaluation law.

A third contributing factor that may account for the low legal knowledge level of the superintendents is their accessibility to relevant resources. Unsolicited respondent feedback stressed the value of the school attorney when they faced legal issues concerning evaluation of teachers. For example, one respondent wrote, "The most important aspect of dismissal, which was not addressed in this survey, is the ability of a superintendent to map out an appropriate course of action with the school solicitor [i.e., the district's legal counsel] prior to beginning any dismissal procedure."

Additionally, the superintendent has direct access to the district's human resources specialist(s). Finally, a superintendent typically has access to print and on-line resources that provide the requisite information rather than having to retain this knowledge on a personal basis.

As for the secondary purpose of this study, the respondents' knowledge level scores were significantly different among the five

levels, which ranged from 0-3 to 16 or more years.

Although the results for legal knowledge and experience level are mixed in previous studies (Caldwell, 1986; Clark, 1990; Hirth, 1989, Osborn, 1990; Schmidt, 1987; Singletary, 1996), which varied in subject matter, jurisdiction, and design, Mata's study (1997) of Pennsylvania principals' knowledge of teacher evaluation law was similar in these respects.

He too found that years of experience was a significant factor. Moreover, his post-hoc analysis similarly revealed no significant difference between the pairs of experience levels.

Various factors may explain this shared finding. First, the Scheffé post-hoc analysis is a conservative method that protects against a

Type I error, i.e., false positives. Second, different groupings of years for each level may have revealed critical junctures that account for the significant difference. Third, interrelated factors, such as the nature and location of the prior administrative experience, may have masked the specific source of the difference.

Similarly, other experience factors, such as the length, type, and location of prior teaching experience and the variety, size, wealth, and litigiousness of the districts may all interact to escape pair-wise comparisons.

Based on the findings from this study, superintendents would benefit from ongoing legal training specific to teacher evaluation law. In the future, a similar legal knowledge level study would complement this study by researching superintendents' knowledge of the broader topic of professional standards and practices.

### Author Biographies

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## Systematically Making Reading the Center of High School

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*Well, I don't really like to read. Because it was not my thing. Also I wasn't good at it the only thing I did was look at the pictures to figure out maybe what it was about. But that really didn't help. Because I took tests on it and sometimes it helped. But most of the time it didn't.*

*When my reading class helped me I knew I could do it. But first, I realized that reading could take me places, for example- a new career, a lawyer etc. Then I started reading. I didn't like it at first, but then I got the hang of it.*

*"Now I can read." Life is easier than it use to be, I can read books higher than my reading level, and can finally read a book to my nine year old sister. My mom says, "Can you help me read this?" I use to say "Mom, I'm tired." She would ask me because my mom only speaks Spanish. But now when she asks me I say "Sure, why not?" And this is my reading life.*

*Ricardo Vergara, 2006*

**S**eminole County Public Schools (SCPS) has systematically made reading the center of instruction in the district's 10 high schools. Data-supported improvements have taken place in reading achievement in a short time through a two-pronged approach grounded in professional development.

### Before Reading Was the Center

Up until 2004, 76 percent of the district's high schools had received a grade of "A" or "B" from the state of Florida based on student performance on the Florida Comprehensive

Achievement Test (FCAT). Additionally, the district's Scholastic Achievement Test (SAT) scores exceeded the state and national averages. Sixty five percent of 2004 seniors took the SAT with a district mean of 1048. The perception of SCPS both within the district and beyond was that it was a suburban enclave of high achievement.

### Changing Perceptions

When the 2004 state-assigned school grades were released for the nine high schools, one dropped from an "A" to a "C," two dropped

from “B” to “C” and one dropped from a “C” to a “D.” An overlooked criterion of Florida’s grading plan, aligned with No Child Left Behind (NCLB), had impacted the school’s grades. According to this criterion:

Schools that aspire to be graded “C” or above, but do not make adequate progress with their lowest students in reading, must develop a School Improvement Plan component that addressed this need. If a school, otherwise graded “C” or “B,” does not demonstrate adequate progress in the current or prior year, the final grade will be reduced by one letter grade. If a school, otherwise graded “A” does not demonstrate adequate progress in the current year the final grade will be reduced by one letter grade. (*Grading Florida Public Schools 2004-2005, Florida Department of Education*)

Schools had failed to move the bottom 25 percent of the lowest level readers in high schools toward greater proficiency resulting in high school grades being reduced by one letter grade. Approximately 6000 students in grades 9-12 were reading below proficiency according to 2004 FCAT reading assessment. Quickly, the district developed a strategy to assist all students in being successful in reading and in making gains.

### **Collaboration for Results**

In SCPS, teaching reading at high school was a new concept. It was accepted that students were supposed to know how to read by the time they got to grade nine, but data supported that many did not meet this expectation. The superintendent began discussions with the principals and developed a systematic step by step two-pronged approach:

1. research-based intervention for students reading below grade level, and
2. consistent literacy professional development for all teachers across the district.

Through collaboration with the Florida Center for Reading Research (FCRR), the district identified research-based interventions for those reading below grade level. Plans were made for the acquisition of the interventions, selection of teachers, professional development of the teachers, as well as monitoring and evaluation of the implementation. This was the first prong to intervene with high school reading.

The second prong was district-wide, consistent professional development for high school teachers and administrators. This professional development was determined to be delivered by newly selected high school literacy coaches.

### **Leadership for High School Literacy**

Leadership was essential for the success of such a large undertaking in a short amount of time so the superintendent appointed author Carol Chanter to coordinate all detail. Some of the most basic details may cause a district-wide plan of this nature to fail if overlooked or not well-executed. Plans for implementation actually began in October of 2004 for realization in August of 2005.

Since the project involved reading intervention programs requiring technology components, all hardware, furniture, and equipment had to be ordered, put in place and tested prior to the start of school.

All books, teacher resources, and student materials had to be purchased, inventoried and made available to the teachers

prior to the start of the school year for teacher planning purposes. Teacher and administrator professional development had to be scheduled and completed including backup sessions for teachers hired close to the start of the school year.

Communication with families was an important step related to student assignment in the interventions. All components came together and schools were ready for full implementation when the students arrived in August 2005. Even though initial implementation was successful, the work had only begun. Interventions required on-going support and professional development for successful completion.

In addition to teacher professional development to ensure fidelity to reading intervention, school leaders saw the need for creating a literacy system which would impact students across the curriculum. High schools that improve reading have both research-based reading intervention and literacy strategies infused into all classrooms (Biancarosa, G. & Snow, K.).

Working with small groups of reading intervention teachers is important, but not sufficient for improving the literacy achievement of all students. Since several schools had begun working with author Rose Taylor, she became a partner for developing consistent professional development for all high school teachers.

First, in order to support literacy across the curriculum, a train-the-trainer model for school-based literacy coaches was developed to provide literacy professional development for all content area teachers who taught standard classes including struggling readers. The second service was to work in individual schools with faculty and administrators to

ensure literacy implementation across all content classes.

The literacy coaches at each high school met with Rose once a month over a period of four months to develop professional development modules for content area teachers addressing the following:

Topic 1: Enhancing Reading, Writing, and Content Learning Using Classroom Libraries;

Topic 2: Comprehension Strategies and Question Answer Relationships (QAR);

Topic 3: Vocabulary and Fluency Strategies;

Topic 4: Reading and Writing Connection.

Following the development of each module, literacy coaches partnered to present the concepts to like groups of content area teachers.

For example, all biology teachers from the various high schools were brought together for professional development using content and topics from the biology textbooks to teach, model and practice how to incorporate literacy strategies in their content classes.

Likewise all geography, American and world history, and chemistry, earth space and physical science teachers experienced professional development in like content area groups focusing on the same literacy strategies as their counterparts in other content areas.

This model was extremely successful. The teachers made the connection between their specific subject areas and incorporation of literacy strategies so all students could be



supported to comprehend the texts in their classes while becoming better readers of non-fiction.

The second level of support Rose provided was to work with both the faculty and administration of each school to assist them in creating environments which included literacy daily non-negotiables or expectations. These daily expectations include:

- creating print-rich environments;
- teach, model, and practice literacy strategies before, during and after reading;
- reading to and with students;
- students reading by themselves with accountability;
- incorporating the processes of literacy (reading, writing, speaking, viewing,

thinking, expressing through multiple symbol systems).

High school leadership teams were also provided with professional development on creating a systematic approach to improve school-wide literacy. They began using the classroom literacy guide to support them in providing feedback to teachers and in reflecting with them.

Administrative teams attended teacher focused professional development to show the importance of literacy in all content classes and to continue their learning about literacy. Today, these high school principals can discuss reading intervention and literacy in content classes at a high level. In addition to using the classroom literacy guide (Table 1, page 41), they use the literacy leadership guide (Table 2, page 42) to reflect on their actions.

Table 1

*Classroom Literacy Guide*

Check the box for each line that best represents what you see in the classroom. PR=Progressing, P=Proficient, and RM=Role Model. Bolded items are essential for growth. The other items are necessary for supporting academic growth.

<b><i>The classroom has ...</i></b>	<b>P R</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>R M</b>	<b><i>Notes</i></b>
Literacy-rich and print-rich environment				
Attractive, risk-free, safe environment				
Smooth schedule, groups, transitions, student known routines & resources				
Student engagement not compliance				
Maximized time for literacy learning				
Integration of literacy learning with content standards				
Celebration of learning				
<b><i>The teacher ...</i></b>	<b>P R</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>R M</b>	<b><i>Notes</i></b>
Incorporates the seven processes of literacy				
Models joy of reading to and with students daily				
Provides daily accountable independent reading K-5 <sup>th</sup> ; 6 <sup>th</sup> -12 <sup>th</sup> level 1 & 2 students				
Assists students in selecting reading materials				
Incorporates critical thinking, 3 levels of cognitive complexity questions				
Promotes reading of non-fiction				
Monitors reading improvement through student achievement data				
Teaches, models and practices literacy strategies before, during, and after reading				
Provides word study periodically				
Integrates test prep into content teaching				

(Taylor, R. T. & Gunter, G. A., p 115)

Table 2

*Literacy Leadership Guide for PreK-12*

Self-monitoring will help identify areas for growth and celebration. You may use this form for self-assessment and for making professional development plans. Also, you may want to ask for input from a colleague. Place a check in the box that best represents you. PR=Progressing, P=Proficient, and RM=Role Model.

<b>Literacy Leadership ...</b>	<b>PR</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>RM</b>	<b>Action Plan</b>
Creates expectations across all content areas.				
Analyzes and organizes student data.				
Takes action on student achievement data.				
Ensures a systematic process of professional development that includes opportunities, participation, and follow-up.				
Participates in professional development with teachers				
Monitors instruction and provides feedback; visits classrooms daily and coaches teachers.				
Develops research-based intervention program and monitors student growth.				
Prioritizes appropriate personnel/materials/technology/schedule/use of time for Level 1 and Level 2 students.				
Leads the literacy leadership team in development and implementation of literacy system.				
Creates aligned system of curriculum/instruction/materials/technology/assessment/professional development/community engagement.				
Engages parents and community in literacy learning.				
Leads the selection of and monitors use of appropriate scientifically research-based student materials and technology.				
Creates commitment on the part of teachers.				

(Taylor, R. T. & Gunter, G. A., p 116)

## What Was Learned About Literacy Leadership

No matter how detailed, procedures for implementation of any initiative will not achieve the desired change without strong leadership exemplified within a system of accountability. As stated by Bill Vogel (2005), the district superintendent, "There is a big difference between compliance and commitment. A project of this magnitude requires commitment." Getting to commitment requires continued focus on the data-driven goal. Keeping the goal of reducing the number of non-proficient readers in the forefront for all school and district leaders was key to success. It was also imperative to involve stakeholders at all levels including district, school, and

community. The results were gained by creating a system of literacy learning in the high schools.

## Results of Making Reading the Center

After only one year of implementation, student achievement results are undisputable. Out of eight high schools with scores for both 2004-2005 and 2005-2006, 100 percent increased the percentage of ninth graders making learning gains on FCAT reading. Seven out of eight schools also increased the percentage of students meeting high standards in reading and four increased the percentage of the lowest performing students making learning gains. See Table 3.

Table 3

### *Percent Meeting High Standards and Making Gains*

High School	Grade 9-Reading % meeting high standards 2004-2005	Grade 9-Reading % meeting high standards 2005-2006	Grade 9-Reading % making gains 2004-2005	Grade 9-Reading % making gains 2005-2006	Grade 9 Reading % of bottom quartile making gains 2004-2005	Grade 9 Reading % of bottom quartile making gains 2005-2006
1	54	59	56	72	68	65
2	56	62	54	66	51	59
3	46	55	50	68	50	68
4	56	61	56	66	47	54
5	49	55	55	64	58	56
6	58	58	55	62	49	53
7	47	55	55	64	51	50
8	55	63	54	68	53	61

In addition to FCAT gains there have been many additional qualitative benefits. Since the initiation in the fall of 2004, teachers and administrators gained access to the latest professional development, research-based

instructional resources, and support for improving student achievement.

The district gained new opportunities to improve literacy practice, and to focus

professional development on areas of critical need. Most importantly, the students benefited in all classes from the district-wide focus on the essential skill of reading.

Thanks to the ability of Seminole County Public School leaders to see things differently, communicate the vision, and shift perspectives, reading has become the center piece of high school instruction and has resulted in higher achievement and improved opportunities for all students.

Across the nation, many individual schools are making a positive difference in

student achievement, however, often times the improvements are tied to one leader or teacher and may not be sustained if the individual moves on.

The synergy that was created through this district-wide approach to program implementation and professional development is powerful enough to result in lasting change that will outlive differences created by individual teachers or leaders. This lasting change is what is needed to meet the demands of NCLB and for preparing students for the rigorous demands of post-secondary education and the world of work.

### Author Biographies

Rosemarye Taylor is an associate professor of educational leadership at the University of Central Florida with a specialty in instructional leadership. Her research interests include leadership particularly as it relates to accountability. She has presented at numerous national conferences and her articles have been published in numerous magazines and journals. She has authored five books that reflect the commitment to all students learning more through leadership that creates ethical fail-safe systems. She serves as a consultant on literacy, learning communities, curriculum system development, and leadership to schools, districts and professional organizations. Past education experiences include teaching, high school administration and district administration in Georgia and Florida.

Carol Chanter has over 25 years experience in the K-12 setting as a special and general educator as well as a school and district administrator. She utilizes this experience in her current role as Senior Director of Implementation for Scholastic Education. She has presented at numerous conferences and has authored and co-authored several articles. Her areas of interest and expertise include general and special education, educational leadership, and secondary reading. She has taught graduate level courses at the University of Central Florida in the areas of reading and educational Leadership. She holds a BA in education, an MA in learning and behavior disorders, a specialist degree in educational leadership and her doctorate in educational research, technology and leadership.

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**Out of the Ashes: Building Leadership and Sustainability Amid the Chaos**

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*Leaders in urban districts need a coherent and morally courageous framework for thinking through the challenges of an environment where the purpose of education is being narrowed, where public schools are being attacked for not solving the problems of cities, and where the shift to meet the current agenda leaves many districts without the human capacity to meet their goals. (Jackson, 2005, p. 197).*

The May 22, 2006 New York Times article titled “PRINCIPAL RANKS IN CITY UNDERGO HEAVY TURNOVER” stated:

“More than half the school principals in the New York City public school system have left their jobs over the past five years, opening the way for a remarkable influx of often younger newcomers, some in their 20's and 30's with impressive credentials but little teaching experience.” (p. 8)

In September 2007 the system's third restructuring since 2002 will refocus educational responsibility to the building level giving the principals the authority for everything from how they

spend money to how their students should learn.

Selection of New York City (NYC) public school leaders has typically been a

process of serendipity rather than deliberate planning. According to Hargreaves (2005), one of the most unsettling and traumatic events in the life of a school is a change in leadership.

Hargreaves continues “leadership succession is not just a temporary episodic problem in individual schools, but a pervasive crisis in the system” (p.164). Succession needs to be planned thoughtfully and ethically: deeper and wider pools of future leaders could be developed to avoid the issues the NYC system is facing.

### **A Starting Point**

The Academy for Promising Leaders of Urban Schools (APLUS) was designed 1) to prepare assistant principal for NYC’s urban schools, and 2) as the foundation of a continuum of planned leadership development. Piloted during the 2006-2007 academic year, APLUS is a partnership effort among higher education, PK-12 public schools, and a nonprofit consulting organization funded by the Goldman Sachs and Hewlett Packard Foundations.

### **APLUS Characteristics and Unique Features**

APLUS is a 21 credit certification-only program delivered over the Fall, Spring, and Summer I semesters. Fellows (candidates) are supported by a mentor principal during an integrated apprenticeship that begins the first month and continues throughout the program and by NESCS’s executive coaches during the second and third semesters.

Candidate selection is the touchstone of a successful school leadership development process. APLUS’s unique early identification process is derived from proven practices regarding executive recruitment adapted to the urban educational environment. The four-stage process includes:

- 1) nomination by a principal;
- 2) resume screening, interview, and writing process designed and delivered by the region;
- 3) academic credential screening and interview process of the higher education institution; and
- 4) an early identification assessment lab featuring a holistic diagnosis of leadership potential.

Each APLUS Fellow has an individual leader development plan (ILDLP) designed to address his/her assessed leadership growth needs. The fusion of ILDPs guides the selection of specific learning activities. The Organizational Replacement Plan (ORP), our version of succession planning, was negated when the system reverted back to the district structure.

Constructs supporting the framework of the emergent APLUS program address the adaptive challenges (Heifetz, 2003) facing urban schools: 1) educating a very diverse citizenry; 2) creating a strong, positive school climate; 3) resolving inequity in schools; 4) providing access to quality learning opportunities to *all* students; and 5) preparing students and their families to participate in and contribute to the society in which they live. APLUS constructs include:

- *leadership for democracy* – to create strong emotionally and socially intelligent school communities with a strong sense of affiliation and caring among the internal and external constituents and a sense of personal responsibility to actively participate in shaping America’s future;



- *leadership for sustainability as school improvement* – to cultivate and recreate an educational ecosystem that can stimulate ongoing improvement without compromising the development of the surrounding environment (Hargreaves & Fink, 2003); to identify and implement forms of teaching, learning, and assessment appropriate for the student population and school structures ensuring *all* students the opportunity to build their capacity and realize their potential;
  - combine leadership theory, knowledge and best practices from business and education;
  - focus on “key habits of the heart and mind;”
  - emphasize a system approach in developing the knowledge base and skills critical to creating environments where students learn;
  - highlight interconnections between a school’s purpose, people, practice and place;
  - prepare candidates to deal with daily “on the ground” issues for teaching and learning;
  - develop knowledge, understanding, skills and workable strategies that shape and sustain organizational change; and
  - design program content around problems of practice in diverse, high need, high energy urban schools.
- *leadership for social justice* – to examine, question, and rectify the policies and procedures that shape urban schools and at the same time perpetuate social inequalities and marginalization (Dantley & Tillman, 2006); and
- *leadership for social mobility* – to ensure that urban students and their families, especially immigrants and children of immigrants, develop capacity to contribute their talents to and benefit from the opportunities of American society.

The conceptual foundation reflects integrated theoretical insights from educational philosophies (Goodlad, Bromley, & Goodlad, 2004), systems and learning organizations (Senge, 1995 & 1996), leadership development (Heifetz, 2003; Kouzes & Posner, 2003), change/sustainability/renewal (Fullan, 2005; Hargreaves & Fink, 2003; Hargreaves, 2005), and social justice (Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Larson & Murtadha, 2002).

APLUS Program objectives are to:

Guided by national and state standards of school leadership, the APLUS curriculum was co-constructed and is co-delivered by teams of professors, leader practitioners, and consultants. Fellows participate in a series of “challenge cycles” calculated to foster deep understanding of working with complex problems of urban schools.

Curriculum materials and activities, including role playing, case studies, and in-basket exercises emanating from real in-school

scenarios, require Fellows to analyze complex issues through addressing multiple, interrelated factors impacting the issue. Successful completion of the challenges requires mastery of the content and understanding of how tasks can be approached to maximize positive outcomes.

### **APLUS Fellows**

Nineteen experienced teachers were selected as APLUS Fellows to participate in this pilot program. The Fellows are as ethnically diverse as the schools they serve, either immigrants themselves or children of immigrants, representing the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, Barbados, Mexico, Ecuador, Italy, and Columbia.

Seven of them are career-changers, having experience in the engineering, accounting, and legal professions prior to coming into education. They are well-educated, have a passion for what they do, and are committed to urban schools and the children they serve.

With experience ranging from 8 to 25 years, the Fellows already served in quasi-administrative role such as Mentor Teacher, Teacher Leader, Special Education Coordinator, Dean of Students, Technology Coordinator, etc. Starting in August 2007, four Fellows will become assistant principals with others following in the near future.

### **Next Step: APLUS Program Evaluation and Expansion**

During 2007-2008 several activities will occur simultaneously. The APLUS Program will undergo a formative evaluation, will expand, and the partners will change.

Our goal is to start two new cohorts at two universities and continue supporting the current cohort to the next level of development.

Within three years, we aim to design and implement the leadership development continuum, the Urban Collaboratory for Educational Leadership (UCEL), which covers the full range of leadership training, from identifying master teachers who may aspire to be assistant principals (the existing *APLUS* program), assistant principals who are promising principal candidates, to principals who are suitable for district-wide leadership positions such as curriculum coordinators and superintendents.

Fullan (2005) contends “From a systems perspective, the single answer to the question of how to increase the chances for greater sustainability is to build a critical mass of developmental leaders who can mix and match, and who can surround themselves with other leaders across the system as they spread the new leadership capacities to others (p. 104).”

The APLUS Program provides a starting point for the phoenix to rise from the ashes for leadership and sustainability in the New York City school system.

### Author Biographies

Phyllis Durden is a professor and mentor in the educational leadership doctoral programs in the Richard C. Riley College of Education at Walden University. A professional educator with experiences in both K-12 and higher education, she also served as a faculty member at West Virginia University and the City College of the City University of New York. Her professional purpose is two-fold: to contribute to the collective effort in achieving a democratic society by preparing educational leaders committed to the sacred responsibility of ensuring that all students become critical thinkers and problem solvers, achieve academically, develop ethically, and become contributors to and participators in this “experiment called democracy;” and to investigate what good educational leaders need to know and do to build supportive learning and teaching environments that assure social justice and democratic practice in education systems. Durden also serves on the consultant staff of the Center for Social and Emotional Education in New York City.

Jorge Izquierdo, a visiting assistant professor in educational leadership and technology at the Manhattan Center of Adelphi University in New York City, is devoting his knowledge and skills to help prepare promising new leaders for highly diverse urban schools. Recently retired from the New York City Education System, where he served as a teacher, elementary principal, and superintendent, he is nationally known for his success in improving and renewing the most highly diverse schools and districts in New York City.

James Williams is a consultant and training specialist in human resources specializing in diversity issues, conflict resolution, collaborative negotiation, mediation, and team building. He has conducted workshops in over 48 cities within 27 states and seven foreign countries. He also serves as the senior education project director for the Center for Social and Emotional Education in New York City.

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## Foreign Language Academy

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**T**he Report of the New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce (2007) emphasizes the knowledge and skills our nation's students must possess in order to compete in the rapidly changing world economy. According to the report, among other things, American students need to know more about world cultures and be proficient in world languages. This view is shared at the highest levels of decision-making in Washington.

Our leaders support widening the range of world languages studied in our schools as a response to political and economic realities that require a more globally sophisticated population and workforce (Liebowitz, 2006; Muller, 2002; Stewart, 2007; Zehr, 2007). In addition to these benefits there are those associated to the cognitive and socio-cultural advantages that result from the ability to communicate in more than one language (Cumming-Potvin, Renshaw, & van Kraayenoord, 2003; Hakuta, 1987; Hakuta, Ferdman, & Diaz, 1986; Merisuo-Storm, 2007).

As interest in the study of foreign languages grows, more and more school and district leaders will be charged with the responsibility of establishing a language program. Some of the questions that they will

need to answer include: What language and what model should be selected? How could another program be inserted in a school day already crowded with curriculum and assessment mandates? What financial, curricular, and personnel considerations must be evaluated?

In this article we shall review the advantages of starting the study of a language early, outline briefly the status of foreign language instruction, and look at the main models used currently. We shall also discuss how a school district introduced a successful language academy within a modest budget and outside of the school day.

### Status of Foreign Language Instruction

The number of students studying foreign languages in American high schools has been on an upward trend from the early part of the twentieth century. Recently, in the year 2000, according to data compiled by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 43.8 percent of the nation's high school students enrolled in a foreign language program as compared to 38.4 percent a decade earlier. Foreign languages are estimated to be taught in 31 percent of our nation's elementary schools (Rhodes and Branaman, 1999). Current efforts,

though, must be significantly expanded if the United States wishes to meet the ambitious goal of promoting high levels of foreign language proficiency among its students.

While only one third of our elementary schools offer foreign language instruction (though in more recent months some elementary and early childhood centers vaunted the addition of foreign language instruction, (e.g. Glod, 2006; Lewis, 2007; Rosenthal, 2007), Asian and European nations continue to increase their commitment to the study of world languages.

For example, in China, English is now the second language and plans are being made to begin introducing it in the third grade (Stewart, 2007). Many European countries include foreign languages in their elementary school curriculum and some offer or require a second one (Pufahl, Rhodes, & Christian, 2001). Within the European Union, 50% of the residents speak a second language as compared to 9% in the United States (Donato & Tucker, 2007). In the UK, where a foreign language is spoken by 30% of the population, Education Secretary Alan Johnson announced that starting in 2010 primary schools will be required to teach a second language (Ward, 2007).

### **Benefits of early foreign language instruction**

Acquiring significant linguistic skills in one's own first language demands effort, time and instruction and, similarly, achieving true functionality in a second language demands extensive instruction, motivation and practice.

The Foreign Service Institute for example estimates that 1320 hours of instruction are required for a native speaker of English to learn Russian at the superior level, defined as the level at which an individual can communicate fully and effectively in formal and informal settings (Omaggio-Hadley, 2001).

This means that a typical secondary school student who attends school 180 days per year would need to be taught consistently one hour per day, in excess of seven years in order to achieve that level of proficiency.

Well-designed immersion programs also suggest a minimum of six years of language instruction (Thomas & Collier, 2003). Incidentally, researchers in second language acquisition (e.g. Cummins 1986; Thomas & Collier, 1997/1998) affirm that a student learning English as a second language in American schools would need five to seven or even 10 years to acquire the level of English language proficiency equal to that of her/his peers. Thus, in order to achieve appreciable levels of fluency in a second language, schools need to start early and to develop a sequential and increasingly more extensive foreign language program (Dominguez & Pessoa, 2005; Liebowitz, 2006; Stewart, 2005).

It is important to note that while it is never too late for adults to learn a new language, especially when they have high-level literacy and skills in their native language, only adults with above average aptitude reach native or native-like fluency (De Keyser, 2000). This level of fluency is reached instead by youngsters regardless of aptitude (Cataldi, 1994; Pratt, 2002).

Onwuegbuzie, Bailey, & Daley, (1999) studied the causes of foreign language anxiety and found, among other things, that age contributed to explain foreign language anxiety in college age students. These researchers too recommend starting the study of a foreign language relatively early.

My own experience in learning English and Spanish as an adult reminds me of the discipline and commitment required. I have also seen firsthand the difference between younger and older students in foreign language learning. This personal experience helped me

to understand the difficulties students encountered in learning the nuances of a new way of communicating and guided the development of the foreign language academy set up in the school district where I worked.

### **Models of foreign language programs in elementary school**

Foreign language programs in elementary schools generally fall under one of three main models. The FLEX model (foreign language exploration), in which one or more foreign languages are explored through activities, establishes the basis for studying the language more deeply later and for developing native-like pronunciation. Students study the language as well as aspects of the cultural heritage of the people who speak it.

The FLES\* model (foreign language in elementary schools) emphasizes oral and written communication. The language is taught as a subject, one or more times per week. Aspects of the culture associated with the language are also studied.

But by far the most effective way to master a second language is through the immersion or dual-language model. This model requires students learn the second language not just as a subject matter, but as a means of classroom learning in which some or all subjects are taught in the foreign language. Students usually achieve native-like pronunciation and fluency in the target language (Lipton, 2003; Stewart, 2005; Thomas & Collier, 2003).

Numerous resources, including language specific ones, are available to administrators and teachers who set out to introduce foreign languages in elementary school. Among these are: the Clearinghouse for Languages and Linguistics, [www.cal.org/ericell](http://www.cal.org/ericell); the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages,

[www.actfl.org](http://www.actfl.org); the Center for Applied Linguistics, [www.cal.org](http://www.cal.org).

Gilzow & Branaman (2000), Lipton (2003), Marcos & Kreeft Peyton (2000), and Tucker & Donato (2001) offer additional excellent suggestions.

### **Foreign language instruction in a multiethnic community**

Decisions about the model to be selected and the languages to be studied depend on financial, educational, and community considerations. A major concern on the part of many school districts, when deliberating on the early introduction of foreign languages, is cost. Another is finding the time to add the teaching of a foreign language to an already demanding school day, coupled with the scarcity of qualified foreign language teachers. But even in school districts of limited resources, children can be introduced to the study of languages. An example could be the model used in Elmont, one of New York City's closest suburbs.

The Elmont school district embraces children from diverse socio-economic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The decision to introduce foreign languages stemmed from the desire to promote appreciation for the cultural heritage of the major language groups living in the community and to develop in children an understanding of other languages and cultures, while beginning to experiment with language learning in a relaxed, joyful and natural setting.

The Foreign Language Academy opened in the fall 2003, with nearly four hundred children from kindergarten through grade six. Classes met on Saturday mornings for two hours. Students were offered a choice of Spanish, Italian, French, or Latin. Parents contributed a nominal registration fee, which

was used to provide snacks for children. Legislative grants also aided in financing the program. Teaching languages on Saturdays had several advantages over offering the program after school, as we learned years earlier.

Parents eagerly brought their children to the academy on Saturday; children were rested and attentive; and it was easier to identify and hire foreign language teachers. We learned that several community residents were qualified and experienced language teachers and invited them to teach in the program.

We were also able to enlist the assistance of retired foreign language teachers from the local high schools. We took great care in selecting teachers with native or native-like fluency in the foreign language since one of the program's goals was to expose children to authentic diction at a time when they can more easily learn new sounds (Cataldi, 1994; Oyama, 1976; Pratt, 2002). Teachers received compensation for two and one half hours per session, to allow for a brief common planning period each week.

Choosing the languages we would offer was relatively easy. An informal survey of parents revealed that most were interested in Spanish, French and Italian, reflecting the largest language minority groups in the District. Some children took Latin upon the urging of their parents, but the interest vanished after the first semester.

In the second year, we added Urdu, the language spoken by an increasing number of residents. The children's families were very enthusiastic about the program. For many, the academy represented an opportunity to preserve the language of their heritage. Parents and grandparents in particular, expressed immense satisfaction in hearing their children recite poems, sing songs, and use expressions familiar

to them. Their desire to maintain the language of their heritage is not atypical. This phenomenon has been documented extensively (e.g. Cummins, 2005; Fishman, 2001). For others, the study of a foreign language was part of a rich elementary school curriculum.

### **Curriculum and materials**

For our youngest students we placed emphasis on memorizing songs, poems, and simple phrases. Upper elementary students followed a series of teaching modules on familiar topics. They also actively participated in skits that they designed with the help of their teachers. Some elements of grammar and usage were introduced at this level. Students learned words and expressions arranged around themes of interest to them. Exposure to the cultural heritage associated with the languages studied was a central part of the curriculum. Materials were compiled by the teachers and arranged around the topics covered.

The initial curriculum decisions were made by a committee of teachers, parents, and administrators. In the future, as interest in the program continues to grow, more advanced levels of instruction, for those children who are ready to move beyond the introductory level, need to be added.

### **Conclusion**

In today's ever more interconnected world, knowledge of foreign languages is an imperative.

In introducing foreign language instruction, elementary schools can benefit from the Elmont experience. When it established the foreign language academy, the Elmont school district took into account the benefits that learning a foreign language have on cognitive development in children, the advantage of helping families retain the language of their heritage, the merit of



exploring a new language early in terms of future foreign language proficiency, and the desirability of enabling tomorrow's adults to live and work in an increasingly global reality.

We received enthusiastic feedback from students and parents. Just as importantly,

foreign language teachers from the local high schools told us that students who participated in the foreign language academy were better predisposed to learning languages and achieved better results than those who did not receive such early exposure to foreign languages.

### Author Biography

Maria Palandra is associate professor of administration and supervision at CUNY's Hunter College. Prior to joining Hunter College's faculty, she was superintendent of schools in the Elmont school district, a position she held for nearly eight years completing a 24-year career in school administration.

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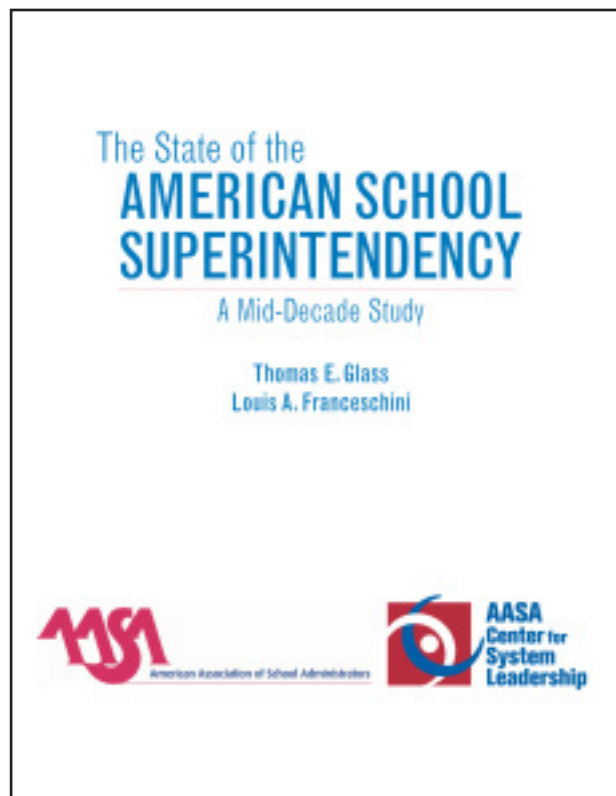
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