

CULTIVATING LEADERSHIP FOR SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY CHANGE: A
CASE STUDY OF THEORY, RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

by

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DEDICATION

Esta tesis esta dedicada a toda mi familia, antepasados, y especialmente a mi abuelito Rubén García. Gracias por creer en mí y por sus palabras de fe. Lo amo y lo extraño tanto...

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ABSTRACT

Researchers have noted that effective school leadership is essential to ensuring positive student and school outcomes. To achieve these outcomes, university preparation programs must adequately train and develop aspiring school leaders with the knowledge, skills, and capacity needed to be effective leaders. This qualitative case study examines a nuanced space of school leadership by examining the transformative formal educational experiences of teachers that participated in an emerging leaders pilot program. The emerging leaders pilot program was imagined and implemented after a sustained conversation and mutual partnership between the university and the local school district in order to cultivate future district leadership. This study highlights the various components that have informed and impacted the development and practice of its participants. Two educators that participated in the emerging leaders cohort and three university and school district leaders comprise the units of analysis. Additional observables in the form of audio recordings, course syllabi, and student writings are integrated to provide a more comprehensive description of the program and its overall impact. The observables were analyzed using a hybrid ecological framework that integrated the concepts of self, organization, and community with the three learning domains of the emerging leaders program: instructional leadership; culturally relevant teaching and leading; and community engagement.

The findings of the study highlight the importance cultivating institutional investment, harnessing the power of relationships, implementing dynamic curricula and pedagogy, and constructing a dynamic process for selection of program candidates.

PREFACE

This research study is an invitation to engage in a dialogue about the importance of school leadership, relationships, and crossing boundaries. It summons us to reframe our perceptions and beliefs about educational change and think critically about the role of schools and school leadership in cultivating and sustaining healthy schools and communities. It attempts to highlight the necessity of constructing the links between schools, school leadership, and place to create a social fabric that provides opportunity, support, and safety for children and families. This work has been inspired, nurtured, and informed by the labors of other change agents, past and present, whose invaluable commitment to equity, justice, and social change have served as a catalyst for the work I've been engaged in for the past five years.

I. AN INVITATION INTO THE WORK

This study focuses and explores the genesis of an idea in practice, one which has served to transform the educational experiences of fifteen teachers from the local school district. This idea emerged and has been informed by theoretical concepts, educational research and more importantly, a sustained conversation with(in) the local community. These three interrelated components have synergistically materialized in the form of an innovative model of school leadership preparation that extends beyond the instructional and managerial responsibilities of school leadership. This eventual interest convergence lead to a collective vision and partnership to build leadership from within the school district and engage educators in an educational process grounded in a community development framework that responds to local context and conditions. In all, fifteen teachers from across the district were identified, recruited and invited to participate in the experimental emerging leaders program. Subsequently, these teachers have been engaged in a robust, transformative learning experience that has helped to reframe traditional approaches to educate, prepare, and develop emerging school leaders. Although the emerging leaders program came to fruition in summer of 2014, the seeds of this initiative were sowed two years earlier at a Community Learning Exchange (CLE) in San Marcos, Texas in which, coincidentally, I unknowingly would be an observer, participant, and contributor to its creation, evolution, and implementation¹. Given my positionality as a doctoral research assistant, I have been privileged to have a front row seat to the progression of the program, its' implementation, and more importantly have borne witness to the profound growth and development actualized by its participants. The

¹ A thicker description of these events is shared in the following sections.

change and quantity of growth exhibited and realized by participants in the emerging leaders program has been notable and merits an in depth study. My participation in this initiative has stimulated a deep sense of optimism and hope that principal preparation programs can and do nurture and cultivate the type of leadership that our schools and communities need (Sergiovanni, 2000; Wallace Foundation, 2013).

Through my direct involvement and participation in the program, I have witnessed an organic, community based approach to principal preparation that integrates the technical elements of school leadership such as the curricular, instructional, and organizational aspects of school, with community development theory to combine in a dynamic and engaging experience for its participants. This combination has resulted in dynamic learning processes that prepare emerging school leaders to lead in both school and community contexts. My proximity and positionality to the emerging leaders program and its participants have provoked me to think and reflect about my own educational leadership preparation experiences²with those from the emerging leaders' program. As such, the focus of this research will investigate elements that make this innovative principal preparation program unique through theory, research and practice. This research explores key aspects of the program such as its genesis, course structure, theory and literature informing practice, curriculum and pedagogy guiding the educational process. It also explores the impact of the program on its participants and the community. The subsequent sections provide context as to the origin and purpose of this work, which is then followed by the framework and questions informing the study.

² A narration of my experiences is expanded in this chapter.

El Camino Hacia San Marcos

In the summer of 2009, I made the bold decision to continue my formal education by pursuing a master's degree in educational leadership. The decision to enroll in graduate school emerged from unique experiences, pivotal moments, and conversations as an educator working in two secondary high schools in the Rio Grande Valley. I had worked in the public school system for five years and was motivated to continue my formal educational journey with the hope and goal of preparing myself to assume a school leadership position. The desire to enroll in graduate school stimulated from an internal need to seek knowledge that would inform my practice as an educator and develop skill sets that facilitate effective practices that promote school change. The logic was simple: a graduate degree would provide me with the knowledge and experience to inform the organizational culture and practices of my school and help effect positive change for teachers and students.

Enrolling in the educational leadership program exposed me to different sets of ideas, literature, and conversations that informed my educational thought and practice. I learned about different educational leadership models and was trained to understand the responsibilities, expectations, and technical elements of school leadership. During my two years in the program, we covered traditional school leadership topics such as organizational theory, school law, curriculum design, and analyzing student data. Despite the rich conversations, readings, and learning experiences in the educational leadership program, the focus of the curriculum emphasized the systems world domain of school leadership (Sergiovanni, 2000). Building on the work of Habermas (1987), Sergiovanni (2000) states that the systems world "is a world of instrumentalities, of efficient means

designed to achieve ends” (p.5). Although, I became technically skilled and proficient in certain areas related to school leadership, I felt that I had limited opportunities to explore its essence and meaning and my own position within the lifeworld of school leadership.

In retrospect, the professors and the program contributed to my growth both as an educator and a learner. My experiences, learning, and conversations in the program expanded my own thinking about education, deepened my respect for school leadership and informed my practice as a social studies educator. While the coursework provided me with a level of preparation along with different tools and skills required to assume a school leadership role, I felt that something was missing. Despite the rich educational experiences and the credentials in hand, I decided to remain in the classroom and forgo the opportunity to undertake a school leader position. I was qualified by state standards to venture into the world of school leadership, but I felt that I was not mentally or spiritually ready to take on all the responsibilities that come with such a position. The decision to commit to such a position required a certain level of personal readiness that I did not possess at that point in time. I felt that I needed to engage in a specific, unique kind of developmental and learning process and create support systems that positioned the lifeworld of school leadership at the heart of leading. I had the internal need to merge both the systems and lifeworld, yet did not have the opportunity to do so. The opportunity to unify these worlds would soon present itself and dramatically change my perspective and conceptualization of school leadership.

Readiness and Quality School Leadership

As I reflect on my decision to remain in the classroom, the important, critical, and often-overlooked issue of readiness comes into clarity. By traditional measures, I had

earned the credentials required to assume a school leadership position and begin stewarding an educational institution. An internal filter signaled to me that I was technically ready to be a school leader but did not possess the mental and spiritual capacity at that particular point in my life to commit and give due diligence and justice to such a admirable and complex profession. Research has noted that the role of school leadership in the United States has changed considerably over the past few decades and continues to evolve at a rapid pace to meet the demands of complex and fast changing society, thus generating challenging and often stressful working conditions (Alvoid & Black, 2014; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom & Anderson, 2010; Rice, 2010). Our schools, students, and communities desperately need and deserve school leaders that possess the skill sets and more importantly the moral character to serve and facilitate the growth and development of children (Fullan, 2016; Sergiovanni, 1996). To be honest, I knew that I was not personally ready to jump into the world of school leadership. As a social studies educator, I attentively observed the behavior of my own campus leadership and how the technical and transactional nature of their work only reinforced some of my perceptions of school leadership. Regardless of my personal attitudes and feelings, I began to see the need for a different type of leadership. Later, I began to wonder about the countless others who have participated in principal preparation programs who may feel like I did and still decide to pursue the path to formal school leadership. As mentioned above, I felt a strong and compelling need to bridge the technical elements of school leadership with the values of community, reciprocity, and relationships. This internal need to find a balance between both worlds would be met by an experience that took place outside the walls of the university. The following paragraph provides context

and insight into the experiences that shifted my idea of school leadership and invited me to (re)think and (re)conceptualize the possibilities of what school leadership can look like in theory and practice. Paradoxically, the invitation to continue to explore the lifeworld domain of leadership would immerse me back into the university setting and thus continue my formal educational journey. Yet, this time around, both the process and outcome would be remarkably different from my M.Ed. experience. The decision to enroll in a doctoral program would cause profound shifts in personal, familial, and professional aspects of my life. It also had a geographical impact as my family and I soon transitioned from our beloved homeland of the Rio Grande Valley to a burgeoning central Texas community.

The experiences noted above were informed by an intuitive way of knowing and helps articulate a change process that informed and shaped my current understanding and conceptualization of school and community leadership. This new perspective and way of framing the idea of school leadership has evolved over the past five years. My experiences, development, and learning in the doctoral program have allowed me to name, describe, and act on my lived experiences. By reflecting on these lived and learning experiences, I am able to acknowledge, make sense of and utilize these experiences that inform my present and future actions (Maturana & Valera, 1987).

Transitioning to the Lifeworld Domain

As mentioned above, my commitment to working with(in) the San Marcos community dates back to January 2012. The seeds of reciprocity, respect, and curiosity were planted when my family and I attended a Community Learning Exchange (CLE) in San Marcos, TX. Since 2008, the CLE has been creating spaces to convene diverse

individuals from across the nation to collectively address important community issues. The CLE originated out of the Kellogg Foundation initiative called the Kellogg Leadership for Community Change (KLCC) in 2002 that aimed to build community leadership in distressed communities (Guajardo, et al., 2016). Eleven initial communities were selected to participate in this initiative and two national organizations, Institute for Ethical Leadership (IEL) and Center for Ethical Leadership, helped to steward the process (Guajardo et al. 2016). After the grant-funding period was over, the communities sustained the work and morphed to what is now known as the CLE. Since that initial work, the CLE family has grown from 11 to dozens of communities from across the nation that has and continues to participate in the CLE vision. The theme for each exchange is dictated by the macro events and the context of the place hosting, which inform the process of invitation and engagement of learning.

The theme for the San Marcos CLE was '*The Politics of Education and Community Development: Creating Healthy Communities through Collective Leadership*'. This learning exchange focused on the intersection of various elements that impact schools, educators, and communities. The invitation to participate in this learning exchange was extended to me by a professor from the University of Texas Pan American. My curiosity was peaked after listening to his articulation of the CLE, its mission, and its impact on communities from across the country. I immediately shared this information with my wife, Jocabed, who urged me to register for the learning exchange. I soon applied for a scholarship for us to travel to San Marcos and participate in this learning experience. Needless to say, those three days would prove to be a life altering experience

and catalyzed for my internal desire and commitment to investing in school and community change.

My experience and participation in the CLE pushed me to reconsider and reflect on my own responsibilities to my students, school, and community. This experience prompted me to think critically about my role as a parent, teacher, student, and community member. It was in this dynamic learning space that I had conversations with people of different backgrounds, experiences, professions, and ages all with the same goal: to work collectively to improve the conditions of schools and communities. After three days of intense conversation, dialogue, storytelling, reflective thinking and collective planning, I realized that this was the type of work I wanted and needed to be a part of. My worldview had been shifted. I began to affirm a sense of moral and social responsibility to my community. It stimulated an impulse to begin thinking about my role in school and assert myself as a school and community leader. As I grappled with this change, I also realized that within our communities exist repositories of history, culture, wisdom, relationships, and assets that when nurtured and mobilized can catalyze school and community change (Block, 2008; Guajardo et al., 2016; Freire, 1997; McKnight & Block, 2010). This revelation helped to reframe the socially constructed notions of leadership, learning, and education that had informed my practice (Billsberry, 2009). In retrospect, these pivotal learning experiences reinforced the foundation for developing my identity as a teacher, leader, and public citizen that actively works towards creating stronger, healthier schools, families, and communities.

In August of that same year, my family and I relocated to San Marcos so that I could begin my Ph.D. course work. The transition to migrate and settle in a new

community required both personal and familial commitments. This new chapter in our lives has opened a world of possibilities but at the expense of continuous restructuring of our lives and a significant amount of sacrifice. We are distanced from our family, our place of birth, and our people. We have relied on our faith, friendships, and each other to adapt to a new life, culture, and community. We do not regret our decision to relocate to a new city, but have embraced it and work daily to make the most from this opportunity. My family and I have been fortunate to build relationships with community members, learn about the rich, local history, and be a part of the social fabric the San Marcos community. Our histories have been interwoven thus solidifying my commitment to creating a vibrant community. We have grown roots here and have established our identity as committed citizens of San Marcos. Our values of love, faith, respect, and reciprocity that were sown and nurtured by our loved ones are sustained by our relationships with friends whom also work diligently to create a different world. Our faith in Christ and familial values provide the fuel for advocating for social and educational equity and our relationship to the place, people, and history sustain our sense of moral and social obligation to be invested in local school and community change. It has been a privilege to continue this meaningful work alongside family, colleagues and friends whose strength, prayers, and ceaseless energies continue to fuel the passion for creating healthy teaching and learning environments as well as developing research strategies, practices, and pedagogies that respond to and impact school and community change (Guajardo, et al, 2016).

Organizing and Making Sense of Change: An Ecological Framework

I choose to open this research study with narratives that begin to elucidate and provide some historical context into the internal change processes that I experienced and continue to resonate with me. This introspective and personal shift to becoming an invested public citizen reflects the writings of Mary Beth Rodgers, when she quoted community organizer Ed Chambers in her book *Cold Anger*. Rodgers (1990) wrote, “The first revolution is internal. It requires commitment to operate on your center” (p. 61). The change process did begin with me. Learning not only to acknowledge but to also value my history, story, gifts, and culture as a source of power for change and leadership provided the necessary fuel to commit to a certain way of working, living, and learning. Moreover, this internal revolution provided clarity and insight into the change process as related to school and community change. Many of the policies that impact the lives of many and drive change in our schools and communities operate at a superficial level and are truly not addressing the root causes of many of the issues plaguing our social institutions (Anyon, 1997; Green, 2017; Duncan-Andrade, 2009). As such, a framework for organizing and making sense of our individual and collective learning experiences is essential in our quest for fundamental social, educational, and community change.

One important framework guiding the collective community change work I have been engaged in for the past five years has been the ecologies of knowing (See Figure 1). This ecological framework has provided a strong foundation for teaching, learning, and leading, while simultaneously working as a tool to make sense of our learning and lived experiences (Guajardo et al, 2013). It allows us to engage in pedagogical practices that align and connect the multiple spaces we inhabit. The ecologies of knowing visually

illustrate the interconnections between the different spheres of self, organization (family, schools, etc.) and the community. The ecologies of knowing framework help to “organize our thinking and learning from the micro to the meso and on to the macro levels, or spheres, in which we experience life” (Guajardo, 2016, p. 27). For this research, I draw on the ecologies of knowing for organizing the flow and rhythm of this document. I began with my personal narrative, then transition to the school level where I discuss organizational components, and then branch out into the macro, community level. Although it may appear that this rhythm follows a rigid, linear sequence, this perception could not be further from the truth. Just as our lives are dynamic and fluid, so are the ecologies and the nature of this document. I weave theory, interdisciplinary research, and my own lived experiences and vignettes in hopes of painting a more holistic view of the interconnections between education, school leadership, and healthy communities. Moreover, in the methodology section of this dissertation, I present a hybrid framework comprised of domains of the emerging leaders program and the ecologies of knowing to further illustrate the conceptualization of the multiple layers of the work. This dynamic, responsive, and hybrid framework forms a natural tool for organizing and making sense of the collection of observables.

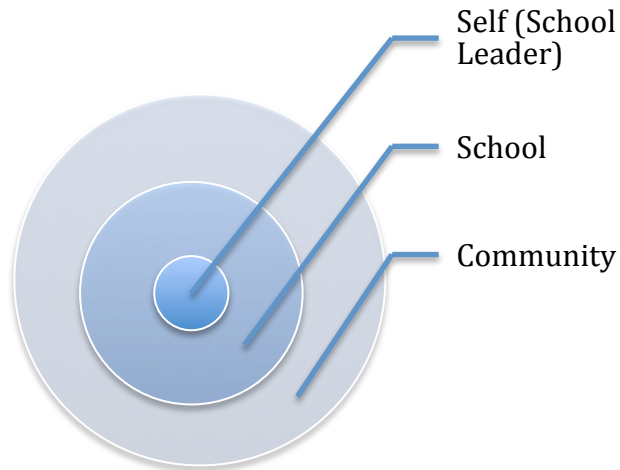


Figure 1. *Ecologies of Knowing adapted from Guajardo et al., 2016; Guajardo et al., 2013.*

Axioms Guiding the Work

What I have learned through my work with educators, educational institutions, and community members is that the work we do is guided by a set of values and concepts that inform our thoughts and actions. These values, or axioms, are what we believe to be true and provide the theoretical underpinnings for working with(in) communities. The creation of the five axioms emerged from the engaged and dynamic work of the CLE. Together, the five axioms create a value system that can be utilized to frame and share the work we engage in. The five axioms are: Learning as leadership and action; conversation and dialogue are critical for relationships and pedagogy; local knowledge and action; encourage crossing borders; assets and hope. Although these axioms are relatively clear, they are best understood and “established by means of real, lived experiences “ (Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 23). In the context of this study, my research partners and I have lived and experienced these five axioms in various settings and through unique experiences. Through our individual and collective experiences, the axioms have been brought to life and inform the way we teach, learn, lead and live. In

sum, the axioms operate as a philosophical basis that informs our personal and collective thoughts, curiosities, conversations, and actions.

School and Community Leadership: A Cultural Fronts Perspective

The transformative process that occurred during my participation in the San Marcos, TX, Community Learning Exchange set off an internal chain reaction that provoked me to ask a different set of questions, engage in different conversations, and commit to a series of actions in my school and community. In short, I committed to a different way of living. The juxtaposition between my experiences in the educational leadership program and those of the CLE created a space of tension that did not exist before. The CLE learning experience had catalyzed my thinking and inspired me in ways that my educational leadership program was unable to do. The challenge for me was to reconcile and make sense of these distinct learning experiences in way that could stimulate positive action. It was what González (2001) refers to as a cultural front, where two discrete forces/cultures come into contact and create a space of tension, but also a space for growth and opportunity (See Figure 2). It is a space where innovation, creativity, and imagination can occur and be nurtured. In this case, the cultural front was an ideological space and battlefield between the traditional conception of school leadership versus the innovative, expanded view of school leadership for school and community change that was introduced to me by the CLE. I knew that my academic training was essential for my growth and development as an educator. The preparation had served me well, yet felt a sense of urgency to commit to different way of engaging in teaching, learning, and leading. I had been trained to approach school leadership from a certain perspective, one that emphasized the more technical aspects of school leadership

and overlooked critical aspects impacting schools such as place, sociopolitical context, culture, and other factors impacting educational outcomes (Brown, 2004; Green, 2017; Marshall & Olivia, 2006; Guajardo et al., 2013; Sergiovanni, 2000).

The pedagogical and engaged processes of the CLE fed not only my mind but my soul as well. The learning process was relevant, dynamic, and invigorating. The organic, dynamic nature of the learning provoked me to connect and make sense of my lived experiences, personal history, profession, and community. Began can to see the interconnections and interdependency of the different spheres operating in my own world. It provided the space necessary to integrate my history, skill sets, and knowledge with the political and geographical contexts, creating a synergy that propelled me to think critically about education. I realized that I was an actor in the world and by acting in and reacting to the socially constructed world, change was possible (Alinsky, 1970; Jacobs, 2003; Freire, 1970; Freire, 2000). It was at this critical juncture where I began attempts to bridge the gap between school leadership confined to the walls of the institution to a model of school and community leadership that is sensitive and responds to the context of the local community (Jacobs, 2003). This tension became the genesis of this research endeavor.

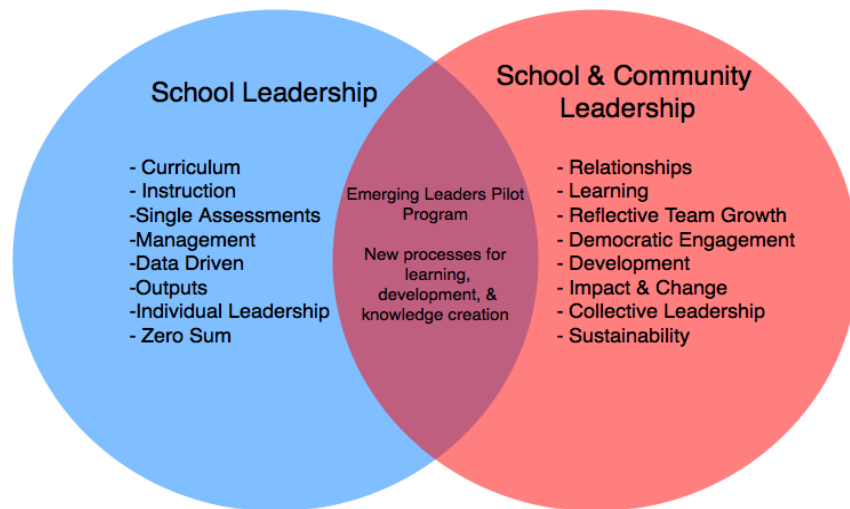


Figure 2. *Cultural Fronts Perspective of Educational Leadership.*

Purpose and Scope of Research

The introductory story that articulated my learning experiences helped (re)frame my conceptions of leadership and provoked me to think about the notion and nature of leadership, its meaning, and significance in educational and community contexts. Since transitioning to San Marcos, I have been immersed and engaged in school and community leadership that aims to cultivate and sustain healthy schools and communities. These experiences have provided an ecological framing to the work I engage in. The health and success of schools and communities are inextricably linked to each other. As Goodlad (1994) stated, “schools are ecosystems situated in larger ecosystems” (p. 218). This framing provides clarity and direction to the decisions and actions researchers, practitioners, and policy makers must commit to in order to improve the educational experiences of youth. It also serves to inform the learning processes that prepare and develop the kind of leadership needed to radically transform our schools (Guajardo & García, 2016; NASSP and NAESP, 2013; Wallace Foundation, 2013). This approach to leadership is a dynamic and engaged process of collective school leadership

that is asset-based, informed by local values, utilizes technology, and privileges the power of place and wisdom of people (Guajardo et al., 2016). As mentioned in the opening paragraph, the implementation of the emerging leaders program has been a point of departure from the proliferation of conventional educational leadership models that may inadequately prepare entering school leaders (Davis & Hammond, 2012; Levine 2005; Wallace Foundation, 2013). The emerging leaders program has deliberately worked to bridge the systems and lifeworld domains of school leadership and ground these concepts within the local community context. This integration of school and community values has served to broaden the landscape of school leadership and (re)imagine alternate frameworks for educational leadership preparation, development, and practice that responds to the local ecology (Green 2015; Guajardo & García, 2016; Khalifa, 2012).

The emerging leaders program, which initially began in the summer of 2014, has engaged fifteen San Marcos C.I.S.D. teachers in an innovative and dynamic learning process that has helped to re-frame school leadership preparation. The pilot program emerged from a partnership between Texas State University's Education and Community Leadership Program and San Marcos Consolidated I.S.D. As a research assistant, I have been privileged to participate and serve in numerous capacities in program's facilitation and progress. But more importantly, I have witnessed the growth and development of the teachers immersed in this rich, transformative learning experience. This approach to educating emerging school leaders has notably been a transformative journey for its participants and provides a nuanced space for inquiring into that learning process. The program has deliberately aligned standards for principal preparation with local

community values and personal experiences. Figure 1 illustrates the framework that informs the emerging leaders program. The framework is comprised of three overarching domains: Instructional leadership, culturally responsive teaching and learning, and community engagement. This fusion of both the professional and personal aspects of development has resulted in a unique and different approach to leadership preparation. This emerging, innovative model adds to the sparse but emerging body of knowledge of effective principal preparation and development programs (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2009; Young, 2015).



Figure 3. *Domains of Emerging Leaders Program*

The need for training and preparing effective school leaders is essential to improving the quality of teaching and learning in schools (National Association of Secondary School Principals and National Association of Elementary Schools Principals, 2013; Wallace Foundation, 2012). To be effective, school leaders need to be immersed in principal preparation programs that provide rich learning experiences that cultivate new

skills, knowledge, and dispositions (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007; Shelton, 2010). This qualitative research case study will contribute to existing scholarship that invite empirical studies to add to the existing knowledge base, improve principal preparation programs, and the quality of education future school leaders receive (Darling-Hammond, 2009; Young, 2015). This research will connect research, theory, and practice by exploring the learning experiences of three teachers participating in the emerging leaders program. It will chronicle their experiences to better understand their transition from educators to school and community leaders. Additional observables will be collected from resource partners situated at the organizational and community levels. These are resource partners that have been in conversation about envisioning a new form of school leadership and played in integral role in fashioning the emerging leaders pilot program. The additional observables serve to augment the stories and experiences of my research partners. Fundamentally, this work explicates the relationship between educational leadership, school improvement, and community development that collectively created the basis for reframing principal preparation practice and pedagogy. As such, it is purposefully grounded in an ecological framework that links community development theory with educational leadership development and practice. The research questions guiding the study are:

- 1.) How can a point of innovation, the Emerging Leaders program, contribute to the literature on Education leadership programs?
 - a. What are the curricular, content, and pedagogical elements that have contributed to this change?

- b. How has this program impacted the development of teachers as school and community leaders?

Rhythm and Flow of Research Study

This first chapter outlined both the experiences that serve to frame the entry point and impetus to engage in this research study and the research questions that guide the inquiry process. This research stemmed from both my formal educational and professional experiences and eventually manifested itself into this opportunity to explore an innovative program that combines the technical elements of school leadership with broader aspects of school improvement such as community context and conditions. Chapter two begins with a narrative of a critical moment that further invites critical inquiry and reflection into the programs and processes facilitating the preparation of school leaders. It also explores the organization layer of the ecologies of knowing by providing a review of literature on the current context of education, school leadership, and school leadership standards informing principal preparation programs in Texas. In Chapter 3, I examine the outmost layer of the ecologies of knowing, the community. I begin this chapter by delving into the concept of community, articulating community development theory and how it relates to school and community change. I then engage these distinct yet interrelated concepts in a dialogical process that explores how these concepts can inform the preparation and practice of school leaders. Chapter Four outlines the methodology that will guided the collection of observables and method of analysis. Chapter Five outlines the findings of the study, while Chapter Six articulates the lessons learned from the study, recommendations, and future research opportunities.

II. CONTEXT OF EDUCATION AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Chapter 1 explored the micro layer of ecologies of knowing, which in the context of this study, are my personal experiences that provoked me to engaged in this research. In this chapter, I examine the meso layer, which in the context of this study are public schools. As a mediating institution, public schools serve as a critical space that introduce and integrate youth to the broader society (Spring, 2009). It is in this dynamic and challenging social environment that young people begin to make sense of and navigate the complex, changing world they inhabit. The challenge and responsibility for school leaders is to foster a safe environment that facilitates the intellectual, emotional, and personal growth of young people (Comer, 2004; Louis et al., 2010). The reality is that creating such environments requires adequate preparation, a unique skill set, and on-going support in the form of regular professional development opportunities for continuous improvement and growth (Louis et al. 2010; Turnbull, Riley, Arcaira, Anderson, & MacFarlane, 2013). Moreover, in order to affect and sustain productive change, schools and school districts are urged to form partnerships with other community entities such as non-profit organizations and higher educational institutions (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Louis et al., 2010). These potential partnerships must be grounded in authentic relationships that are reciprocal, respectful, and responsive to the conditions of the local community (Guajardo et al., 2016). To achieve the partnerships require the knowledge, skill set, and understanding of how to navigate between the three different ecologies. The following is a review of literature that delves into the intersection between schools, school leadership, and communities. This will include the purpose of public

education, a brief survey of the changing landscape of school leadership, and focus on school leadership preparation programs in Texas.

Relationships Between Schools and Communities: A Story

In the summer of 2013, several doctoral colleagues and I helped a professor facilitate a staff leadership retreat for all San Marcos C.I.S.D. leaders. The invitation to help assist the facilitation process for San Marcos staff came on the heels of our participation in community development summer course for our doctoral program. In that course, we dove into literature and theoretical concepts pertaining to community development and this was an opportunity for us to apply our new acquired knowledge. The leadership retreat was hosted at the local Lion's Club building near the banks of the San Marcos River. In total, 55 district leaders including the superintendent, assistant superintendent, department heads and school principals convened to prepare for the upcoming school year. The mission of this retreat had three goals: to improve district leadership capacity, align district leadership goals and develop community engagement strategies. The retreat was part of a school district development strategy to construct and implement the emerging district vision of what was termed 'The Learning Community of Texas.' The superintendent had graciously agreed to provide us with a time slot in the morning and our team had three hours to engage these district leaders in a community building process that integrated place, collaboration, dialogue, and technology.

After short introductions and acknowledgement of our presence, we then convened and facilitated small group conversations between the school leaders. The

opening of our session began with opening circles³ that set the conditions for collective learning and engagement. In the circles, the district leaders introduced themselves, their respective roles in the district, and shared about their artifact that they were asked to bring to the gathering. After this, we invited the participants to think about the concept of community engagement and what it could look like in practice. Subsequently, we facilitated a Digi-hunt⁴ activity, in which the groups were provided a list of questions that served to guide a collaborative inquiry process that encouraged leaders to explore the local community, its history, and assets (Guajardo et al., 2016). The groups had an hour to engage in conversation, identify places in the community that best represented the questions, take a group photo of the chosen image/place or actions, and return to upload images for collective debriefing and sharing. After this activity, the energy of the room was palpable as the groups shared their images with their colleagues and spoke about their experiences during the digi-hunt process.

The activity sparked individual and collective thinking as they conceptualized ways of integrating community based learning and inquiry into the curriculum into their existing curricula. One group in particular, creatively envisioned the local ecological system, most notably the San Marcos River, as the foundation and unifying thread for the district's K-12 curriculum. The general consensus among the groups was that the local community was rich with resources and assets that have yet to be tapped by district educators and leaders. During one of the presentations, one long-time district leader stood up and shared, “I have learned more about this community in three hours than I have in

³ A more in-depth treatment of the concept and use of circle will be presented in Chapter 5.

⁴ A hybrid version based on the childhood scavenger hunt.

all my 15 years of working in this district.” The lessons garnered from this experience are profound and worthy of consideration as they inform the inquiry of this study. One observation that quickly emerges from this story is that this form of engagement invited him and the other school leaders to explore, (re)consider, and (re)imagine the possibilities of what and how school leadership can look like. Another, more concerning observation is that his stark commentary about his experience and knowledge of the local community provided an illuminating insight into the nature and contemporary state of educational leadership and practice. This experience provided an entry point for inquiring about the kind of preparation and development aspiring school leaders receive and their relationship to the community they serve. The articulation shared by the school leader served as a clear indication of the limited knowledge and connection many school leaders serving across the nation may have with their local communities (Green & Gooden, 2014). On another level, it also revealed the ‘disconnect’ that exists between school leaders and their communities and the missed opportunities for mutual collaboration to address social, political, and educational issues impacting the community (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; McKnight & Block, 2011; Warren & Mapp, 2011). The disconnect between the life and systems world of school leadership was made evident as was the power to help (re)connect the two through invitation and CLE pedagogies.

The sharing of this story is not to criticize and impose judgment of the school staff and personnel, but rather an opportunity to engage in critical reflection of systemic issues, ideologies, and value systems that influence educational leadership preparation and development programs (Darling-Hammond, 2009). It reveals a rupture and disconnection between the life and systems worlds of school leadership. Additionally, it

compels us to reassess how school leaders are educated, trained, and supported throughout their careers. As an advocate for school and community change, this experience provoked me to think about how well our school leaders know the community they serve, the type of preparation needed to lead effectively in a diverse society, and the relationships between institutions, school leaders and the local community context. The following sections work to contextualize school leadership in the current educational reform landscape by providing a brief commentary of purpose of education, while simultaneously opening up a space for dialogue to explore its nuanced potential as a force for facilitating fundamental school and community change.

Purpose(s) of Public Schools

Philosophers, scholars, and politicians have long debated the purpose of public education. Having roots in the 1800's, compulsory education in the United States has been an integral part of the nation's social fabric (Spring, 2004). Contemporarily speaking, public schools fulfill numerous roles and responsibilities that directly contribute the well being of youth, families, and the community (Center on Education Policy, 2007). They are charged with numerous and critical tasks ranging from the intellectual and educational development of children to meeting the demands of capitalist economy through their development as active and engaged citizens living in a democratic society (Carnegie Corporation & CIRCLE, 2003; Spring, 2009). From a historical perspective, public schools were created to be places where children were sent to explore and learn more about academic subjects, but also to learn about themselves as important contributors to a democratic society (Dewey, 1916). According to Hafen (1987) public schools function as mediating institutions because "schools stimulate the development of

students' capacities to discover their own forms of meaning and purpose, as illustrated by the way schools nurture both the values and the skills related to self-expression” (p.700). Thus schools interact with the different spheres of society such as the family (private) and the government (public) and play a major role in the socialization of youth into life in a democratic society (Ehman, 1980). From an organizational perspective, schools differ from other forms of organizations in that their mission is to “enhance the continuing growth and development of people to become more fully functioning individuals” (Owens & Valesky, 2011, p.13). The ideal concept of school was to be a place of imagination, exploration, and personal development. Yet, the realities of the wider sociopolitical context and economic demands of sustaining a democratic nation influenced and placed significant demands on the educational system to develop a trained labor force and a means of social control (Spring, 2006). While, the generally accepted belief is that the foundations of public education in the United States have been grounded in democratic and egalitarian values, scholars have noted that racist and deficit ideologies underpinned the U.S. educational system since its very inception (Menchaca, 1997; Valencia, 1997). These scholars have revealed historical and present inequities and have created opportunities to critically examine policies and practices that lead to the pervasive, persistent, and disproportionately low educational attainment among racial minorities (Valencia, 2010).

Moreover, many schools still operate in isolation from the local community, which create a host of other issues and barriers to school and student success (Warren & Mapp, 2011). One result of this ‘disconnect’ between schools and their local community is the fact that many individuals including youth and their families have lost faith in

schools to serve as the “great equalizer,” leading to widespread disengagement, lack of student interest, poor leadership and low academic achievement (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). Systemically, the bureaucratic and technocratic nature of education inhibits the ability of public schools for nurturing relationships with the local community (Comer, 2004; Vollmer, 2010). As such, this disconnect continues to be a major barrier in establishing and nurturing fruitful partnerships that can generate capital and leverage resources that benefit the entire community (Stone et al, 1999). Thus, there is an abundance of missed opportunities to build the adequate conditions and environments for raising, educating, and developing healthy children. Furthermore, the burden of creating effective school learning environments and experiences that meet the needs of educating students in the 21st century continues to fall on the shoulders of school staff and personnel (Vollmer, 2010). The disconnect between schools and their communities severely limit the possibilities of creating viable partnerships that generate the social, political, economic, and cultural resources to improve the outcomes for youth and families (Goldring and Housing, 2001; Warren & Mapp, 2011; Yosso, 2005).

Defining School Leaders

Many terms have been used to describe the individual(s) charged with the responsibility for managing a school’s operations. These individuals have historically and commonly been referred to as principals, yet other terms such as educational leaders, school leaders, and educational administrators routinely appear in the literature. Although these terms have multiple definitions, there is general consensus among scholars and research that they refer to school principals. For the purposes of this study, the terms principals, educational leaders and school leaders will be used interchangeably

throughout this study and will refer to school leaders such as principals and assistant principals.

School Reform and its Impact on School Leadership

The history of public school in the United States is replete with legal battles, court cases and groundbreaking studies that have dramatically altered and affected the educational experiences of children (Valencia, 2009). Beginning with *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896, the landscape of public schooling in the United States has undergone numerous changes that have impacted how children learn, teachers teach, and leaders lead. Other milestones in public education history such *Brown v. Board* (1954), the Coleman Report (1966) and the U.S. Department of Education report, *A Nation at Risk*, (1983) have all shaped and informed educational policy that has impacted the lives of millions of young learners. In the current context of public education, *A Nation at Risk* has had a profound effect on contemporary approaches to school reform initiatives and policy making (Borek, 2008). When initially released to the public, the report drew attention of both public and private sectors to the state of education in the United States and ushered in a new era of education reform in the United States (Goldring & Hausing, 2001). The tremors of this pivotal study sent shockwaves throughout the land that jolted the American consciousness by highlighting the mediocre state of public school education. The document stated:

We report to the American people that while we can take justifiable pride in what our schools and colleges have historically accomplished and contributed to the United States and the well-being of its people, the educational foundations of our

society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people. (U.S. 1983)

A Nation at Risk changed the course of American education by reframing the educational discourse and thus propelling a shift to a standards-oriented, accountability, and market-based education reform movement (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009; Metha, 2015). The implications of this report were wide-ranging and long lasting. According to Metha (2015), “A Nation at Risk invoked a crisis so far-reaching in its impact that it still governs the way we think about public education 30 years later” (p. 21). It stimulated a sense of urgency to invest in educational programs and research that sought to produce and retain high-quality teachers and school leaders (Hunt, 2008).

The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Act in 2002, also known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), has significantly altered schooling practices, financial structures, and overall school culture and climate (Dee, Jacob, & Schwartz, 2013; Ravitch, 2011). More than a decade later and numerous educational reform efforts, attempts to ‘close the achievement’ gap with the passage of NCLB has revealed significant issues, concerns, and unintended consequences (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). The enactment of these policies and performance driven reforms have burdened schools with large doses of standardized testing, hyper accountability and compliance measures that evaluate student progress, and the narrowing of a curriculum that emphasizes the science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields, while marginalizing other disciplines such as the fine arts, physical education, and health (Schneider & Keesler, 2007). The high stakes nature of assessments and accountability, coupled with high levels of low academic of achievement leading to the closures of many public schools have

sounded the metaphorical panic alarm that have triggered a ‘crisis’ response from the media, policymakers, and other publically recognized individuals and organizations who then in turn vilify and condemn the inadequacy of public school performance (Giroux, 2011).

The prevalent, top-down mandates that require public schools to meet policy requirements, assess student achievement through standardized testing, as well as the inherent demand of meeting the social needs of students, staff, and the community have dramatically altered the organizational culture of schools (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Green, 2015; Owens & Valesky, 2011). The ability of adapting to a rapidly changing society has compelled educational institutions to adopt different models of school leadership to keep pace with the changing political, social, and economic landscapes (Fullan, 2001; Sergiovanni, 2000). To lead effectively in our contemporary society, school leaders in American education must function more than just managers and operators of schools (Wallace Foundation, 2013). They are required to make important decisions that influence institutional culture and possess capacity to deeply affect the lives students, teachers, and other community members (Berson & Oreg, 2016; Fullan, 2003). The Wallace Foundation (2013) has identified five key responsibilities of school leaders

- Shaping a vision of academic success for all students, one based on high standards.
- Creating a climate hospitable to education in order that safety, a cooperative spirit and other foundations of fruitful interaction prevail.
- Cultivating leadership in others so that teachers and other adults assume their parts in realizing the school vision.

- Improving the instruction to enable teachers to teach at their best and students to learn their utmost.
- Managing data, people, and process to foster school improvement.

The increasing pressure to increase student achievement and teacher quality has significantly placed a huge burden on the shoulders of school leaders. In their quantitative random sample study of school leaders' perceptions of the NCLB mandates with regards to Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), Gosnell-Lamb, O'Reilly, and Matt (2013) found that school leaders' priorities have shifted from 2002, which indicates that most of their time and energy concerns are dedicated to meeting the state required mandates (See Table 1). Another finding from that study indicated that school leaders had to deal with faculty and staff stress related to teaching in a high-stakes testing environment (Gosnell-Lamb, O'Reilly, & Matt, 2013). These findings help situate and contextualize the current challenges, stresses, and conditions that impact the growth and development of school leaders. It also calls forth the need to engage in research that foster create systems, strategies, and practices that provide the support for emerging and practicing school leaders to lead effectively in challenging contexts (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010).

Table 1
School Leader's Priorities

| 2001-2002 | | | 2010-2011 | |
|---------------|---|------------|---|------------|
| Priority Rank | Responses | Percentage | Responses | Percentage |
| 1. | Reading time/Math Achievement | 20% | Student achievement, Test Scores, compliance, State standards | 29% |
| 2. | Superior Instructional techniques, Prof Development | 20% | Superior Instructional techniques, Prof Development | 24% |
| 3. | Evaluating Teachers | 18% | Reading time/Math achievement | 12% |
| 4. | Prep Time & Grade level meetings | 18% | Prep Time & Grade level meetings | 10% |
| 5. | Student achievement, Test Scores, compliance, State standards | 14% | Evaluating teachers | 8% |

Gosnell-Lamb, O'Reilly, & Matt (2013).

Moreover, the challenging conditions and contexts that school leaders must navigate lead to other leadership and organizational issues that severely impact student learning, instruction, and school performance (Dee, Jacob, & Schwartz, 2013). One important issue facing many public schools in Texas and across the nation is school leader retention and turnover rates (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2009). Fuller and Young (2009) found that just over 50% of newly hired principals stay for three years and less than 30% for five years. Additionally, school districts on average lose anywhere from 15 to 30 percent of school leaders annually, with low-income, high minority schools being significantly affected even more (Béteille, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2012). The high turnover rate of school leaders also has significant financial implications. According to

School Leader's Network (2014), it estimates that it costs school districts \$75,000 to prepare, hire, and onboard each principal. This financial commitment to the hiring, training, and placement of school leaders is often weakened by high levels of principal turnover that impact district financial resources. By not retaining a high percentage of principals, districts are challenged to recruit new and qualified school leaders to replace previous leaders, which further increases school district expenditures (School Leader's Network, 2014). It is argued that by properly training, retaining, and supporting effective school leaders, student achievement, teacher quality, and economic investments are enhanced and better sustained (School Leader's Network, 2014).

Moving to a Space of Opportunity

Despite the cries that the sky is falling on public education, this is clearly not a valid and correct representation of the state of public schooling (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008). Similar to other social institutions, public schools have significant challenges and issues to contend with. This contentious atmosphere surrounding the state of education has created opportunities for business elites to influence the fate of public education in the United States (Giroux, 2011). More recently, neoliberal attempts to privatize education in the United States have been labeled as an 'assault on public education' that further works to socially reproduce disparities, perpetuate existing inequities, and underserve and disenfranchise already margined populations (Giroux, 2014). Regrettably, this is the context in which teachers and school leaders must create the environments and conditions that help educate our children and provide enriching learning experiences that inspire imagination, creativity, and civic duty.

The need for different models of school leadership preparation and decision making have been highlighted by the growing body of research that suggest that the quality of school leadership has a profound impact on student achievement and teacher effectiveness (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013; Darling-Hammond; LaPointe, Meyerson, & Orr, 2010). Studies have indicated that effective school leadership is a critical factor in the educational reform equation and merit continuous attention to ensuring that schools are populated with highly qualified leadership personnel (Darling-Hammond et al, 2010; Leithwood, 2004; Wallace Foundation, 2010). Additionally, scholars and researchers invite us to rethink traditional educational leadership preparation frameworks that focus on managerial and technical duties and expand those models to include the contribution of other individuals, thus marking a shift from bureaucratic approaches of managing schools, to one that fosters creativity, collaboration, relationships and community engagement (Block, 2008; Green, 2015; Guajardo, 2007; Guajardo et al., 2016; Guajardo, Guajardo, & Casaperalta, 2008; Sergiovanni, 2000). When conceptualizing the type of leadership required by schools, Sergiovanni (2000) stated,

Schools need special leadership because schools are special places. Sure schools share with other enterprises common managerial requirements that ensure basic levels of organizational purpose, competence, reliability, structure, and stability. But schools must respond as well to the unique political realities they face. After all schools belong to parents and children, interact with the needs of local businesses, churches, and other community groups, and have a unique relationship with state governments. These "stakeholders" don't always agree, and

it takes a high level of political skill for school leaders to bring about the necessary consensus and comment to make schools work well for everyone. (p. 165-66)

Sergiovanni's (2000) articulation of the kind of leadership required in public schooling underscores several important elements to creating the conditions for student and school achievement. He acknowledges the technical elements of leadership such as structure and management, but emphasizes the political and relational domains of school leadership. As such, the school leader is responsible for working with others in developing methods to increase effective school-community partnerships and create spaces where meaningful conversations can take place, which are fundamental to creating a climate and culture that nurtures student and adult development (Block, 2008; Comer, 2004; Fullan, 2016; Senge, 2012; Sergiovanni, 1999; Sergiovanni, 2000).

National School Leadership Standards

In 1994-95, the representatives from the Council of Chief State School Officers and National Policy Board for Education Administration met to create a set of standards with the hopes of providing a common language to help guide and renovate school leadership preparation and practice. The result from this collaborative endeavor bore fruit in the form of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium in 1996 (ISLLC, 2008). The original standards were revisited and revised in 2008 with the goals of “creating comprehensive, locally tailored approaches for developing and retaining high-quality leaders” and to “raise student achievement” (CCSSO, 2008, p. 5.).

More recently, the ISLLC standards have undergone significant restructuring and have resulted in the creation of the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders

National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA), 2015). According to the NPBEA (2015), the standards are focused on all levels of educational leadership but are geared towards leadership at the school level. The 2015 standards are grounded in a ‘future-oriented’ perspective by “recognizing that the changing world in which educational leaders work today will continue to transform-and the demands and expectation for educational leaders along with it” (NPBEA, 2015, p.3). The ten professional standards are listed below (Table 2).

Table 2
NPBEA Professional Standards for Educational Leaders 2015

| Professional Standards for Educational Leaders 2015 | |
|---|--|
| Standard | Performance Expectation |
| Standard 1. Mission, Vision, and Core Values | Effective educational leaders develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high-quality educational and academic success and well-being of each student. |
| Standard 2. Ethics and Professional Norms | Effective educational leaders act ethically and according to professional norms to promote each student's academic success and well-being. |
| Standard 3. Equity and Cultural Responsiveness | Effective educational leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote each student's academic success and well-being. |
| Standard 4. Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment | Effective educational leaders develop and support intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to promote each student's academic success and well-being. |
| Standard 5. Community of Care and Support for Students | Effective educational leaders cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community that promotes the academic success and well-being of each student. |
| Standard 6. Professional Capacity of School Personnel | Effective educational leaders develop the professional capacity and practice of school personnel to promote each student's academic success and well-being. |
| Standard 7. Professional Community for Teachers and Staff | Effective educational leaders foster a professional community of teachers and other professional staff to promote each student's academic success and well-being. |
| Standard 8. Meaningful Engagement of Families and Communities | Effective educational leaders engage families and the community in meaningful, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial ways to promote each student's academic success and well-being. |
| Standard 9. Operations and Management | Effective educational leaders manage school operations and resources to promote each student's academic success and well-being. |
| Standard 10. School Improvement | Effective educational leaders act as agents of continuous improvement to promote each student's academic success and well-being. |

The NPBEA standards were created to inform and shape the contours of educational leadership policy and practice in the United States and “challenge the profession, professional associations, policy makers, institutions of higher education and other organizations that support educational leaders and their development to move beyond established practices and systems and to strive for a better future” (NPBEA, 2015, p.3). Thus, continuous research around principal preparation programs is needed to further enhance the training and development of aspiring school leaders to create productive learning environments for all children (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Sarason, 2000).

The standards presented above offer a macro view of standards impacting educational leadership preparation at the state and local levels. The following section pays attention to the Texas standards for school leadership and provides a more focused and nuanced examination of state requirements for school leadership.

State of Texas School Leadership Standards

In the state of Texas, the standards used guide and inform principal training are found in 19 TAC Chapter 149, Subchapter BB in the Commissioner’s rules Concerning Educator Standards (see Table 3). These administrator standards delineate the standards, indicators, knowledge, and skills that are to be in alignment with principal training, appraisal, and professional development. It is comprised of five different standards and is sub divided with the knowledge, skills, and indicators of that correlate with the respective standard. The five standards are: Instructional leadership; human capital; executive leadership; school culture; and strategic operations.

Table 3
Texas Commissioner’s rules Concerning Educator Standards

| | |
|--|---|
| Standard 1 – Instructional Leadership | The principal is responsible for ensuring every student receives high-quality instruction. |
| Standard 2 – Human Capital | The principal is responsible for ensuring there are high-quality teachers and staff in every classroom and throughout the school. |
| Standard 3 – Executive Leadership | The principal is responsible for modeling a consistent focus on and commitment to improving student learning. |
| Standard 4 – School Culture | The principal is responsible for establishing and implementing a shared vision and culture of high expectations for all staff and students. |
| Standard 5 – Strategic Operations | The principal is responsible for implementing systems that align with the school's vision and improve the quality of instruction. |

The standards presented above are critical to the education, development and growth of school leaders. These standards guide and orient school leaders to center and focus on the domains student learning and teacher effectiveness as measured by state exams and teacher evaluations. When connecting and analyzing these standards with my own educational experiences, it becomes evident how these state standards inform the mission, design, content, and the pedagogical processes of principal preparation programs. A succinct analysis of the educator standards highlights the emphasis on the instructional and organizational components of school leadership. The language and concepts used to frame these standards indicate the importance on the instructional aspect of school leadership. As the context and landscape of school leadership continues to evolve and grow more complex, the state standards have adopted standards that explicitly

require school leaders work with community members such as parents and other stakeholders to achieve effective school and student outcomes (NPBEA, 2015). Despite the incorporation of community-oriented standards, there is concern about school leaders' capacity to engage and work effectively with the broader community (Horsford & Brown, 2011; Green, 2017). For most school leaders, the expectations of working with the community and harnessing its assets as a potential for leveraging school and community are often on the periphery (Green, 2015).

Principal Demographics and Programs in Texas

The number of employed school leaders in Texas public schools continues to rise as noted by Table 4. The demographic snapshot of school leaders in Texas presented illustrates the gender and ethnicities of practicing school leaders. It also invites policy makers, university programs, and school districts to conceptualize methods to create pathways that identify, recruit, educate and support a steady stream of school leaders that effectively impact student achievement and school improvement (Orr, 2011; Turnbull et al., 2013).

Table 4
Principals employed in the Texas public school system

| Year | Total | Female Pct. | Male Pct. | Black/ African Pct. | White Pct. | Hispanic/ Latino Pct. | Asian Pct. |
|-------------|--------------|--------------------|------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|
| 2013-14 | 8,026 | 62.1 | 37.9 | 11.89 | 63.27 | 22.81 | 0.57 |
| 2012-13 | 7,946 | 61.4 | 38.6 | 11.52 | 65.40 | 21.91 | 0.55 |
| 2011-12 | 7,936 | 61.3 | 38.7 | 11.24 | 64.73 | 21.95 | 0.52 |

Source: Texas Education Agency 2015

As indicated above, the education and preparation of emerging school leaders must prepare leaders to lead in a complex, fast-changing world (Darling-Hammond, 2009). To lead in these dynamic and socially oriented environments, school leaders need rich learning opportunities that support their growth and development to able to perform their duties effectively (Turnbull et al., 2013). As such, principal preparation programs must engage and provide aspiring school leaders rich, intellectually and socially robust learning experiences that cultivate and nurture the type of leadership our schools require (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; National Association of Secondary School Principals and National Association of Elementary Schools Principals, 2013; Turnbull et al, 2013; Wallace Foundation 2012). To educate and cultivate this type of school leadership our schools require, a major shift in the conceptualization and enactment of educational leadership programs must take place (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007).

To get an idea of current educational leadership preparation programs available in Texas, I include a matrix that provides a snapshot of program characteristics (See Table 5). The institutions were selected on the following criteria: public university, student enrollment, geography, and availability of program information on-line. The matrix includes the name of the institution, name of educational leadership program, description, first year course work and hours needed to complete the program (See Appendix A for complete program description).

Table 5
Overview of Select Principal Preparation Programs in Texas

| Institution | Name | First Two Semesters Course Sequence | Hours Required | Program Delivery |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------|--|----------------|---------------------|
| Texas A&M University | PK-12 Educational Administration | Foundations of Educational Administration School Principalship Applied Data Techniques Principal Professional Practices | 36 Hours | Online, Traditional |
| Texas State University | Education and Community Leadership | Understanding Self: Developing a Personal Vision for Leadership Understanding Organizations & Using Inquiry Understanding People: Professional Development Understanding Environments: Social, Political, Economic, Legal & Technical | 36 Hours | Traditional |
| University of North Texas | Educational Leadership | Introduction to Educational Administration Instructional Leadership Campus-Level School Law Management of School Resources | 36 Hours | Online, Traditional |

Table 5 (cont.)
Overview of Select Principal Preparation Programs in Texas

| | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|--|----------|---------------------|
| University of Texas at El Paso | Educational Administration | Administrative Leadership Instructional Leadership School Community Leadership Data Based Decision Making | 36 Hours | Traditional |
| University of Texas Rio Grande Valley | Educational Leadership | Data Management for School Improvement Socio-Cultural Contexts of Education Organizational Leadership Ethics and School Law | 30 Hours | Online, Traditional |

This matrix provides a visual snapshot into current educational leadership programs in the state of Texas. It is not a conclusive list nor intended to be so. It is not intended to rank and make judgments about institutional programs and their effectiveness. It simply operates as a baseline to support the inquiry of this research work. By examining the information on the matrix, we can discern that four of the five university programs listed follow what appears to be a course sequence that focuses on the conventional elements of educational leadership. Three programs, Texas State University, UT-El Paso, and UT-RGV have at least one course that deviate from the instructional, organizational domains of school leadership. The presented information begins to illustrate how certain programs are structured and informed by national and state standards.

Bridging the Lifeworld and Systems world of School Leadership

During the last twenty years, there has been increasing agreement among educational scholars, researchers, and policy makers that effective school leadership and school leadership practices are critical to positive schooling outcomes for teachers and students (Levine, 2005; Sergiovanni, 2000; Wallace Foundation, 2013). In fact, it has been noted that effective school leadership is only second to classroom instruction in regards school related factors that influence student academic learning (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Leithwood, 2004; Wallace Foundation, 2013). A pivotal component in overall process of educational reform, the arena of school leadership is a hot topic of discussion and debate among researchers, scholars, and policy makers. The increased attention to effective school leadership practices have led to a proliferation of principal preparation programs, models, and strategies to adequately preparing practitioners to handle the complexities of leading a school. Moreover, the emphasis on effective school leadership in a rapidly changing global context has given rise to numerous leadership frameworks intended to guide and inform school leadership practice (Beauchum, 2011). Leadership frameworks such as transformative, servant, instructional, democratic and social justice approaches have quickly surfaced as a few of the most popular frameworks for leading schools in the 21st century (Brown, 2004; Burns, 1978; Greenleaf, 1970; Khalifa, 2012). Although, significant research has surfaced theorizing and assessing the success of school leadership models and programs related to student achievement, there are considerable challenges to developing and sustaining strong principal preparation programs that ineffectively prepare school leaders to engage, lead, and facilitate student, teacher, and school success (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Levine, 2005).

The charge to develop and systemize a sustainable plan for cultivating and nurturing “a sufficient corps of well-qualified” school leaders is a pertinent issue facing principal preparation programs across the nation (Wallace Foundation, 2012, p. 13). Research has indicated that traditional and alternative leadership programs are insufficiently training and preparing emerging school leaders for navigating the complexities of school leadership (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Wallace Foundation, 2016). Levine’s (2005) comprehensive analysis of principal preparation programs from across the country noted the poor quality of programs and that the education of aspiring school leaders receive is not consistent with the realities of school leadership. Many of the school leaders that enter the field feel inadequately prepared for the complexities, responsibilities, and demands of educational leadership (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). This is partly due to the emphasis on the managerial aspects of school leadership as opposed to the multiple roles that school leaders must navigate (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). Moreover, poor communication and collaboration between universities and the local school district inhibit the potential of cultivating and nurturing effective school leadership that responds to the local context (Martin & Papa, 2008). As mentioned in the introduction, I was technically prepared by traditional measures but not mentally or emotionally ready to be a school leader, at least an effective one. I felt that I needed to sharpen and refine other skills such as awareness of self and place and how to develop meaningful partnerships with community members (Budge, 2006; Posner, 2009). It was evident that systems world of school leadership had occupied a more prominent role in my preparation and development as an emerging school leader (Sergiovanni, 2000).

The response from both researchers and scholars to these and other challenges impacting school leadership has manifested in a profusion of theories, models, and programs intended to adequately train and develop school leadership that shapes a vision of success and collective works with others to create an atmosphere that supports the academic and social development of children (Mendels, 2012; Wallace Foundation; 2016). One specific recommendation from the literature to make this possible is the creation of partnerships between universities and school districts. The cultivation and nurturing of strong school district and university partnerships have been shown to be a critical component in the overall design and effectiveness of principal preparation programs (Browne-Ferrigno, 2011; Goodlad, 1993; Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012). Effective school district and university partnerships have the potential to foster rich and engaging educational experiences for aspiring leaders and help cultivate and sustain school leadership that responds to local school and community conditions (Cosner, Tozer, Zavitkovsky & Whalen, 2015; Guajardo et al., 2016; Shelton, 2012).

The complex and challenging, yet noble profession of school leadership, has urged researchers to inquire about the nature of school leadership programs and standards, as well as the key elements needed to develop effective programs that promote strong school leadership. The impulse to train, develop, and retain well-qualified and highly-adaptive school leaders becomes more urgent for school leaders situated in low-income communities that serve historically marginalized populations (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016; McKibben, 2013; Wallace Foundation, 2012). Similar to teacher preparation, historical and contemporary school leadership models and frameworks are outdated and do not respond

to community context and conditions, which only serve to reinforce existing inequities that affect the educational achievement of youth (Duncan-Andrade, 2010; Rothstein, 2004).

Despite the abundance of research on and about school leadership, there is a constant necessity for (re)assessing existing academic preparation programs, leadership models pedagogies, and practices (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Guajardo et al., 2013; Young, 2015). The creation and implementation of innovative and cutting edge educational programs that promote dynamic, adaptive approaches to school leadership in the 21st century will be critical to the educational outcomes of youth and schools (Khalifa et al., 2016; Wallace Foundation, 2016). Moreover, democratic structures that promote greater community engagement, shared leadership, and partnerships at different levels are critical to supporting and sustaining high levels of student achievement (Wallace Foundation, 2010). As such, scholars, educators, and policy makers must be eternally vigilant of promoting, designing, and implementing standards that promote a shared vision of school leadership that responds to both school and community contexts (Guajardo et al., 2016; Green, 2016; Khalifa, 2012).

By situating school leadership in the current context of public education, it is clear that aspiring school leaders must be equipped with knowledge, skill sets, and systems of support that create the adequate conditions conducive to effective teaching and learning. The following chapter will combine the systems and lifeworlds of school leadership and present the possibilities of reinventing, redesigning, and reframing school leadership preparation models that responds to the changing conditions of education, schools, and communities (NPBEA, 2015). The need for effective school leadership is vital to the

outcomes of student achievement, teacher effectiveness, and school improvement. Yet, school leaders alone cannot achieve these outcomes. Aspiring school leaders need principal preparation programs that align state standards with the conditions of the local community to provide rich and relevant educational experiences that build their leadership capacity and prepare them to lead effectively in a rapidly changing society (Darling-Hammond, 2009; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Wallace Foundation, 2016).

III. REFRAMING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

The literature and research presented above clearly elucidates how school improvement and change is highly contingent on the quality of school leadership. The path to arrive at that point is murky, challenging and highly political. One thing that most scholars agree with is that schools and school leaders cannot achieve this goal alone. When viewed through a community perspective, the symbiotic nature between educational institutions and the local community becomes apparent. The outcomes of schools are contingent on the health of communities they are nested in. Similarly, community well-being is dependent on the quality and success of its educational institutions. As such, school improvement reform efforts must factor in community context and conditions and create democratic processes that engage the input from various community partners. This approach to school change will indeed require a significant shift in our thinking about relationships, the conversations needed, and the individuals that need to be present (Block, 2008; Guajardo et al., 2016; McKnight & Block, 2010; Sergiovanni, 2000; Wheatley, 2002). What we do know is that change is possible and necessary. Our children, schools, and communities need to feel a sense of hope to survive, thrive, and excel in difficult and sometimes violent conditions. Creating the conditions and environment to support the emotional, social, and intellectual well-being of children and youth is highly contingent on the quality of the school leadership (Fullan, 2016; Wallace Foundation, 2012).

The emerging leaders program has helped to reframe school leadership by integrating community development theory to educational leadership standards and practice. This hybridization of ideas, theories, and values has resulted in rich educational

experiences that respond to district and community contexts. This chapter situates community development in the context of educational leadership by highlighting ecological links between community development, leadership, and education.

Creating Sustainable School Leadership: A Story

In the summer of 2014, my mentor was invited by the local school district to steward the facilitation of the emerging leaders pilot program with San Marcos C.I.S.D. teachers. I was recruited to take part in the assessment protocol that interviewed and vetted prospective candidates for the program. The emerging leaders program was a significant departure from traditional leadership development models in that it was fundamentally grounded in a community-based philosophy and framework that responded to local school-community context and conditions. The individuals who participated in the assessment center were personally invited by school district staff and personnel to apply to the cohort. The teachers were selected to participate in the assessment process on the basis of their relationships, demonstration of their commitment to serving their school and community, and level of readiness. For most of the teachers, it was the first time they considered the possibility of pursuing a graduate degree. Overall, fifteen educators from the district were chosen to take part in the emerging leaders program and embark on a dynamic developmental journey towards attaining their leadership degree.

The emerging leaders cohort was conceptualized and emerged out a series of conversations between Texas State University's Education and Community Leadership Program and San Marcos C.I.S.D. leadership. Interestingly enough, the seeds of this partnership between the university and the school district were sown at the San Marcos

Community Learning Exchange in which my family and I were a part of two years earlier. I recall that a few local notables from San Marcos provided a warm welcome to conference participants. One of those being the school superintendent, whom upon his greeting later pointed at a Texas State University faculty member and says “I want you to hold me accountable for my work in the community...check in with me in one year.” Unknowingly, and only upon reflection, did I realize that this was the critical moment that became the genesis of a sustained conversation that would be cultivated during next two years and bear fruit in the form of an emerging leaders program and I was right in the middle of it.

Since that initial exchange, my family and I have been immersed in community development work with youth, educators, and community members. We have witnessed the importance of conversations, relationships, and partnerships to promote and continue to push for community change. Our relationships with the local ecology, its people, and its history have created a deep desire of commitment and accountability to serving to create a healthy, vibrant community that provides equitable educational and economic opportunities to all of its members (Anyon, 1997). It is the work with(in) the context of community that fuels and sustains our passion for school and community change. It is at the heart of the work we do as parents, public citizens, and emerging scholars. We embrace it as a civic and moral responsibility and view it as our ontological vocation to becoming fuller human beings (Freire, 1998).

In an educational context, this work with(in) the local community has provided me the opportunity to organize and facilitate numerous professional development opportunities with youth and school district staff and personnel. The experiences in these

educational settings have only served to cultivate, nurture, and reinforce the concepts of community in addressing social, political, and educational concerns. They have provided insight into the content, pedagogies, and conditions required to train, develop, and sustain community oriented educational leaders (Guajardo et al., 2016). It has also reemphasized the necessity of shifting the mainstream context by reframing the engagement process to one that nurtures a shared vision of possibility, accountability, and collective leadership (Block, 2008; Guajardo et al, 2016; McKnight & Block, 2010).

Articulating a Concept of Community as Practice

As I begin to make the link between school leadership and community development, I will define the notion of community first. Subsequently, I will articulate the strong and vital relationship between school leadership and community development. The concept of community is both fluid and diverse. Depending on perspective, time, and place, community has been conceptualized and defined in numerous ways. Traditionally, community has been described to represent a geographical space, a special interest group, such as professional community, and a group of people sharing similar characteristics. For the purposes of this study, I choose to borrow Maser's (1999) description of the concept of community. According to Maser (1999),

Community is rooted in a sense of place through which people are in a reciprocal relationship with their landscape. As such, a community is not simply a static place within a static landscape but rather is a lively, ever-changing, interactive, and inherent system of relationships. Because a community is a self-organizing system, it does not simply incorporate information, but through its activities changes its environments as well. (p. 29)

Maser's articulation of community underscores the importance of place and the relationships embedded within it. These multiple and complex relationships are in a state of constant transformation and change. As with any movement for fundamental change, whether social, institutional, or personal, relationships are the heart of the change process (Wheatley, 2000). The relational aspect to both place and people creates a foundation for committing to a distinct way of teaching, learning, and leading. As a parent, doctoral student, and citizen, I have been at the center of community development initiatives designed to generate institutional partnerships, develop leadership capacity, and build community. What I have learned through these collective experiences is that fundamental school improvement efforts must consider and respond to local context and conditions of children and families (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Goldring & Housing, 2001; Green, 2017; Stanton-Salazar, 2010). Moreover, facilitating sustainable school and community change requires a deep level of commitment to place and its residents and to nurturing meaningful relationships that make positive change possible (Block, 2008; Guajardo et al., 2016). The addition of collective principles such as place, relationships, and reciprocity begin to create a different set of school leadership standards and a framework through the relationship between educational leadership and community development becomes apparent (Benham & Murakami, 2013). By infusing the required state standards of school administration with community oriented principles we begin to create an alternative model of school of leadership. As illustrated in the opening chapter of the study, both the lifeworld and systemsworld of school leadership are interconnected domains that support and complement each other's respective functions. The bridging of these two disparate but essential domains open up the space for a different type of

leadership to emerge: school and community leadership, which is the main focus of this research.

The Conditions of Communities in the U.S.

Communities fulfill an important role in our society. They serve as unique settings in which diverse individuals are raised, nurtured, and educated. As places of interdependence and ‘dynamic entities’, communities are sites in which numerous relationships exist between individuals, groups, and organizations (DePhillips and Saegert, 2008; Guajardo et al, 2016; Warren & Mapp, 2011). The noted developmental psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner (1977) argued that the health of a community and its local environmental context profoundly impacts the social, emotional, and cognitive development and well-being of individuals (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Moreover, local community conditions, history, and culture are all significant factors that influence and impact the health, fortification, and sustainability of vital public institutions such as public schools (Galster, 2014; Guajardo & Guajardo, 2004; Shirley, 1997; Warren & Mapp, 2011).

The unfortunate reality is that many of our communities are indeed struggling, fragmented, and severely under resourced (McKnight & Block, 2010). Domestic and global forces such as immigration, income inequality, growing racial violence, economic and social instability, and contentious policies have collectively strained the social fabric of communities resulting in a decline of social capital and quality of life (Block 2008; Horton, 2003; Putnam, 2000). The inequality and opportunity gaps have widened considerably and have further worked to create an economic divide among social classes impacting social, political, and cultural domains of life (Brenner & Pastor 2015).

Socioeconomic issues such as economic and social segregation, poverty, crime, access to health care, educational attainment severely limit community members' opportunities of obtaining a high quality of life and participation in the political process (Galster, 2014; Warren, 2007; Warren & Mapp, 2011). All these macro-level societal factors impact communities, both urban and rural, across the nation are faced with significant challenges, issues, and problems that affect the lives of millions children and families (McKnight & Block, 2011). The convergence of all these factors create a toxic mix severely impact the health, education, and social development of youth (Galster, 2014). These community dynamics are further exacerbated in low-income, communities of color, whom are relegated to a lower standard of living, quality of education, and quality of life (Coley & Baker, 2013, Kozol, 2005). In short, where you reside can increase or limit certain access, opportunities and outcomes (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2011).

Under the current sociopolitical context, an ever-increasing number of communities around the country are feeling intense pressure to develop frameworks, strategies, and processes to respond to sweeping socioeconomic, political, and technological changes occurring at the local level (McKnight & Block, 2010; Warren & Mapp, 2011). It has been documented that over the last century, the shifting economic base has severely impacted local communities and their power to serve as places of opportunity and promise (Kretzman & McKnight, 1993). These global changes have debilitated the health of countless communities and have transformed them into places of isolation, dependency, and despair. A clear example of how these shifting forces have impacted the social fabric of communities can be seen in the decline of urban

communities such as Detroit. Once a dynamic, bustling center of industry, production, and music, citizens of Detroit have witnessed the decay of their home city, which is now struggling to regain the vibrancy and economic success of the past. These conditions plaguing many U.S. cities both large and small have been the sources of inquiry for community development personnel, policy makers, and community based leaders. As a result, many unified, committed efforts have materialized into hard working groups that work to address community concerns and revitalize communities' power to provide a productive, equitable, and sustainable future for its citizens and future generations (Kretzman & McKnight, 1993; Warren & Mapp, 2011).

In the educational context, the lived experiences and situations of many youth severely impact their ability to concentrate and excel in educational institutions and settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Comer, 1980). Continued experiences with educational failure, marginalization, and inequity impacts their faith and investment in the educational system to provide them skills required to challenge inequitable conditions (Duncan-Andrade, 2010). Despite the acknowledgement of the correlation between socioeconomic status and educational attainment, many of our public schools continue to operate in isolation and apart from the local community, which only further serve to exacerbate existing inequities (Gardner, 2009). The isolation of schools from their communities can be traced to sociohistorical events as well as the current educational reform model that values competition, privatization, and choice, while completely ignoring or trivializing the importance of critical domains such as community building and development (Ravitch, 2013). As such, we must be creative and deliberate in forging the partnerships necessary to combat these harmful effects.

Frameworks for Community Development

Traditional community development methods often focus on economic development as the primary means for stimulating community progress (Goldring & Housing, 2001). This form of community development incorporates institutions such as banks, local businesses, and other private establishments with more grassroots organizations such as churches in the process of generating community and economic revitalization (Patterson & Silverman, 2013). Although, this model addresses community needs by integrating different community perspectives, it may perpetuate existing inequities and further disempower community residents.

With roots in social advocacy and action, community development is a powerful force for addressing social, political, and economic equity (Phillips & Pittman, 2015). Scholars have noted that the concept of community development in the United States surfaced out of major sociopolitical and economic events such the Progressive Era, New Deal policies of the 1930's, and post War World II developments (McGuaghy, 2001). Community development has been conceptualized in a variety of ways. Sanders (1970) conceptualized community development in four different ways: as a process, a method, a program, or a movement. Although there is no universal definition of community development, the general consensus among scholars is that community development is a process in which numerous stakeholders collectively work to address local issues impacting community residents (Kretzman & McKnight, 1993; Sanders, 1970). There are four pillars that comprise the general community development framework: social capital, intellectual/human capital, financial capital, and physical capital (Figure 4). Each sphere of the framework is unique and is specific to an area of development that is

essential to nurturing and sustaining the overall health of a community (Ferguson & Dickens, 1999).

PILLARS OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

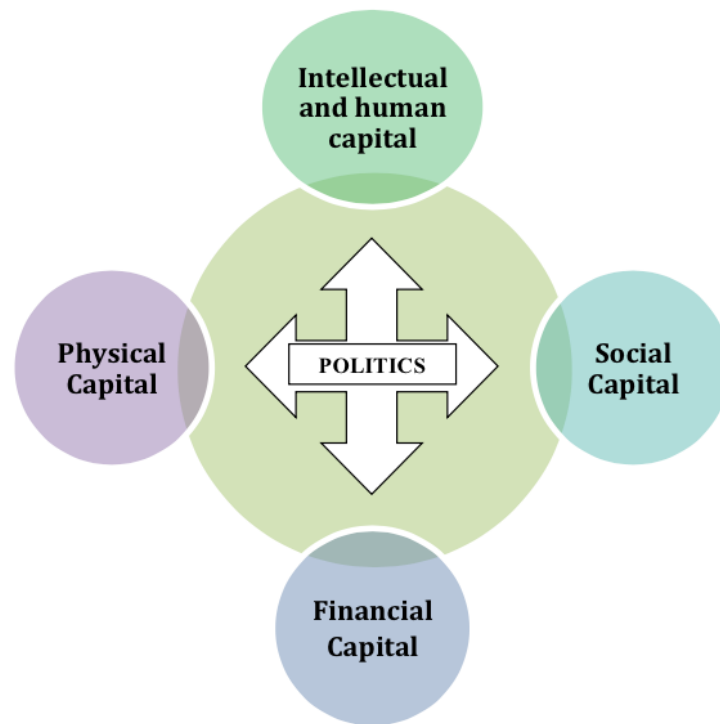


Figure 4. Pillars of Community Development (Ferguson, 1999).

Social Capital - The Resource for building a stronger social fabric

One of the key resources required for successfully implementing and sustaining community development begins with building community. Building strong communities includes authentic and reciprocal relationships, without them, communities' health and progress can be sufficiently limited, lacking, and underdeveloped (Block & McKnight, 2010). As one of the pillars of community development, social capital provides a strong theoretical base that grounds the community development process by highlighting the importance of cultivating, nourishing, and sustaining relationships among community members, organizations, and institutions. Putnam (1995) argues that over the past few

decades, the social capital of many communities has weakened leading to a host of social and economic problems. The weaker the social ties among community members the less accountability individuals have towards each other, which increases the likelihood of negative outcomes such as crime, violence, and theft. As such, viewing community development as a relational process is fundamental to collectively envisioning a better community for all.

There are two forms of social capital that jointly work together to increase the impact of the community development process; bonding and bridging capital. Bonding social capital exists when individuals with similar interests work together to achieve a common goal. Bridging social capital is when diverse individuals and groups come together to share, exchange, and work to address common concerns. Embedded in both forms of social capital are vital links to information, resources, and other forms of support. Both forms of social capital are required for increasing institutional and community capacity for sustainable, transformative change (Warren & Mapp, 2011).

Human/Intellectual Capital

Emerging from the work of economists in the 1960's, traditional human capital theory suggests, "that economic growth then and now depends on the knowledge, information, ideas, skills and health of the work force" (Spring, 2009, pg. 7). From this perspective, the amount of human capital communities possess is fundamental to economic opportunity, sustainability and prosperity. In essence, the concentration found in cities is what powers growth and development (Glaeser, 2011). The skills, talents, and capacities that comprise human capital can range from high-level professions such as scientists and engineers, to individuals who care for the sick and elderly (Kretzman &

McKnight, 1993). The amount of human capital found in communities is dependent on several factors such as educational levels of its populace and the quality of educational institutions embedded in the local community context (Florida, 2011).

Financial Capital

Another form of capital found in communities is financial capital. This form of capital constitutes the economic sources and avenues of funding necessary to pay for necessities. Financial support and resources are critical for schools and communities to provide the infrastructure, support the development of businesses, and offer social and civic resources such as public parks and recreational centers.

Physical Capital

Physical capital pertains to the infrastructure, buildings, and public spaces that comprise a particular place. All communities possess numerous buildings such as schools, parks, and other physical landmarks that are assets to community residents. The natural environment is also part of the physical capital and is a valuable resource that affects the health and well-being of the community (Ferguson, 1999). Moreover, embedded in the physical structures are the lived experiences and stories of community residents that can help bring the brick and mortar to life, and if properly harnessed, possess the power to catalyze educational, political, and community change (Guajardo et al, 2010).

(Re)positioning Public Schools as Community Assets

As social institutions rooted in a sociohistorical context and charged with preparing youth to assume social and civic obligations, public schools are a critical component in a community's social fabric (Stone, Doherty, Jones, & Ross, 1999). By

operating in isolation, schools are unsuccessfully fulfilling their democratic mission and purpose. As ‘lifeworld’ intensive institutions nestled in the heart of most communities, public schools are intimately related to the local community context in which they function (Chrzanowski, Rans, & Thompson, 2009; Sergiovanni, 2000). Schools employ a significant number of community residents and nurture and sustain vital human, cultural, and financial capital that directly contribute to the development of local community (Silverman, 2014). For many neighborhoods around the country, schools are the cornerstone of the community, places of resources, opportunity and refuge, where diverse community members meet, interact, and co-create meaning (Patterson & Silverman, 2014; Stone et al. 1999). The mere physical and aesthetic representation of local public buildings such as public schools can have a profound effect on the attitudes and outlooks of residents serve as visual representations of the possibilities for a better life and future. Beyond the exterior, public schools have a profound public responsibility to nurturing the academic, social, and emotional development of children. When articulating the function of schools, Stone et. al (1999) stated that:

As social institutions schools have sustained contact with children and their families and thus have means by which they can enable the residents of less wealthy areas not only improve their individuals skills but also to develop their capacity to act on community concerns. (p. 339)

The potential of schools to serve and function properly as pivotal community institutions becomes more critical in traditionally marginalized low-income, communities of color where valuable resources and economic and educational opportunities are limited thus restricting the prospects for social and economic mobility (Patterson & Silverman, 2014;

Ravitch, 2013). Given the historical and contemporary socio-economic contexts of San Marcos, repositioning schools, as community assets become an essential goal for promoting educational and community revitalization.

The prospective of public schools to serve as anchor institutions requires a significant cultural shift; it is certain shift in our collective consciousness that understands the value of meaningful relationships and the reality that all our futures are inextricably linked to each other and vital to create and sustain school and community change (Block, 2008; Guajardo et al., 2016). It requires a different set of questions that facilitate different conversations and reimagines how individuals, families, institutions, and communities develop the partnerships required to build and sustain healthy schools and communities. Each local school should be seen not only as an educational institution but also as a rich collection of specific resources, which can be used for strengthening the social and economic fabric of the entire community. At the same time, educators must see their local community as active, strong and full of assets. Successful communities come in all shapes and sizes, all economic levels, urban and rural, and they possess many assets, which, once mobilized and connected make community life rich and vibrant (p.6).

Power of Place: Community Based Movement for Education Change

Contemporary school reform efforts have largely aimed at increasing student achievement as measured by state assessments by targeting the technical elements of instructions such as student test scores and neglecting other social external factors such as local community conditions that greatly impact educational achievement of youth (Anyon, 1997; Duncan-Andrade, 2008). Significant sources of funding are funneled into public school system in the areas of professional development, test preparation strategies

to address educational achievement gaps, while neglecting opportunity gaps that underlie (Boykin & Noguera, 2011). While notable, other more pressing concerns impacting school and student success are not readily addressed therefore severely limiting admirable efforts at school improvement and reform. Issues of social class, racial segregation, financial and educational inequity and deficit thinking are all very prevalent and warrant attention in the conceptualization, implementation, and evaluation of educational policy (Aleman, 2009; Anyon, 1997; Pizarro, 2005; Skrla & Schuerich, 2004; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Valencia, 2011). Adopting a critical perspective, many of these approaches to school development are apolitical and fail to effect any sustainable systemic change. Scholars such as Jean Anyon (1997) have documented that educational policy emphasizes improvements at the school level and largely ignores the local community context and conditions thereby ineffectively responding to school and community challenges such as poverty and racial isolation (Anyon, 1997). In doing so, schools are treating the symptoms of educational failure and not the causes (Valencia, 2004).

Since the enactment of these policies in the early 2000's, school districts have been challenged to incorporate effective ways to involve parents and the community in the educational process. With the passage of NCLB (2002), parental involvement has taken on a whole new meaning. The act emphasizes the importance of parental and community involvement and requires all schools to develop methods for engaging these and other stakeholders in school based decisions and processes, which is delineated in campus improvement plans (NCLB, 2002). Despite the noble attempt of institutionalizing parental and community involvement, the reality is that most of these

models are grounded in conservative thought and marginalizes and relegates involvement to making copies or having an active Parent Teacher Organization.

The pervasive and persistent poor performance of public schools has inspired committed citizens to collectively address educational concerns impacting their communities. As such, community organizing has gained prominence as a powerful force for school and community change. With the formation of community based educational reform movements such as “Alliance Schools” and Valley-Interfaith, historically marginalized communities have generated and leveraged community power to positively effect change educational, political, and community change (Warren, 2007). These grassroots organizations and others have shifted the power dynamics of education reform and have created a democratic, community-based approach in which citizens are directly part of the decision making process. This model of organic education reform has served as a mechanism and a movement for low-income communities of color to address educational concerns and transform public education in a sustainable manner (Warren & Mapp, 2011).

The community-organizing paradigm for educational change marks a profound shift from conventional models of parental-involvement by shifting the power dynamics and creating a democratic approach to educational reform. This approach to address educational and community issues underscore the urgent conditions that many citizens feel they must address. It affords them to be agents of change and creators of a different, more equitable future. The impulses of community-based leadership can be felt throughout the country and should stimulate some inquiry among school district officials and leaders to create the conditions for fruitful partnerships to flourish and develop the

necessary partnership to address community issues that influence and impact the educational experiences of children.

Grounding Place as the Heart and Soul of School Leadership

As human beings living a dynamic, always changing environment, we are situated in landscape of biology, history, culture, and change (Freire, 1998; Maturana & Valera, 1987). From this perspective, we are intimately connected to our environment and are shaped by it and in turn possess the power to shape it (Freire, 1998). Essentially place is pedagogical at the core and we would be ill advised to neglect its importance in our development as people, a community, and society. In their work with(in) indigenous communities, Benham and Murakami (2013) identified place as one of the four key principles in their conceptualization of educational leadership. According Benham and Murakami (2013),

It is in place that we experience the spiritual, physical, intellectual, and ecological. The concept of place is reciprocal in nature; that is, inasmuch as we may, over time, impact place it will, in turn, shape and define who we are...the concept of place also challenges constructed barriers between the school and the community the notion that learning occurs only in the schoolhouse or classroom and nowhere else. (pg. 153)

Although Benham and Murakami's (2013) concept of place has been derived from work with(in) indigenous communities, it provides important insights and is highly relevant to the theme of this study. It provides a useful conceptual and epistemological base for the development of educational leaders as community developers because it emphasizes a model of an engaged educational leadership that is responsive to place and

the local ecology, and committed to the health of the entire community. Additionally, it underscores the spirit and the deep links embedded in community contexts and therefore provides the rationale for engaging educational leaders in community development efforts. From this perspective, educational leadership becomes a collective effort in which students, educators, and community members collaborate to achieve mutual goals.

Moreover, Wahlstrom et al., (2010) reiterate that context is vital to effective leadership practices and state that, “Leadership success depends on the skill with which leaders adapt their practices to the circumstances in which they find themselves, their understanding of the underlying causes of the problems they encounter, and how they respond to those problems” (p. 25). By taking into account their environment and local context, educational leaders can access important community resources, build strong relationships, and incorporate community values that contribute to the health and success of the school. Furthermore, as mentioned above, a consciousness of place and conditions may provide school leaders’ with insights into the realities of community conditions impacting student learning and therefore create a process for informed, effective decision-making.

Challenges to Community Building and Partnerships

While there is growing attention to the importance of establishing strong partnerships between schools and their local communities, there are a number of challenges to generating these partnerships. One of the challenges is the added responsibility placed on school leaders. Time requirements and other important organizational obligations may limit a school leader’s ability to generate and forge relationships with the local community. A second challenge concerns the politics of

working with other community citizens and institutions. Different stakeholders may have differing agendas that compete or do not agree with the goals of others. The ability of the school leader to be a ‘community connector’ requires a certain skill set to initiate and facilitate these emerging partnerships (McKnight & Block, 2011). Another important consideration is the amount of time required to devote to nurturing and sustaining relationships. Building and supporting social capital is an intensive process that requires energy, time, and the right intentions. These challenges and requirements intimidate many leaders and school officials, therefore stifling any commitment to working with the local community. Although, a community-centered educational leadership approach requires significant sacrifice on the part of all those involved (Stone et al, 1999), the possibilities of creating an alternate, sustainable future requires establishing partnerships across all sectors to generate substantial power and mobilize resources to address community needs to ensure the future for healthy, sustainable communities (Guajardo et al., 2016; Block, 2008; Warren & Mapp, 2011). Simply put, healthy communities need strong schools and vice versa and school leaders are can capitalize on this opportunity and thus function as committed citizens serving the public good (Guajardo et al., 2016; Kretzman & McKnight, 1993).

Principal Preparation for Schools and Communities

For many communities around the nation, public schools continue to be an integral part of the neighborhood social fabric (McKnight & Block, 2010). These public resources serve as critical social institutions that impact the surrounding community and in turn are affected by external forces (Goldring & House, 2001; Noguera, 2003; Stone et al., 1999). This symbiotic exchange is a fluid, relational, and political process comprised

of many moving parts (Goodlad, 1991). From a school level perspective, school leadership is a key component in establishing a culture that is both responsive and reciprocal to the local community (Epstein and Sanders, 2006; Green, 2015; Ishimaru, 2013; Khalifa, 2012; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2012;). School leaders must respond and navigate the complexities of organizational and institutional management, such as discipline, instruction, and finance (Guajardo, Guajardo, Oliver, Valadez, and Cantú, 2013; Sergiovanni, 2000). School leaders must also possess skill sets that help foster a positive school culture and climate conducive to student learning and teacher satisfaction (Fullan, 2001). Moreover, school leaders and leadership must possess the capacity required to effectively communicate with others, cultivate and nurture partnerships with parents, organizations, and other community members (Green, 2017; Skrla, Scheurich, García, & Nolly, 2004; Wallace Foundation, 2012). Despite these requirements and demands on school leaders, many that enter the profession are not equipped with the consciousness and skill sets required to develop effective partnerships with parents, community organizations, and other key institutions, which severely limit the possibilities of nurturing fruitful partnerships that benefit both school and the local community (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015). As the individual primarily responsible for the creating the conditions conducive to positive learning and development of students, school leaders are in a prime position to create a vision that promotes healthier schools and communities. School leaders can serve as change agents and are essential actors in generating systemic educational reform (Teoharris, 2010; Wallace Foundation, 2012). The need to create a principal pipeline to strengthen the caliber of school leaders is a top priority for education reformers and will require a significant shift in our conceptions of leadership, the

implementation of high standards, and partnerships to strengthen the learning experiences aspiring school leaders (Turnbull, Riley, & MacFarlane, 2015). School leaders will need the skills, disposition, and confidence to steward the process of change in the schools (Guajardo et al., 2011; Posner, 2009). Ideally, principal preparation programs will engage aspiring principals a rich, dynamic learning process that is informed by the state requirements with the needs of the local community. Additionally, frameworks and pedagogical strategies that provide the invitation for emerging school leaders to engage in a process of critical-self exploration, inquiry, and relationship building that generates the political imagination required to advocate and facilitate the process for building healthier schools and communities (Guajardo et al., 2016).

IV. METHODOLOGY

Similar to other professions, the nature of school leadership is in a constant state of change and tension. As our society grows more diverse, our educational institutions are challenged to keep up with the changes and thus must have the creative capacity to develop innovative programs, strategies, and techniques that adequately prepare individuals to excel in their respective positions (Florida, 2011). I argue that our educational institutions, specifically universities, have both the social and moral obligations of preparing school leaders that possess the intellectual, theoretical, and spiritual tools and readiness necessary to bridge both the systems world and lifeworld to help create healthy, successful schools and communities. The awareness of the delicate balance between both worlds and the ability to navigate and reconcile the two was a skill set I did not possess after completing my educational leadership program. In contrast to what I and many other aspiring school leaders have experienced, the emerging leaders cohort has been created to merge both domains of school leadership to cultivate and nurture professionals who respond to both institutional demands as well as community context and conditions.

My educational experiences in the Ph.D. program have paralleled and been interwoven throughout the genesis and evolution of the emerging leaders program. This frame of reference has grounded the research process and has served to create a solid relational foundation between my research partners and myself that enables me to conduct this research. As such, the methodology employed in this study is qualitative in nature and will utilize several strategies for the collection of observables. The guiding questions of the study are:

- 1.) How can a point of innovation, the Emerging Leaders program, contribute to the literature on Education leadership programs?
 - a. What are the curricular, content, and pedagogical elements that have contributed to this change?
 - b. How has this program impacted the development of teachers as school and community leaders?

The following sections in this chapter serve to frame and contextualize the study by providing information that situate the emerging leaders cohort. These sections collectively provide a thicker description of the context and conditions at both at the state and local levels.

Context of Study

In the context of school leadership, the dialectical nature of education compels us to consider this reality and examine the relationship between two discrete yet interrelated domains, which in the context of this study is the technical and community elements of school leadership (Freire, 1997; Sergiovanni, 2000). As illustrated in chapter one, a cultural fronts perspective of school leadership provides a space for distinct forces to clash together creating a space for synergy and the opportunity for innovation (González, 1997). The purpose of this study ventures into this nuanced space by examining the emerging leaders cohort by drawing on Sergiovanni's (2000) concept of the systems and lifeworlds of school leadership. The emerging leaders cohort was conceptualized, developed, and implemented after a series of conversations about the possibilities of creating an alternative model of school leadership preparation, one from that focuses on the instructional and technical components of leadership, to one that nurtures local talent

and mobilizes that talent to make informed decisions and initiate actions that respond to both school and community contexts (Guajardo & García, 2016). Since its creation, fifteen educators have participated in a transformational educational journey that has shaped the way they live, teach, learn and lead.

This study employs a case study format, which provides the opportunity to examine and explore a particular program, event or set of individuals (Stake, 1995). Case studies examine contemporary events as they unfold and are characteristically bounded by time, place, and other factors and utilize multiple sources of data such as interviews, artifacts, and observations (Yin, 2003). Yet in the context of this study, case study as traditionally defined and practiced, limits the potential for reliably capturing and responding to the dynamic nature of the work. The emerging leaders program did not materialize overnight, solely by the work and efforts of one individual, but was a dialogical, relational, and collective process and required a commitment to understanding and working within certain historical, political, cultural, and regional parameters. Therefore, the complex and dynamic nature of this point of innovation, the emerging leaders program, calls for a hybrid method that reflects and responds to its dynamism. The hybrid nature of the research is anchored within a social constructivist framework that utilizes case study methods but also integrates ethnographic, archival, and dialogical processes that allows for capturing a different space, place, and time. Considering the genealogical underpinnings of the emerging leaders program, which date back to January 2012, offers clarity into the relational nature of the work and thus calls for a hybrid, method to best capture and make sense of the dynamic, synergistic, and generative nature of the emerging leaders program.

The philosophical and ontological underpinnings for the development, training, and preparation of teachers to emerge as school leaders are rooted in a social constructivist, ecological framework that is facilitated through a scaffolding process that begins at the most micro level, the self. It then branches out to the organizational layer and finally the outermost layer, the community. The methodology and collection of observables reflects this process and integrates different data sets to provide a thicker, holistic description of the study. The unit of analysis (micro) for this research is the educational experiences of three teachers participating in the emerging leaders program. At the organizational and community levels, the accounts and insights of individuals that have participated in the creation of the program will be solicited. Finally, latent observables such as audio recordings, and other program artifacts will be examined as well to thoroughly explore and understand the lived experiences of my research partners (Creswell, 2013).

To provide context to this case study, I provide a snapshot of Texas and follow with a brief history of San Marcos. This framing elucidates a macro and micro perspective and underscore the implications and importance of the emerging leaders cohort in respect to school and community change. After providing the historical context of the study, I delve into the epistemological and theoretical elements of the study. I then introduce my research partners and the selection process to participate in this study. I conclude this section with the framework for analysis and the ethical considerations of this research process.

The Texas Challenge: A Demographic Snapshot

Context matters. It was the knowledge, respect, and commitment to the San Marcos community that initiated the conversations that ultimately materialized in the form of the emerging leaders program. As Texas continues to grow, professionals in all institutions will be invited to develop and implement innovative policies and practices that help accommodate these trends. As the population of Texas continues to grow, so do the number of youth enrolling into Texas public schools. According to the Texas Education Agency (TEA, 2014), Texas public school enrollment has increased 19.0 percent within a ten-year span from 2003-2004 to 2013-14. Additionally, student diversity has increased with Hispanic students accounting for the largest percentage of total enrollment in public schools (TEA, 2014).

The contemporary and projected demographic and economic shifts will shape the current and future decisions impacting the lives of millions of youth. Currently, there are more the 26 million people (See Table 6) living in Texas and that number continues to expand as the state has become the top choice for citizens seeking jobs and affordable housing (Badour, 2015). Moreover, the non-citizen immigrant stream to Texas become more diverse as individuals from Latin American and Asian countries make the transition to the Lone Star State (Ura & Daniel, 2015). In sum, as Texas continues to grow, the implications of the trends will cut across all sectors of public and social life and we as a community would be wise to consider using the available information to base future decision-making impacting education, schools, and communities.

Table 6.
Texas Demographics

| Total Population | Black or African American | Asian Alone | Native Hawaiian | Hispanic or Latino | White Alone, not Hispanic |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 26,956,958 | 12.5% | 4.5% | 0.1% | 38.6% | 43.5% |

US Census Bureau Quickfacts.

Children in Texas

As the population continues to rise in Texas, so does the challenge of legislators and policymakers to implement public policy that provides the necessary socioeconomic and educational opportunities to afford all residents a healthy quality of life (Murdoch, Cline, Zey, Jeanty, & Perez, 2013). As the state of Texas continues to grapple with tremendous growth, we must be cognizant of the impact these changes and conditions have on the most vulnerable populations, such as children. According to Kids Count data from 2015 (See Figure 5), the number of children (0-17) living in Texas has exceeded over 7 million.

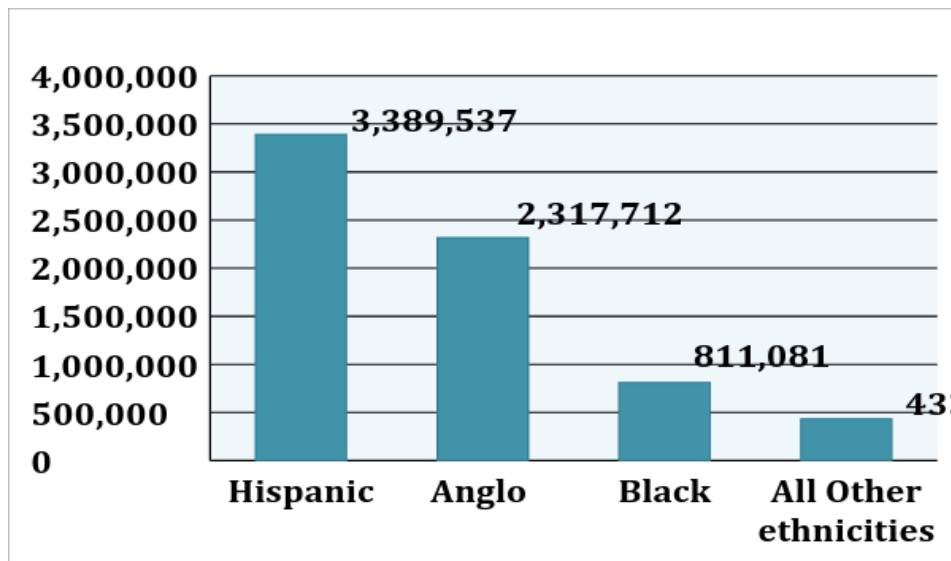


Figure 5. Total Texas Child Population (Kids Count Data Center, 2015).

Moreover, the economic trends have shifted and resulted and have a significant impact on the access, opportunity, and quality of education children have (Table 7).

Table 7.
Statistics of Children in Texas

| Total Number of Children in Texas | Children in Poverty | Children (under 18) Without Health Insurance | Children Living in Food-Insecure Households | Economically Disadvantaged Students | Children in Foster Care |
|--|----------------------------|---|--|--|--------------------------------|
| 7,047,199 | 25% | 13.4% | 27.4% | 60.1% | 4.2 (per |
| | 1,739,298 | 975,001 | 1, 899, 310 | 3,096,050 | 1,000 |
| | | | | | children) |

San Marcos City and School District History, Context & Conditions

Over the course of its existence, the San Marcos C.I.S.D. has witnessed numerous and profound changes to its educational philosophies, policies and practices. These changes were a result and reflected of the conditions and realities of the wider societal context, which ultimately impacted the schooling conditions and experiences of children in the local community. As a segregated community, a racialized binary had firmly been established in San Marcos that resulted in unequal, inferior schooling for children of color (Davis, 2000). The educational experiences of both African-American and Mexican-American students in San Marcos have historically been marked with copious examples of the inferior schooling, discrimination, and racism prevalent in their educational journeys (Contreras, Mendez, Rodriguez). Similar to the experiences of students of color elsewhere in the Southern U.S., the result of such schooling conditions in the San Marcos community resulted in poor academic achievement, high dropout rates,

and a subordinate position in the social and economic order. The educational systems and its institutions, entrenched with racist ideologies, were unknowingly hindering the development of its own community and its members, which created a host of issues during the process, some of which are still in existence (personal communication, Celestino Mendez, 2015).

The tide of Anglo-American control over local city and school politics began to change in the late 1940's due to the emergence of an ethnic consciousness and political identity that manifested as a result of Mexican-American involvement in World War II. The creation of community-based civic organizations such as the American G.I. Forum and LULAC provided Mexican-Americans a vehicle for addressing social and educational concerns while simultaneously developing a political infrastructure and leadership base. The decade of the 1960's witnessed significant changes and successful actions for the Mexican-American community. A flurry of numerous political victories began in 1961 after the election of Ruben Ruiz to the city council. The Mexican-American presence and political power was beginning to assert itself as a viable force for change. Mexican-American men and women assumed various other publically elected positions that began a significant shift in the political landscape of the community. The process of change was slow but forthcoming. As these historically marginalized and neglected citizens labored in different domains for social, political, and educational change, they increasingly addressed and contested discriminatory policies and practices that were imposed on citizens of color. The efforts, vigilance, and commitment to equity of these public citizens and other community members sparked key institutional and

community change, most notably the dismantling of segregation of San Marcos public schools in 1964.

Many of these issues that stemmed from years past are still alive and well in the contemporary period and have been a part of an ongoing community discourse to engage public conversation and develop sustainable efforts to create a healthier, more vibrant community for all residents. A great example of this commitment to community revitalization efforts has been the creation of the Centro Cultural Hispano de San Marcos, a non-profit cultural organization. The Centro materialized after years of collective conversation and visioning to establish a space for the community to In analyzing historical documents and capturing the voices of San Marcos residents, it can be argued that the educational institutions of San Marcos have an obligation and an opportunity to correct the injustices inflicted on children and families and compensate for generations of social, educational, and economic shortcomings (Contreras, personal communication, 2014).

At present, the school district is comprised of seven primary campuses, two middle schools, one high school and one alternative campus. According to Census data, the city of San Marcos has an estimated population of 54,076 (U.S. Census, 2013). The population of San Marcos is comprised of 53.7% White, 37.8% Hispanic, and 5.5% African-American residents. These statistics are significant when compared and contrasted with school district information (See Table 8).

Table 8.
San Marcos CISD Student Demographics

| Population | White | Hispanic | African American | Native American | Asian |
|-------------------|--------------|-----------------|-------------------------|------------------------|--------------|
| 7,501 | 20% | 72.5% | 5.0% | 1.0% | 1.0% |

Note. From Texas Education Agency website, 2013-14

San Marcos CISD Teacher Demographics

| Population | White | Hispanic | African American | Native American | Asian |
|-------------------|--------------|-----------------|-------------------------|------------------------|--------------|
| 542.8 | 60% | 33.5% | 2.8% | 0.6% | 0.7% |

TEA, 2014

San Marcos CISD School Leadership Demographics

| Population | White | Hispanic | African American | Native American | Asian |
|-------------------|--------------|-----------------|-------------------------|------------------------|--------------|
| 10 | 80% | 20.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% |

Note. From San Marcos CISD Website

The statistics above provide context into the current school district conditions. These statistics and the current trends that result from demographic changes will greatly influence the decisions school officials, district leaders, and school leaders must make. As these figures indicate, there is significant evidence to argue the case to recruit, educate, and develop school leaders that are invested in student, school, and community well being. This research endeavor is significant to me in several ways. First, as a community member of San Marcos for three years, I have developed deep relationships with numerous community members and organizations, which only serve to reinforce my aspirations for helping to create an abundant community (McKnight & Block, 2010). During my encounters and conversations with community members, I have been privileged to learn about the history of San Marcos, the vast contributions of its

committed citizens, and the values that have sustained the evolution of this community. Being in relationship, conversation and immersed with(in) community life has provided a foundation for the work I do and why I choose to participate in it (Guajardo et al., 2016; Guajardo et al, 2008).

Vision San Marcos: A River Runs Through Us

As noted above, San Marcos is among the fastest growing cities in the nation. With increasing population demands also come the physical infrastructure challenges to meet these needs. In keeping pace with the shifting societal context and community conditions, the city of San Marcos and other community residents engaged in numerous conversations with community members to develop a plan to respond to a growing populace and other emerging local needs. This process of public input resulted in a comprehensive plan that was adopted by the City of San Marcos on April 16, 2013. The plan entitled, *Vision San Marcos: A River Runs Through Us* (2013) was emerged as a blueprint to assist city officials, institutions, and community members make informed decisions pertaining to the city's future.

The document contains a brief history of the city, a process delineating the creation of the vision and goals, and plan elements that will provide direction to meet the specified objectives. The vision is divided into six different domains each with a set of goals that articulate aims and processes for meeting the stated objectives. The first domain of the comprehensive plan centers on economic development. This plan clearly highlights the critical involvement of public schools to the city's growth and development. It underscores and confirms that the community's future is inextricably linked and contingent to the health of its educational institutions.

The vision statement of the economic development domain of the plan states, “We envision San Marcos with economic, educational and cultural opportunities that develop a stronger middle class and grow our local economy (p.34). Goal two of this domain centers on workforce and promotion of educational excellence. The objective is to “Develop a strategy with appropriate partners to promote the San Marcos CISD as an educational system of choice ” (p.35). We can safely assume that some of the appropriate partners required for developing this strategy include local school district officials and leaders. For the community of San Marcos to develop and flourish as a vibrant, sustainable community, the necessary conditions for fruitful partnerships must be nurtured and sustained. The language and the vision of the city provides a space of opportunity to imagine the possibilities of establishing a view of school leadership that extends beyond the school building, privileges local assets, and works to cultivate partnerships with the surrounding community to support student learning and development (Benham & Murakami, 2013). It is in this nuanced space of community development, community partnerships, and education that I examine the school leader's’ role in the community development process.

Epistemological Underpinnings of Research

The emerging leaders program is a dynamic educational learning process that combines educational theory and practice, critical reflection, and collective leadership and deliberately situates it in the local ecology (Guajardo & García, 2016). The methodology employed to study the learning and lived experiences of educators participating in the emerging leaders cohort is dynamic and hybrid in nature. It is grounded in a social constructivist epistemological framework that acknowledges,

respects, and validates the lived experiences and stories of my research partners and takes into consideration the local ecology (Guajardo et al., 2008). Social constructivism is premised on the belief that all knowledge is constructed, not passively received (Noddings, 2007). Social constructivist theory emphasizes that knowledge and reality are constructed and mediated through social processes (Vygotsky, 1978). Moreover, social constructivist theory affords us the opportunity to view present conditions, policies, and practices that have been socially constructed and provides the space to co-construct a different reality that is more responsive and congruent to local community values. As the cohort members and I progressed in our respective formal educational journeys, our paths have and continue to cross at various points along the learning continuum. These individual and collective learning experiences continue to (re)shape our thinking, help us to (co)construct new knowledge, and (re)act to and excel with(in) our professional and personal environments. Hence, we are in constant dialogue with our social and lived environments, which is key tenet of social constructivist theory (Trueba, 1999; Vygotsky, 1978).

Research Partners

In all, there were fifteen school district educators invited to participate in the emerging leaders program and are currently at the internship phase of the program (See Table 9). Since their entry to the program, these emerging school leaders have been in engaged in a dynamic developmental process that bridges school and community leadership (Guajardo & García, 2016). Personal and institutional commitments and relationships have been nurtured to ensure the sustainability of the program and provide quality experiences that provide rich, learning experiences for these emerging leaders. To

attempt to capture this experience, I deliberately selected two educators who emerged as both school and community leaders and have engaged in school, district, and community change initiatives. I identified my research partners utilizing a purposeful sampling technique that was inclusive and diverse in nature based on gender, age, ethnicity and experience (Patton, 1990). Initially, I selected three individuals to participate in the study. Unfortunately, one of the potential research partners opted to not participate in the study leaving me with only two research partners, Esteban and Lydia.

Esteban is a long time educator who has served in the San Marcos C.I.S.D. for over twenty years as a math and science educator. My second research partner, Lydia, has been employed with San Marcos C.I.S.D. for sixteen years as an elementary school teacher. These two individuals graciously gave of their time to share their experiences and insights into their participation in the emerging leaders program and provide an opportunity to study the impact of the program.

Resource Partners

To provide a more robust and thicker description of the emerging leaders program, I also engaged in conversation with other significant individuals who played an integral part in its conceptualization, creation and implementation. Attention has been paid to the collective effort and partnership between the university and local school district. The realization and implementation of the emerging leaders cohort was a mutual endeavor with the intention of meeting both institutional and community needs. These external resource partners include two school district officials, a university dean, and a lecturer from the School and Community Leadership Program. The intention of soliciting the participation from these individuals was to examine the organizational layer

comprising the emerging leaders program. The insights gleaned from these conversations underscore the institutional and systematic aspects of the creation, implementation, and facilitation of the emerging leaders program.

Table 9.
San Marcos Emerging Leaders Cohort Demographics

| Population | White | Hispanic | African American | Native American | Asian |
|-------------------|--------------|-----------------|-------------------------|------------------------|--------------|
| 15 | 46 % | 53 % | 0 % | 0 % | 0 % |

Cohort, 2014

Collection of Observables

The collection of observables consisted of a hybrid approach that combined ethnographic, archival, and dialogical forms of data collection such as pláticas (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013). The collection of the aforementioned observables was informed and shaped by the tenets of social constructivism and the principles of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). The intentional integration of consulting multiple data sets provided a broader range of tools to explore various elements of the emerging leaders program, such as structure, curriculum, and pedagogy as well as to capture a segment of the lived experiences of its participants. These methods intended to explore an innovative model of principal preparation that nurtures and develops school and community oriented leadership.

Plática Framework

The main method for collection of observables with my research partners was through the plática method. The decision to utilize plática as method for collection of observables is consistent and congruent with the dynamic educational process of my research partners participating in the emerging leaders cohort (Guajardo & García, 2016).

Pláticas have been described as meaningful conversations that open up the space for authentic dialogue, knowledge creation, and community building (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2013; Guajardo et al, 2016). I engaged in two face-to-face pláticas with each of my research partners. Given the organic nature of pláticas, it is difficult to indicate a specific amount of time needed to devote to engaging in these meaningful conversations. As such, the length of our conversations will depend on flow, energy, and the depth of collective exchange. Our pláticas will be recorded and later transcribed as part of the data analysis process.

Meaningful Conversations

The intention was to engage my research partners in two pláticas to have meaningful conversation about their experiences in the program (Guajardo et al., 2016; Wheatley, 2002). The conversations with my research partners were intentionally facilitated in spaces that were familiar and accessible to them. Significant attention was paid to the conditions that helped nurture a gracious space deep conversation to occur (Guajardo et al., 2016). The conversations with Lydia were facilitated in a community space where both Lydia and I frequent and work in. My conversations with Esteban took place in his classroom. The intentional selection of the place and arrangement of the physical environment to engage in conversation with my research partners was important to creating the optimal conditions for having authentic and meaningful dialogue (Block, 2008; Guajardo et al., 2016). During our conversations, I observed both Esteban and Lydia to be relaxed and fully present. They welcomed my curiosity and valued my interest in learning and documenting their experiences as they shared both deeply personal and professional stories with me. Our dialogues were not static but dynamic and

reciprocal as I also shared some of my own life and educational experiences with them, which helped create a certain synergy, and eased some of the pressure that can be felt when being the focus of a study.

Additional conversations with external research people were utilized to provide a richer, robust account of the development, implementation, and developing impact of the emerging leaders cohort. In all, concise conversations were held with two school district administrators, a college dean, and university adjunct professor teaching in the Education and Community Leadership Program. The deliberate inclusion of these individuals was deemed as a necessity in providing a more detailed account of the conversations, collaboration and partnership that engendered the institutional commitment to allocating the resources required to implement the emerging leaders cohort. The conversations with the two school district administrators, Fernando and Paul, were conducted utilizing technological means (i.e. phone conversation, video call). I engaged in a face-to-face conversation with Dean Evans in his office on campus. And lastly, Lucy, the adjunct professor, and I had an hour-long conversation. Unfortunately, logistical reasons prevented the incorporation our conversation but will be examined further in the near future. All these meaningful conversations, except for Lucy's, were recorded and utilized for analysis purposes.

Questionnaire

During the data collection phase, a questionnaire was developed and administered to solicit the input, experiences, and insights of all cohort members. In the context of this study, the grounded theory approach to data collection affords the flexibility to alter and modify data collection techniques and procedures (Charmaz, 2006). The idea of

administering a questionnaire surfaced after engaging in conversations with my research partners, the initial coding of data, and continuous reflection during the research process. Based on the information collected from the cohort members, the addition of the questionnaire proved to be a valuable tool to broaden the gather additional rich data to enhance the study. Unfortunately, due to logistical reasons, the information collected was not utilized in the analysis of the study, but will be examined in future research.

The questionnaire consisted of eight questions that invited cohort members to share their thoughts, experiences, feelings and other relevant information about their time in the emerging leaders program. The questionnaire was sent electronically to all cohort members using Qualtrics software. Information gathered from the questions ranged from number of years in education prior to entering the program to impact of program on personal and professional development. All but one of the questions were open ended.

Latent Observables

The integration of latent observables served as another source for collection of observables. Significant and relevant amounts of latent observables in the form of audio recordings, documents, and program artifacts were utilized to help chronicle and help narrate the evolution of the emerging leaders cohort. Students were purposely interviewed throughout the program to document individual and collective learning experiences at various stages during their academic journeys. The audio observables gathered captured unique, critical learning moments in time while providing insight into the thoughts, feelings, and educational experiences of the emerging leaders. As such, these audio recordings become a rich source for attempting to best capture the spirit and essence of the learning process as well as to paint a more robust portrait of the teaching

and learning processes that drive the program. Student writings and reflections also provided a rich source for deeper analysis of the emerging leaders program by integrating the experiences of the entire cohort⁵. The voices and experiences of the cohort members were interwoven throughout the last two chapters and therefore supplement the observables gathered from Esteban and Lydia. Additional observables such as program documents, photographs, and student artifacts were consulted and utilized to augment the primary methods for collection of observables and assist in the data analysis process.

Primary Sources

Primary sources such as university and school district materials (i.e., course syllabi, course curricula, agendas, etc.), website information, emails, and other digital/tangible artifacts were collected to further enhance the inquiry and sense making processes. The primary sources served to articulate the technical elements of the program. These sources combined with the conversations of cohort members to paint a more robust sketch of the emerging leaders program.

Reflective Journal

Throughout the inquiry process, I have documented thoughts, ideas, and observations by keeping a journal that chronicles the progression of the study. The intention was to systematically record significant information that helped to inform and guide the inquiry and sense making processes. This method is congruent with constructivist and interpretivist paradigms and supports the generative nature of the research process by continuously shaping the research design, data collection methods,

⁵ Pseudonyms are utilized for all cohort members in order to protect their respective identities.

and analysis process (Denzin, 1994). Additionally, it helps create transparency and chronicle the overall inquiry process (Ortlipp, 2008).

Ecological Framework for Analysis

A hybrid, ecological framework was used to analyze and make sense of the observables collected (see Table 9). Merging the ecologies of knowing with the domains of the emerging leaders program creates a space for a dynamic method of blending unique theoretical concepts that have informed theory, research, and practice of the emerging leaders program. This ecological framework opens up a space to weave the experiences of my research partners, conversations with resource partners, integrate latent observables to provide a thicker, robust account of the observables collected. It also serves a framework for both organizing and making sense of the observables collected. The inner most layer of framework is comprised of the conversations with my research partners who participated in the emerging leaders program, student writings, and audio recordings. The organizational layer will consist of the conversations I had with resource partners such as school district and university personnel. The outmost layer is represented by the overarching impact of this program on its participants, creators, and the community. This ecological framework was utilized to capture, chronicle, and present emerging themes pertaining to the development of the emerging leaders cohort and learning experiences of my research partners.

Observables from the study were analyzed through the utilization of grounded theory opening-coding techniques (Charmaz, 2006). To strengthen the analytical process, a dialogical and reflexive framework grounds the meaning making process by focusing on the experiences of cohort members, comparing and contrasting the observables with

scholarly research, and remaining open to theoretical possibilities (Charmaz, 2006). The themes from the findings were then organized using the ecologies of knowing framework and the emerging leaders programmatic goals (Guajardo et al., 2016). As part of the unit of analysis, the ecologies of knowing operate as a tool for organizing data and help scaffold the analytic process. Figure 6 provides a visual representation of the analytical framework. The following sections delve further into the different sections of the framework and explore the findings from the study in further detail.

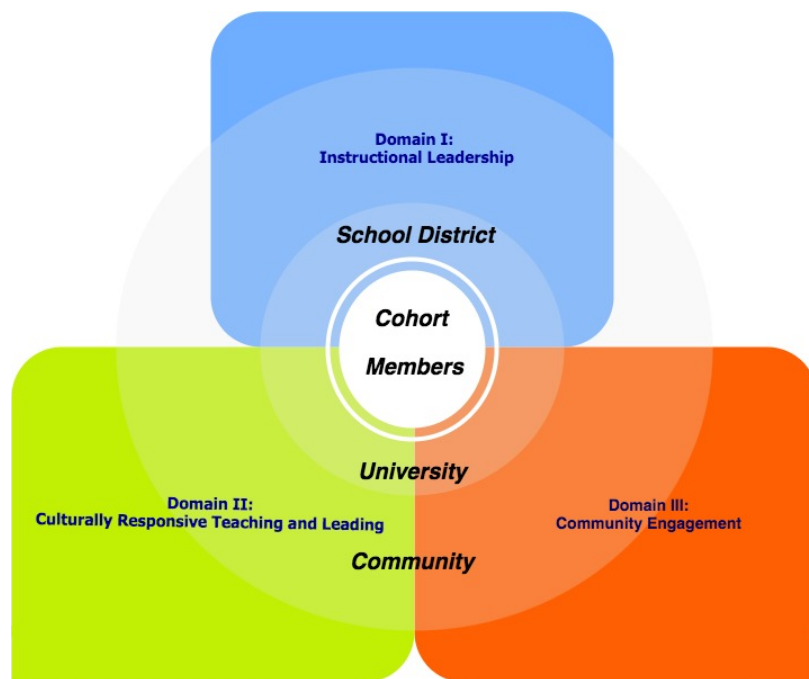


Figure 6. *Ecological Framework for Analysis*

Positionality and Validity

Since the creation of emerging leaders program I have participated in this endeavor in a number of capacities. First, I have been part of the assessment protocol utilized to interview the prospective candidates. Second, I have served as a community resource person for the emerging leaders and have sat in a few classes during their summer courses. Thirdly, I have worked along cohort members to help conceptualize and

facilitate local Community Learning Exchanges for school district staff and personal. And lastly, I have had the opportunity to attend a national Community Learning Exchange with a team of the emerging leaders in which we represented central Texas. As indicated by my participation with this program, I have been deeply invested in the growth and development of these learners and therefore must be cognizant of my positionality in the study. As contributor, observer, and partner to this educational leadership endeavor, it is illogical and nearly impossible to be fully objective or to attempt to be. During this time, I have established meaningful relationships with individuals and therefore have been held to a different set of standards. My relationship to the program and the participants positions me in an insider and outsider position (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2004). The insider/outsider perspective affords me the opportunity to simultaneously occupy participant and an observer spaces. This duality opens spaces for collective inquiry, reflection, and more importantly fashions an organic form accountability to myself and my research partners (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2004). As part of this study, I aim to conduct research in a responsible manner that serves to validate the lived experiences of my research partners (Guajardo, et al, 2008). The research is informed by the concepts of motivational and ethical validity in which the research process is driven by the desire to conduct meaningful work (Pizarro, 2005).

V. RESEARCH FINDINGS

⁶ We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; ⁷ if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸ if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully. - Romans 12, 6-8

Opportunities for Innovation and Change

In May 2016, thirteen San Marcos C.I.S.D. educators walked across the stage to receive their Educational Leadership degrees (M.Ed.). The momentous occasion not only marked a milestone in the lives of these educators and their families, but also underscored the possibilities of nurturing and sustaining meaningful institutional partnerships. It validated years of conversations, exchanges, and dialogue between university and school district personnel. It also served to bridge the divide that existed between the university and local community. Being a witness to this process, I knew that the program was distinct and warranted an in depth empirical study. I was compelled to investigate the significance and impact of this program. The leading question guiding this research is: How can a point of innovation, the Emerging Leaders program, contribute to the literature in educational leadership programs?

The purpose of this case study is to investigate the significance of an innovative principal and leadership preparation program that materialized from a partnership between Texas State University and San Marcos C.I.S.D. Labeled as the ‘emerging leaders program’ this initiative emerged because of numerous conversations about the future of school district leadership. Informed by research, theory, and the local

community context, the program was created to recruit, train and prepare district educators to emerge as educational leaders with cultural sensibilities to respond to the realities of student, families and the community. The study explores the significance of the program through the experiences of cohort members, organizational personnel, and community members to gain a deeper understanding of how the program can contribute to existing literature on educational leadership programs. The study also integrates observables in the form of audio/visual recordings, documents, student work, and other artifacts to provide thick description.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the origin of this program dated back to the Community Learning Exchange (CLE) that was hosted in San Marcos, TX in January of 2012. The learning exchange served as a nexus point where key contributors gathered and engaged in a sustained conversation that evolved to the conceptualization, creation, and implementation of the emerging leaders program. The initial gathering catalyzed profound cross-institutional conversations that have worked to reframe the meaning of school leadership preparation, establish a university-school district partnership, and nurture deep institutional commitment to investing in a second cohort.

Examining the Micro Layer: Emerging Leaders Perspectives

To explore the experiences of the cohort members, several strategies for collecting the observables were employed throughout the research process. First, I engaged in conversations with two educators who participated in the emerging leaders program. These conversations created a space for honest-open dialogue, reflection, and inquiry. Secondly, I utilized observables in the form of interviews, personal reflections, and group dialogue that were gathered during the course of the program. The recordings

were transcribed verbatim and analyzed through a series of coding techniques that sought to explore emerging topics, themes, and patterns (Charmaz, 2006). The final set of observables are composed of the culminating narratives written by cohort participants and course documents such as syllabi. The culminating narratives comprised the final written assignment completed by the cohort members that detail their respective journeys throughout the graduate program. The intention of incorporating different sets of observables is to expand the terrain of inquiry and thoroughly explore the micro level of the study.

Having the privilege of exploring and integrating multiple sets of observables collected during different points of their academic journey provides the opportunity to explore the dynamic and transformative growth experienced by cohort participants. It also provides an advantageous occasion to dive into the nuances of school leadership preparation based on the experiences, stories, and reflections of participants. In the context of school leadership preparation, it is ultimately the school leaders themselves that will make important decisions that will impact the students, teachers, and the surrounding community (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Sergiovanni, 2000; Wallace Foundation, 2013). Therefore, it is critical to devote attention to the lived experiences of individuals and their unique perspectives. The following section highlights the emerging themes based on analyzing the multiple sets of observables gathered during the course of the study.

Domain I: Instructional Leadership

The content and curriculum of principal preparation programs are essential to preparing school leaders entering the field. According to the Wallace Foundation (2016)

“a high-quality curriculum emphasizes the skills principals most need (the ability to be instructional leaders rather than, say, experts in school law) and enables candidates to practice important job skills, such as giving feedback to teachers (p.10).” The content and curricula offered by principal preparation programs must be relevant and engaging and align with the context that school leaders are situated in (Wallace Foundation, 2016). Yet, many principal preparation programs continue to operate with curricula that may be outdated and ineffective for leading in today’s complex school environments (Hess & Kelly, 2007). Research on principal preparation has shown that a program’s content and structure is vital to preparing competent school leaders to lead our schools. Moreover, a high-quality curriculum and in-depth practical experience are essential to adequately preparing principals to be effective instructional leaders (Wallace Foundation, 2016). In today’s world, school leaders are expected to serve as instructional leaders that actively engage in and model school practices that improve teaching quality and support student achievement (Wallace Foundation, 2015). According to the Wallace Foundation (2015), “Instructional leaders are often described as leaders who maintain a focus on improving teaching and learning in daily decision making” (p.18). As instructional leaders, school principals are tasked with crafting a clear, cohesive vision, establishing a positive school climate, and fostering a spirit of collaboration among staff and personnel (Heck & Hallinger, 2014; May & Supovitz, 2011; Townsend, Acker-Hocevar, Ballenger, & Place, 2013; Wallace Foundation, 2013).

Throughout the program, the cohort members were immersed in coursework that integrated theory, class readings and assignments, and pedagogical strategies that emphasized effective instructional leadership values and practices. The pedagogy

employed during the program created the conditions for deep listening, learning, and sharing. This learning environment created a space for honest and reflective dialogue, which helped to ease personal anxieties, foster relationships, and think critically (de)construct their own understanding of instructional leadership. Reflecting on the experience of the program, one cohort member shared the following thoughts in her culminating narrative:

Before the cohort experience, I would never have defined my role as a future leader or principal as an instructional leader. Embarrassingly enough, my knowledge before was so minute that I may have only described a leader's role in instruction as to evaluate teachers. While I talk about the "instructional leader," it was the coursework of all previous classes that developed my knowledge of what an instructional leader should look like.

The experience of being in the program helped the cohort member to view herself as an emerging school leader and develop a deeper understanding of the kind of qualities and characteristics instructional leaders possess. Another cohort member expressed her feelings before entering the program and the impact the configuration and facilitation of the process of engagement had on her:

I recall the first day of class, I was a little anxious, yet I was excited about this journey I was about to embark in. The first day was not your typical class where your professor takes roll and begins by handing you a syllabus and then just lecturing you. Oh no, the first day of Understanding the Self, we had "circle time!" We gathered in a circle and we were asked a question, "Who are you and now that you are on this journey, whom will you invite to your graduation at the

end of this journey?” I was a little confused and didn’t see the relevance. Before we knew it, people were crying, it felt like a therapy session. Now, I depend on circle to help set the tone for class, to reflect, share and celebrate. Circle created a safe learning environment for me. It helped me to be reflective but most importantly it made me listen. Listening to others is such an important skill as a leader. Learning to listen without interrupting or being judgmental of others has given me a tool that all leaders require. It’s amazing how the power of telling our stories and listening can create a school culture and climate that fosters learning. My values and my beliefs have shifted as an educator and a leader, I believe that there is power in building relationships in order to create change.

One of the take aways from being in the emerging leaders program was the appreciation and understanding of what good pedagogy in multiple contexts looks like. The manner and format in which courses were organized and facilitated resonated with the cohort, who then acquired the desire to implement the tools and knowledge gained from their experience in the program. They developed a deep recognition of the importance school leader play in shaping and creating a positive school culture (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2014; Leithwood, 2004; Macneil, Prater, & Bush, 2009; Stolp & Smith, 1995; Wallace Foundation, 2013). One of the strategies that most resonated with the cohort was the use of circle. Circle was employed as a pedagogical tool to facilitate conversation, reflection, and deep learning. The concept and use of circle to generate conversation and reflective thought can be traced to numerous indigenous communities from around the world. Indigenous communities have employed the practice of circle as

tool for engaging in important conversation, decision-making and peacemaking (Baldwin, 1994). In modern times, the use of circle has been adopted in the health care, criminal justice, and educational fields as a method to address important issues (Coates, Umbreit, Vos, 2003). In the context of this study, the thoughts shared by the cohort member illustrate the power of circle in disrupting the long-standing and time-honored lecture method to facilitate the learning process. This approach to the learning impacted their view of alternate methods school leaders can use to facilitate school change. The adoption of circle into educational practice has grown considerably over the past ten years. In the literature, the concept of circle is generally referred to as learning circles, talking circles, and/or restorative circles, has served as a method to facilitate school change, build relationships, and address student discipline (Ortega, Lyubansky, Nettles & Espelage, 2016; Schumacher, 2014; Swaminathan, Byrd, Humphrey, Heinsch, & Mitchell, 2014). The rearranging of the furniture in the room and posing a meaningful question altered the power dynamics and quickly worked to foster an environment that invited the cohort members to share personal thoughts and feelings (Block, 2008). As indicated by the cohort member, the circle process elicited both cognitive and emotional responses that set the tone for the rest of their educational journey and their development as instructional leaders.

The circle also has proven to have utility in practical terms as several cohort members have expressed how they have adopted the circle process into their practice. Through circle, the cohort member learned the power of dialogue, reflection, and inquiry. The pedagogical process of circle also had pragmatic and practical implications related to

leadership. The cohort member shared about the impact circle had on her development as an emerging school leader:

Circle is a very powerful tool that can impact you as a leader because you will have to be able to start critical conversations and come up with questions that get to the heart of what needs to be addressed, it invites a “Gracious Space,” which provides a physical space allowing participants to feel productive, and be connected with their work and working with others. Participating in circle has challenged me to open up and express myself in a “gracious space.” I have learned to trust, thus it has helped me to build relationships and improve relationships with others. As a leader I will use the power of circle to facilitate meetings with teacher and provide that spirit of feeling welcomed. Then, I will provide the physical setting to provide a “gracious” working space. Next, I will use circle to listen deeply to the needs of my teachers and to gain their trust by building relationships. Then circle can continue to be used to move forward with implementing school change or issues that need to be addressed such as difficult issues of inequities and injustices.

Another cohort member echoed the sentiments and thoughts shared by the cohort member:

I have to say that one of the most transformational experiences I have had is “circle.” So picture this with me, it is our first night of class and many members of our cohort had attended a project based learning training for 8 hours previous to class starting. It’s the first night of class, I knew a few members of the cohort but mostly there were new faces. A few of the “big dogs” of our district joined us

for the first night's class, several assistant superintendents from our Curriculum, Instruction and Accountability office. Our instructor says, "Let's make a circle." Well, let me say that I had no idea what to expect. Circle begins and I distinctly remember the question he asked, "Whom would you bring with you on this journey you are about to begin?" So, as the individuals began responding I was moved, so moved I began to weep. I remember thinking to myself; 'Hold it together...you work with these people.' Then, I realized I was not the only one moved to such a place that there were tears.

The use of circle to facilitate the learning process was critical to shaping the learning context for their educational journey. The content, facilitation, and emphasis on relationships that grounded that course combined to establish a social environment that valued and welcomed diverse perspectives. In this learning space, the cohort members collectively engaged in conversation about the readings and connected the literature with their own personal experiences. The social constructivist nature of the circle provided a process for the cohort members to construct their own notions of instructional leadership, making sense of concepts and frameworks and apply them to their everyday practice as aspiring school leaders (Billsberry, 2009; Grint, 1997). This approach to structuring social engagement inspired the cohort members to reimagine how instructional leaders convene with school staff and personnel. In our conversations, Lydia shared the following:

This we understood each other better after that first semester and then we were not afraid to challenge each other, like 'oh, I'm going to offend that person, or this person is going to get upset with me' it was like that gracious space that we talked

before, it continued on, sometimes we didn't even meet in circle depending on the professor, sometimes it was more traditional like you would expect a normal college class to be but that foundation was already set for us so that we could have those critical conversations.

Igniting a Gracious Revolution of the Self: Context and Conditions

I think from the very get go, the understanding self class and the way that [our professor] facilitated that learning environment was key to what unfolded the rest of the two years because that class helped us identify certain points in our life that have made us or created us...To have this belief system and you really don't realize how strong your belief system is until you start getting challenged in this environment and you're having to have conversations with people who have different belief systems. - Lydia

Change is difficult, yet constant. Though the change process can be arduous and complex, in many cases it is necessary. In relation to the change process some questions to ask are: How does planned change begin? Where should the change process begin? In the context of education, traditional approaches to change and whole system reform usually begins with changing existing policies, structures, and programs (Fullan, 2016). One major dimension of the educational reform process is the development of high quality school leaders (NASSP, 2013). As such, considerable attention has been given to the quality of university principal preparation programs. One essential component to effective school leadership preparation is the quality of curriculum (Wallace Foundation, 2016). As noted in Chapter 1 of this study, the majority of contemporary principal

preparation programs' introductory courses tend to emphasize the technical elements of school leadership. Based on each program's course sequence, it is clearly evident that the focus of the preparation leans toward the instructional, managerial, and theoretical elements of school leadership. Despite the intermittent integration of culturally relevant and social justice oriented courses, the bulk of the course work remains systems world oriented thereby marginalizing other important and essential areas of school leadership. Courses such as foundations of school leadership, administration, and instructional leadership abound with little or no reference to courses that focus on identity, values and beliefs (Scribner & Crow, 2012). The technocratic nature of the curriculum negates opportunities for aspiring school leaders to examine their own personal values and responsibilities working in a complex organization (Scribner & Crow, 2012). More over, the 'conventional approach' to school leadership preparation works to maintain the status quo and limit the possibilities for engaging emerging school leaders in praxis (Gordon, 2012, p.4).

The Education and Community Leadership Program shifts this traditional approach to school leadership on it heads by grounding the program in a personal context before learning about the world of school leadership. As part of the process of developing and preparing school leaders, the emerging leaders cohort emphasizes the internal development of aspiring leaders. Many would ask, what is the purpose of studying one's self as related to school leadership? According to Posner (2009), "Leadership is driven more by internal forces than by external forces, and thus the development of leaders is fundamentally the development of the inner self" (p.2). Moreover, Zimmerman (2011) articulated that, "Given the demands and constraints under which they work, it is critical

for principals to determine their own readiness for change before undertaking the complex process of changing schools. Leaders can discover their change readiness by becoming reflective practitioners who know themselves” (Zimmerman, 2011, p. 107). As such, principal preparation programs that focus on the internal elements of school leadership can better equip aspiring leaders to lead more effectively. As referenced by Lydia’s statement above, the first block of courses set the foundation for the program by inviting students to explore and increase awareness of their own ‘values, beliefs, attitudes and the ecological context informing and impacting their school leadership experience’ (Course syllabus, 2014). To achieve these course objectives, the incorporation of dynamic critical pedagogies (Guajardo et al, 2016) was utilized to facilitate the learning process. A dynamic critical pedagogy “is a process that includes teaching and learning, action and inquiry, knowledge and reflection, skills and generosity to engage and honor people” (Guajardo et al., 2016). The entry point into the emerging leaders program disrupted the traditional academic setting by honoring the agency individuals possessed which served to catalyze a dynamic, invigorating rhythm to the learning process.

Changing Values and Beliefs

Based on the reflections shared by the cohort members, it is clearly evident that this exploration of self was a transformative process and had a significant impact in their educational journey. The process of self-discovery and self-awareness was initiated in the two introductory courses and was facilitated throughout the rest of the program through the use of various methods such as conversations, class assignments, and writings. In Curriculum and Design, which was one of the final courses of the program, students were tasked to write a Culminating Narrative paper that invited students to share about their

growth and transformation throughout the program. One student reflected about her thoughts and beliefs entering the program and articulated the process of exploring her own values.

As I began this journey, I was idealistic in regards to what I believed about teaching and, at the same time, completely unsure of what to expect. As the first summer began to unfold, I was forced to dig deep inside myself and look at whom I was and what principles were guiding me both as teacher and leader. Ironically, just when I thought I knew who I was, the truths, values and axioms that guided my life, I suddenly learned even more about myself, to include learning why I believed as I did. I now understood and was able to name my own guiding principles. The journey or *meine reise* has been an ever-evolving exploration that continues to add to the foundation of who I am both personally and professionally (Cohort Member, 2016).

The deep reflection, assessment and transformation of beliefs and values experienced by this cohort member show the impact of the introductory courses, their content and facilitation. The sentiments shared by the cohort member underscores the value and significance of emerging school leaders to engage in self-reflection and delve deeply into their own experiences to better understand values and axioms that inform their practice and tend to personal biases and ontological blind spots that may hinder their development as leaders (Brown, 2004; Guajardo et al., 2011; Scheurich, 2001). According to Senge (2015) attention to mental models (i.e., beliefs, values, and assumptions) and how they impact thoughts and decision-making are key components to effective change. It is

evident that many of the cohort members were experiencing significant ontological shifts.

Reflecting on her experience in the course another cohort member shared:

During the course about understanding self, I engaged in a lot of reflection.

Having to think about my story from historical, cultural, and biological perspectives gave me a deeper understanding of my personal why... My first graduate course helped me to recognize that my experience had been a privileged one. I realized that not all children share that experience, and my why became clearer. I wanted all students to have that sort of experience--to be encouraged, nurtured, and challenged.

One of the hallmarks of effective instructional leadership practice is reflection.

Engaging in critical reflection is a cornerstone of effective organizational change (Fullan, 2006). The exploration and interrogation of personal values, beliefs, and attitudes are critical for any educator pursuing a school leadership position. School leadership is highly political given the amount of leverage and authority school leaders possess to make decisions that impact an entire organization. School leaders are expected to create a vision and implement structures and strategies that promote healthy, supportive, and equitable learning environments for students, teachers, and the community (Furman, 2012). As such, a deep awareness of personal beliefs, assumptions, and values is vital to realizing and sustaining this goal. Therefore, principal preparation programs would benefit from incorporating courses, class assignments, or other strategies that provide ample opportunity students to deeply examine their personal beliefs and values (Guajardo et al., 2011). The initial courses created the conditions that invited students to engage in constant dialogue with themselves and ask difficult questions that pushed them to new

levels of thinking and personal reflection, which permeated throughout the entire length of the program. When asked about the effectiveness of the course sequence and its impact, Lydia shared the following:

Understanding self (class) has to be first right because then we get to know each other and then we know...imagine going to class with different people every time like the way you traditionally do... whereas this this was already established, like you know me you know where I'm coming from. I know you I know where you're coming from and we can have that gracious space to disagree because we know we're coming from different perspectives and I can challenge you on your perspective and you can challenge me on my perspective on the same issue. I mean I wouldn't have done it any differently.

Lydia speaks to the tone and learning environment that was fostered during the initial course of the program. She refers to this setting as 'gracious space.' In the literature, gracious space is defined as "a spirit and setting where there is an invitation to the stranger and learning occurs in public" (Hughes, 2004). As indicated by Lydia, the gracious space allowed for a certain level of trust to develop among the group to where they felt comfortable in sharing thoughts but also engaging in critical conversations that provoke deep thought and inquiry. In sum, like the other cohort members, Lydia felt challenged in the learning space but reaffirmed the value of learning in public and being in conversation with others. "I mean I'm glad that I was pushed into it but I'm glad that I went through it because now I can't even imagine taking an online class there's no way," said Lydia, "I feel sorry for those people like 'oh yeah I took a Lamar class' and I'm like aww man I feel sorry for you."

Fostering a Climate for Change

As previously mentioned, the concept of gracious space has served as a vehicle for engaging diverse individuals in meaningful, sometimes difficult conversations. As a fundamental element of the CLE, gracious space operates as a method of organizing diverse individuals by fostering an atmosphere that nurtures relationships by working to build relational trust among participants. Developed by the Center for Ethical Leadership, the pedagogical process of gracious space has been employed in various international, national, and local contexts with the aim of convening individuals to work better together to address important issues.⁶

Based on the comments shared by Lydia, an important question to ask regarding the context of this study is: Do all principal preparation programs foster a climate or a gracious space that affords students to respectfully challenge one another? This question is relevant given the nature and complexity of school leadership. As indicated by Lydia, the learning environment added an important dimension to the experience of the cohort that strengthened the engagement and enriched the quality of the learning. The continuous provoking and challenging moved the learning to deeper levels where inquiry, curiosity, and growth were valued and necessary for the cohort members to consider the practical implications on their development as school leaders. One cohort member shared the impact on her current practice:

The skills I've learned being in the program have helped me become a teacher leader. I feel that everyone brings different gifts and passions to the table. In turn,

⁶ For more information about gracious space visit <http://www.ethicalleadership.org/gracious-space.html>

I create a supportive environment where my friends and colleagues feel safe to share and collaborate with me as with one another.

Similar to circle, as a pedagogical tool, gracious space has had a significant impact on the learning process and has taken on a life outside the classroom as numerous cohort members have testified to its impact on their development and growth as school leaders. When reflecting on gracious space one cohort member shared that:

I think that by using the approach of Gracious Space, it sets the expectation for authentic collaboration. Gracious Space is made up of 4 elements spirit, setting, Invite the stranger and Learn in Public. The setting would be an inviting one. I set the expectation by my ability of bringing people together for a cause. The physical spaces where we collaborate are hospitable and warm.

Research has noted that the culture present in schools has a profound effect on the success of schools and students (Fullan, 2016; Ohm, 2006; Wallace Foundation, 2013). For Glatthorn (1992), the culture present in schools is supersedes all other elements of school. “The most important foundational element is the culture of the school.” As such, the creation of a collegial and equitable school culture and environment that fosters is a key priority for instructional leaders (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015). One cohort member wrote, “I began to learn the importance of fostering gracious space... it is in this gracious space that the roots to a growing, positive school climate and culture are developed.” Another cohort member shared the following thoughts: “I would like to bring gracious space to my future school and encourage teachers to embrace professional development and further training.” The coursework provided the cohort to think critically about the

importance of social settings and construct frameworks that create the conditions that best maximize the opportunities in which social interaction takes place.

Making Sense of Lived Experiences

Regardless of organizational context, effective leaders engage in continuous in personal and professional reflection as one of the key practices of successful organizations (Senge, 2006). Part of the process of developing effective school leaders is investing adequate time and effort in engaging prospective school leaders in deep personal and introspective work (Guajardo et al., 2011; Janson, Parikh, Young & Fudge, 2011). The need for developing the reflective capacity of school leaders is more relevant given the educational disparities that exist in schools (DeMatthews, Mungal, & Carrolla, 2015). As part of the exploration of self, the students were tasked with numerous course assignments that invited students to delve deeply into significant experiences that shaped them as individuals. Centering their own experiences, the cohort members were given opportunities to explore their own personal, academic, and professional development. When asked what particular class assignments proved to be the most meaningful, my research partners shared that the autoethnography assignment had a lasting impression on them. According to Dailey (2015), “the use of autoethnography is the best approach to obtain a deeper understanding of the political context, organizational culture, and complex dynamics of a person’s lived experience in a leadership position” (p. 10). Thus, the autoethnography served to combine multiple, overlapping spheres in which individuals simultaneously inhabit. According to the class syllabus the autoethnography:

Will help explore your inward thoughts, feelings, and actions, while also allowing you to receive input from others close to you (working group and LSI).

Along with your personal story, you will also begin work on a developing educational/leadership platform; you will construct a statement of your beliefs about education that will in turn inform your educational philosophy. Your philosophy will be based on your history, values, personal story, professional experience, the literature reviewed in and out of class, and your LSI input. This data will help you construct and articulate your own view of educational leadership. The educational platform will be dynamic as you go through the educational program, but it will serve as a good benchmark to assess your growth during your first semester and beyond.

The autoethnography assignment is grounded in a four-part framework that collectively weaves different elements of an individual: biological, historical, cultural and political. The exploration and examination of these different, yet interrelated elements affords students to delve deeply into their past, identify pivotal moments, and make sense of them through a series of written reflections that explore each element. Collectively, the stories embedded within the written reflections are then woven together to create an emerging story. This process of self- (re) authoring has proven to be a powerful and transformative experience for many, as evidenced by the feedback received by former and current students. The culmination of reflections, readings, inventory assessment, and class conversations resulted in the creation of a digital story that wove the different elements together. When asked which assignments had the most significant impact, Lydia shared how the autoethnography invited her to revisit key moments in her life, make sense of them, and situate them in both historical and contemporary contexts:

The auto ethnography because it was not only analyzing going back and remembering your life but analyzing certain moments, key moments of your childhood. So a lot has happened in those years you know and be able to go back and actually go back to that space of what it was like during that time when my brother's ear got pulled...that significant key moment. I remember when I was trying to put it all together, I remember some of my cohort members that are younger would tell me 'you're just putting way too much into your story.' I was writing like three pages or whatever but I was like 'but there's something about that particular time when my brother's ear got pulled' and we went home and I was scared because my brother got reprimanded right in the hallway. We got home and my dad asked how was your day and we mentioned it...we talked about it and my dad goes the next day and gets dismissed by the principal and he decides to run for school board. I was like that moment, what happened then was key in our family because it's now kind of unfolded to oh now my brother is a school board member, now there are a lot of *hispanos* on the school board.

Upon reflection and analysis, Lydia realized that the incident involving her brother proved to be a pivotal moment that resonated with her, her family, and the broader community. Through the autoethnography, Lydia was able to revisit this critical moment by situating it in a historical context and assess its impact on her as an individual. The opportunity to revisit key life moments can generate some tension as indicated in her commentary. Although the critical moments such as the one shared by Lydia can elicit strong, sometimes painful emotional responses, the cohort members believe that the

autoethnography operated as a mirror to examine deep-seated feelings and beliefs that may inhibit their effectiveness as educators. One cohort member shared the following:

Before beginning the educational leadership program, I always wanted to improve teaching and learning for my students, and grow as an educator myself. However, I was stuck in a way of thinking that needed to be challenged and different lenses and perspectives needed to be explored. Although professionally I was open to new and innovative thinking, I had a lens that covered that becoming a reality with my students. In my daily work in education, I can now put on a different lens that might not fully understand their culture, but can accept that their culture is necessary too. Through my autoethnography that I developed in *Understanding Self*, the beginning of my transformation truly began.

Upon analyzing the commentary shared by the cohort members, it became evident that the exploration of self, personal experiences, and critical life moments personalized the learning process by centering the lived experiences of the individuals. This approach increased awareness of self by situating important moments in a historical context and their impact on their own development. The effects of the introspective process invited cohort members such as Lydia to reframe existing mental models and view their contexts, personal or professional, with a new, fresh perspective.

Summing Up

Domain I of the emerging leaders program focuses on the instructional leadership element of school leadership. The thoughts and words voiced by the cohort members provides insight into the learning process and its effect on their conception of instructional leadership. The combination of the courses, assignments, and instructional

jointly operated to provide learning opportunities to dig deep into the meaning and practice of educational leadership. The dynamic and generative nature of the pedagogical processes employed throughout the program created a synergy that enlivened the learning experience and moved the cohort members to enter spaces they had never explored. By beginning with the self, the cohort members examined their own attitudes, views, and beliefs that informed their practice and constructed new perspectives of instructional leadership. The conditions for deep learning shifted personal and collective views of school leadership and practice. This process of engagement humanized the learning experience by grounding the learning in historical, cultural, socio-emotional and political contexts (Freire, 1970). The cohort members recognized that the emerging leaders program was an investment of time, energy, and finances but more importantly, they were emotionally invested. They found meaning and relevance in content and material they were learning, which is integral to the sustainability of any change process (Fullan, 2016).

Domain II: Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning

The previous section concentrated on instructional leadership domain of the program through the words, thoughts, and experiences of the cohort. Based on the observables, it is discernable that the cohort members experienced considerable changes to their notion instructional leadership and their role in constructing a brand of school leadership that is responsive to positive organizational change. This section highlights the second domain: culturally responsive teaching and learning.

By beginning with the self, the cohort members explored deep-seated values, beliefs, and attitudes that informed their thinking and actions. This approach provided

clarity into their own mental models and afforded them the opportunity to reconcile, reconfigure, and renegotiate existing mental frameworks. The implications of this method had profound implications on their disposition and development as school leaders. Although, the degree of impact varies with each individual student, a noticeable shift in individual consciousness did occur. One cohort member shared that:

Now, my educational philosophy is that we must first overcome inequities and injustices in our schools so that all students are learning in fair and equitable environment through culturally relevant curriculum. If we want to meet the needs of all students, educators must change their deficit thinking about students of different backgrounds, including culture, economics, and language.

This statement by the cohort member indicates that a profound shift in consciousness had occurred. Importance was placed on acknowledging existing disparities and injustices affecting schools and possessing the ethical drive to confront them. This is done by confronting and challenging deficit notions about diverse students that stifle positive school and community change. More importantly, is the intrinsic desire to actively challenge deficit mindsets, contest prevailing notions limiting the success of diverse students, and embrace the role of change agent (Glatthorn, 1992). The cohort member concluded, “I will lead teachers to create culturally relevant curriculum, and deepen the knowledge of educators to be more culturally aware of their students and create a mind shift that students and families come with assets.”

Esteban also experienced a change in mindset from his participation in the program. “Really the biggest thing that I learned from my cohort is that students are number one,” said Esteban, “everything you do should be for the students. Yeah,

sometimes we try to make things a little easier for teachers because we're humans also but really all decisions need to be driven for the students.” This newfound consciousness pushed him to critically analyze the context and conditions of his school. Sharing about his school, Esteban noted that, “even at our place right now we are in a culture of intervention; we were a culture of enrichment, we only had the handful that were coming to the goal that needed it, everybody was working normal or high and somehow that is flipped totally.”

A sense of moral and ethical responsibility to address inequities and advocate for equitable learning spaces that value diversity was cultivated among the cohort. For some of the cohort members, there was no delay in applying this newfound praxis in their particular context. One cohort member shared the following:

When I started my graduate coursework with the cohort, I was already in a leadership role of sorts. As an instructional coach, I worked closely with principals and other campus leaders. Our focus was student learning, and we worked to provide the support that can strengthen teachers’ instructional practices. We wanted students to succeed, but it seemed like the focus was on the immediate future. Very few of the conversations addressed the impact of today’s student learning on their lives as adults.

She applied a critical lens to the work she was engaged in and questioned the authenticity of that approach. This heightened awareness pushed her to consider the responsibility of leaders to prepare young learners for life beyond public school. This led her to adopt a more invested, committed, and socially conscious framework of school leadership, which is reflected in the following paragraph:

Educators have a moral responsibility to empower students. In addition to empowering all students, we have a critical role in preparing students for active participation in a democracy. I acknowledge that I did not approach my work with those end goals in mind. Now that I understand the history of marginalization of many American students and its impact on our society, I have a different big picture of the work we do as educators. That shapes my future role as an educational leader. I have to share my why and I must begin a conversation about our moral purpose as educators.

Her commentary highlights the highly ethical and moral dimensions of school leadership. The principles that comprise a school leader's ethical base profoundly affect their decision-making, choices, and actions taken or not taken (DeMatthews, Mungal, Carrola, 2015). According to Matthews, Mungal, & Carrola, (2015), "Ethical principles can direct decision-making processes by reframing decision problems and establishing new possibilities" (pg. 25). For this student, educators play a key role in shaping young learners to be key contributors in a democratic nation. A (re)framing of school leadership allowed this student to reassess her role as a socially conscious leader in facilitating a change process that utilizes a dialogical method to understand personal values and beliefs. As such, she voiced concern and was moved by a sense of moral duty to serve as a conduit for securing positive life outcomes for students.

Domain III: Community Engagement

Community engagement makes up the third domain of the emerging leaders program framework. The community engagement piece was enacted in a variety of forms ranging to the structure and facilitation of classes to community-based projects and

assignments. Throughout the program, the cohort was provided opportunities to thoroughly explore theoretical, intellectual aspects of community engagement and apply the knowledge gained in real-life, everyday contexts. Scholarly research has noted the importance that community engagement has on school (Warren & Mapp, 2012) and student outcomes and the pivotal role school leaders play in nurturing and sustaining mutually beneficial partnerships with parents and the broader school community (Goldring & Hausman, 2001; Green, 2016; Guajardo et al, 2016; Khalifa, 2012; Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016). Goldring & Housing (2001) noted that, “it is unlikely that substantial change can occur in the name of school community partnerships unless school principals embrace a more community-oriented perspective” (p. 199). The value of community engagement and its relevance in school change became evident to the cohort. “As far as community goes, I never thought I had community here cause I used to live outside of San Marcos and came to work here the last 20 years,” said Esteban, “but I do see the community and I know some of it and I’m going to get know more of it.” Esteban’s words demonstrate how his experience in the program impacted his idea of community. Another cohort member reflected about the change she experienced:

One of the greatest shifts for me as a leader came in the form of learning about stakeholders and what role they play in the public education system. Previous to my enrolling in my graduate studies, I acknowledged parents and businesses as an extension of the students and work schools do but, looking back, realize that I neglected to consider the power of their voice and their investment in what schools can do.

Her experience in the program assisted her in constructing a different perspective of parental and community relations. Prior to enrolling in the program, she had a limited understanding about the value and role parents and the community plays in the life of schools. Despite her acknowledgement of parental and community support, she had not considered nuances of community engagement, which hindered the potential for accessing social capital and other valuable community resources and wisdom that can facilitate sustainable school and community change (Guajardo et al., 2016; McKnight & Block, 2010; Warren & Mapp, 2011; Yosso, 2005). Unfortunately, a limited view and understanding of the dynamics of parental and community engagement is a reality affecting many schools and educators (Shirley, 1997).

Similarly, another cohort member shared that, “I’m just becoming more aware of the community period... I felt that community was just in the background so I think I have a different view and a greater awareness of the community.” Often times, parental and community engagement is an ambiguous concept that is misunderstood and undervalued by educators and schools which only serve to perpetuate existing power imbalances (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001; López, 2001). Shirley (1997) noted the different approaches schools take when working with parents and the community:

Parental involvement—as practiced in most schools and reflected in the research literature—avoids issues of power and assigns parents a passive role in the maintenance of school culture. Parental engagement designates parents as citizens in the fullest sense—change agents who can transform urban schools and neighborhoods (p. 73).

The manners in which schools interact with parents and the community have profound implications affecting the overall health of schools and student achievement and outcomes (Anyon, 2005; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Green & Gooden, 2014; Stanton Salazar, 2011). As such, there has been a call to reconnect the work of schools with local communities and members who are who are left out of the educational process and establish authentic partnerships that harness the collective power of both educators and community members (Apple, 2013; Guajardo et al., 2016; Shirley, 1997; Warren & Mapp, 2011). Moreover, research has called forth school leaders to champion efforts to (re)engage with parents and the community (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2014; Green, 2017). As stewards of school change, today's school leaders can greatly benefit from possessing a deep understanding of the importance of community engagement and the power of establishing meaningful ties with the local community (Green, 2017).

One method that afforded the cohort to cultivate a deep appreciation of community engagement and thoroughly explore its principles was through mapping community assets. The assets mapping process provided the cohort members the opportunity to view the local community through an asset based lens and consider how these assets, when harnessed properly, can serve to facilitate school and community change (Kretzman & McKnight, 1992). Guajardo et al., (2016), posit that the asset mapping approach offers a different alternative to working within communities:

The discipline of asset mapping recognizes and honors the work of elders and other who work to raise families, create enterprises, and lead institutions in the community. Asset mapping offers opportunities to engage organizational and communities in gaining a deeper understanding of the strengths that exist in

community, and is a requisite step to the process of building the assets identified through mapping (p.57).

The following paragraph details one cohort member's experience with the asset mapping strategy and the impact this process had on her understanding of community:

Through an important learning tool known as asset mapping, I became aware that these are a viable, valuable, and necessary asset to our community schools and more importantly, the students and families we serve. It is all about the story of the community and the members in it and taking the time to listen. As an emerging leader, I feel that as a district we have neglected the individual story and its impact on student learning. It is time to change our educational system and the only way that will happen is to put people into the leadership roles that have the knowledge and courage to create the paradigm shift that is necessary for an informed community and educational system based on the voice of those it serves.

Learning about the community, its assets, and stories were a powerful and revelatory experience for her. She acknowledged that every community possesses individuals with unique stories that are unheard and utilized to strengthen student learning. McKnight and Block (2010) posit that, "Inviting stories is the single biggest community-building thing that we can do, especially when the stories we tell are stories of our capacities, what worked out. Since stories tell us what is important, speaking of our capacities establishes them as the foundation upon which we can build a future (p.96)". The harnessing of community stories can serve as a powerful tool for facilitating and sustaining school and community change (Guajardo et al., 2016; McKnight & Block, 2010).

The concept and principles of community engagement permeated throughout the program. Beginning with the structure of the coursework, the content, assignments, and facilitation of the learning throughout the program served to scaffold a developmental process that emphasized the value community. As such, cohort members learned the theory as well as the practice of community. This newfound appreciation and desire to build community catalyzed cohort members to adopt a community-oriented framework to school leadership and actively work to pursue this goal. Her statement provides insight into her understating and devotion to community:

I have learned that schools and community go hand in hand. Without community involvement or their support for schools, we will be lost. After all we want our kids to become productive citizens in the communities they live in. I have seen what community involvement looks like and how it can propel our schools towards a more positive future. I strongly believe that we need the community involvement in order to make necessary changes in our education systems. I am committed to helping them become lifelong learners, productive citizens of their communities with a sense of responsibility for not only themselves for others too.

This particular cohort member learned that schools and communities are bonded together. The health and success of one is contingent on the well-being of the other (Benham & Murakami, 2013; Goldring & Hausing, 2001; Guajardo et al., 2016; McKnight & Block, 2010; Kretzman & McKnight, 1992). The program also instilled a deep sense of commitment to working diligently to enable the partnerships public schools need.

Navigating the Tensions of Change

The aim of this study was not to romanticize the nature of the emerging leaders program but to inquire into the inner workings, spirit and essence by capturing the experiences of the cohort members and understand what makes this educational process distinct and significant. As noted through qualitative and written evidence, vast changes were transpiring among the cohort. This change process did not come without some individual, professional, and familial tensions. This tension relates to Gonzalez' concept of cultural fronts in which individuals are immersed in two disparate yet interrelated worlds and are challenged to negotiate the two. Reflecting on her experience, one cohort member shared that, "you learn how much you can go through, endurance wise I think it's probably the toughest thing I've ever had to do."

Moreover, progressing through this educational voyage has proved to be both an intellectual and emotional immersion into unknown and unfamiliar spaces. One cohort used the example of a river to serve as a metaphor to represent her experiences in the program. The cohort member articulated these sentiments:

I have this river of knowledge now, but it started as a little trickle cause I was scared, I was shy... I was scared and now I feel like I'm in that little rapid, where I'm just going vroom, vroom, vroom, and I don't want to stop. So I'm just going to go all the way to the ocean. I feel like I've learned so much and the things that impacted me the most were every little project we did, I just felt like I've been going deeper into that river and now I just feel like the projects, every single project has impacted me so much.

The metaphor of the river serves as a powerful and significant symbolic representation. The concept of the river elicits many different ideas and connotes a slew of interpretations and meanings. Rivers often symbolize life, abundance, and even borders. But in this context, the river metaphor serves as an example of constant change. The seeds of change were sowed in the opening circle and collectively nurtured through subsequent gatherings. From a non-cohort member perspective, these changes were noticeable. One cohort member expressed the following thoughts:

My whole thinking has changed and my knee jerk reactions are almost nonexistent, my family and friends wonder what has happened to me but I'm still fun (laughs)...but don't worry I haven't lost my edge I've just toned it down, it's coming back. Last semester it was this one and this one at the same time (pointing to blinking eyes) so I had to tell people I'm not making *ojos* at you it's just this is the way I deal with stress, so much to do, so much to do.

Similarly, Lydia attested to some of the tensions that accompanied her change in consciousness.

I'll bet that people will argue with you that I'm not a better person coming out of there (cohort), like people who have known me before. Actually, my principal has told me more than once, 'I like the old Lydia better.' The reason I think she said that was because I used to be very much of a 'sure I'll do it,' with no questions asked, no conversation. I might complain over here with my husband that I was tired or whatever, but I was very much not only a yes person but I would get things done.

Moreover, on a professional level, Lydia specifically noted the challenges of reconciling the expectations of her school and her emerging identity and evolving disposition.

I think the biggest challenge so far has been that people in leadership positions are feeling threatened. I think that they're feeling threatened that here's somebody who is asking questions, here is somebody who is not only asking questions but has the education to back it up. Because you can have people asking questions but if they don't have that educational background or that way of challenging in an intellectual way then it's not as powerful. So, the biggest challenge that I have is to present things in way, frame it in a way that is not having them feel like 'oh, she's threatening me or my position.'

In conclusion, the change process was profound and transformative yet was accompanied with a certain level of tension. This tension whether personal, familial, or professional, had to be negotiated and attended to. For some of the cohort members, such as Lydia, a newfound level of awareness was perceived to be elements of radicalism. This prompted her to constantly monitor and assess her own thoughts, sort them out, and filter them in way that would not be perceived as threatening.

Summary

Collectively, the three domains, instructional leadership, culturally responsive teaching and learning, and community engagement, integrated critical aspects related to school leadership. The content, delivery, and coursework provided a rich and powerful learning experience for the cohort. By exploring these domains, the cohort members surveyed the landscape of school leadership and their own role in the evolution of public education. Faith in the power and the principles of community to foster school and community change was cultivated among the cohort. The desire to learn, model, and implement the principles of community into their practice were nurtured. Although the

cohort did possess some awareness of the role of the community in the educational process, it was rather limited and confined to a marginal existence. Through their journey in the program, the cohort members have learned that the school leaders must possess a deep understanding of self and awareness that values the gifts and talents of students and parents. They also learned that the future of schools and their communities are inextricably linked and that school leaders play a pivotal role in creating the conditions for successful partnerships.

Examining the Organizational Layer: Structure, Processes, and Commitment

The next phase of the study examines the organizational layer, which in this case is comprised of university and school district administrative staff and personnel. The creation and development of the emerging leaders cohort emerged from a series of conversations between university staff and school district officials. As noted in the introduction, the Community Learning Exchange (CLE) hosted in January 2012, provided the space where all key stakeholders were present in the same room. This occasion proved to be an opportune moment to open the lines of communication and begin to cultivate relationships that foster trust, conversation, and forge an alliance that aims to improve school and community conditions. It was a space primed for innovation and collaboration. In retrospect, it was a critical moment for the both institutions, the cohort members enrolled in the program, and the larger community. This occurrence raises profound questions: How can individuals identify spaces for innovation? How many opportunities have been seized? How many have been missed? Another important question to frame is: How can we nurture the conditions and context for innovation to

occur? These questions are at the heart of creating a world of opportunities that have the potential to impact individuals, schools, and communities. What is evident from the CLE was that an opportunity for innovation and partnership had presented itself in a community with a university in operation for over 100 years. As a participant and witness to these developments, the seeds of trust and collaboration were sown at this encounter, nurtured through several years of conversation, and eventually were harvested in the form of a university-school district partnership that has now established its second emerging leaders cohort.

The following sections highlight the emerging themes garnered from conversations with school district and university staff and administration. In all two school district administrators, a university dean, an adjunct professor participated in this research study. The observables were collected through phone conversations that were recorded and later transcribed. The transcriptions were analyzed through open coding techniques that looked for patterns and emerging themes (Charmaz, 2006). Based on the analysis three major themes surfaced from my conversations with the research participants: Importance of institutional relationships and commitment, strong recruitment and assessment processes, and a context-responsive educational program.

(Re)visioning School Leadership for the Community

In my conversations with school district administrators, it was abundantly clear that building leadership capacity was at the forefront of the change initiatives. The prioritization of building leadership across the school district had been a topic of conversation prior to the 2012 CLE convening. My research partner Fernando, who served as the director of school improvement during the implementation of the emerging

leaders cohort, established roots in the community since 1991. A native of San Antonio, Fernando attended what was then Southwest Texas State University to earn his teaching degree. After working in Austin I.S.D. for a number of years, Fernando returned to Texas State to earn his doctorate degree. During that experience, Fernando was in sustained conversations with university professors about preparing the kind of leaders schools need.

I came back as an employee to San Marcos at Texas State University, while there we again noticed that teachers could be leaders and when I say leaders I'm not talking about just building principals or assistant principals I'm talking about teachers that take teaching and learning to heart and lead that at their campus, and if they inevitably become assistant principals, principals, or superintendents that is their career pathway but ultimately leadership happens in the classroom and then it spreads out to the campus.

Soon afterward, Fernando was hired to serve as the director of school improvement in San Marcos C.I.S.D. While in this position, Fernando kept in mind the conversations about preparing effective school leaders and brought these thoughts along with him when he transitioned to the role of director of accountability and secondary curriculum and instruction. "In that capacity I impact middle and high schools and continuing with district school improvement initiatives," said Fernando, "again one of the improvement initiatives that was always in the back of my mind because of the work in the educational leadership program at Texas State, was that we would continue developing leaders."

These developments lead to the pivotal CLE gathering in January 2012. We both were present and witnesses to the events that transpired that day and Fernando recalled and reflected on those events:

At some point, there was a Community Learning Exchange in San Marcos, Texas, hosted at the LBJ Museum...At that point, I asked my superintendent, 'would you honor this request to attend this gathering?' it was welcoming dinner for the CLE and at that point he decided to accept the invitation and we attended that dinner. At that dinner we were asked to introduce ourselves and what we did and our superintendent at that time stood up and introduced himself and almost challenged a professor to say 'at some point in two years I want you to call me on this, I want you to hold me accountable for improving education in San Marcos.' Well of course the professor followed up and he and I began conversations about how we prepare leaders in our school district and how the next generation of leaders is developed.

The rest is history. I chose to include this story to contextualize the genesis of the emerging leader program by situating its creation in a historical context. Fernando's story also underscores the importance of relationships and communication. By remaining in conversation with university faculty and utilizing his position within the school district, Fernando leveraged the social capital he had acquired to help congregate key individuals that were integral to the creation of the cohort (Fullan, 2014). In essence, the creation and implementation of the emerging leaders cohort was a collective process and not the sole creation of one individual.

Restoring Relationships

Research has noted the potential power of establishing reciprocal partnerships between universities and the local school districts. In regards to the value of these partnerships, the Wallace Foundation (2016) explained, "When they work with districts,

programs can better harmonize their offerings with district needs and better serve their customer. Further, lack of collaboration hinders programs from providing learning opportunities cited in research as important, such as clinical experiences” (p.8). Clearly, the need to forge partnerships is evident, yet historical issues may undermine the capacity and willingness to establish them. In 2011, the school district hired a new superintendent who through conversation with other personnel discerned that the school district did not have strong, meaningful ties with the university. In our conversation he acknowledged this situation: “Our relationship with Texas State and the school district had not been one of the highest level that was needed. You know we had Texas State in our backyard and we weren't really working well together” (Paul, School district leader, 2016).

The opportunity to forge a mutual, meaningful partnership between the university and school district emerged during the January 2012 CLE. Paul reflected on his experience at the CLE and the need for developing a partnership that benefitted the school district:

I had the opportunity to experience the CLE and saw the impact that I personally thought was...a true, authentic sense of discussion and about community and about developing community leaders. I was an observant for that meeting and so from that point he (professor) and I had multiple dialogues about what we can do to develop community minded leaders that fit the culture of our community in San Marcos. Over multiple meetings we decided that we would go into partnership with the cohort group and work on developing our in house people to understand our community more, understand the needs of our kids and parents more, and so that's how that cohort group was started and established.

The building block of relational trust began in this space and evolved into the establishment of a sustained conversation that eventually led to the development of the emerging leaders cohort. The manifestation of a partnership was a paradigm shift in the manner that the school district and university had historically collaborated and engaged with one another. Historically, universities have developed a reputation for operating only on behalf of institutional interests, but on this occasion, a new narrative was being co-authored (Walsh & Backe, 2013). When asked about the kind of partnership that needed to be forged, Dean Evans, who helped implement the emerging leaders program, painted a stark, realistic picture of the mentality that often guides institutional collaboration initiatives:

If you're asking me the right thing to do, it is the right thing to do but it's not the right thing to do like we were doing it ten years ago, what I called drive by research. That's not right... it's a plantation mentality. This is not our laboratory in a way, but in another way it is but it's not a one-way laboratory. That's my point, we have to be responsive to the community and the community has to have buy-in.

This time around, the common language of respect, mutuality, and impact grounded the relationship and the spirit of shared interests guided the process. Paul affirmed this reality: When asked what are some essential elements for creating an effective partnership, Paul stated the following:

I would tell you that the key is having the right partnership with the right person at the university level. And it has to be someone who's willing to work and commit to it and not just treat it as a class because it was much more than a

typical university class. It was a development of a collaborative group of people; it was a major partnership...so, if you don't have the right professor involved with it, it won't happen.

Paul's commentary accentuates a substantial factor undergirding the establishment of a meaningful partnership. The individual or individuals involved must display and practice a certain politic that transcends the normalized, business only approach of academia (Brown & Strega, 2005). The individuals must have a vested interest in the well-being of the program and be committed to the vision of the partnership. This commitment must be accompanied by the energy and motivation required to work diligently to ensure its effectiveness and positive outcomes for all involved. Aside from having the 'right' person at the university, Paul also shared thoughts:

The other key is that you must at the district level have someone who's engaged in the activity who's an employee whose committed to the long term outcome of that and that wasn't me that was my staff. I had people involved with it who could commit the time and effort to it.

From an administrative perspective, Paul distributed responsibility among his staff to help facilitate the progression of the emerging leaders program. Paul's articulation of having an 'employee whose committed to the long term outcome' recognizes the fact that effective programs and systems require a certain level of commitment and shared accountability among individuals (Sergiovanni, 2000). In sum, elements of successful change processes at the school district level necessitate a distinct vision for improving student achievement, strong internal commitment, and collective input (Fullan, 2016).

Strong Recruitment and Authentic Assessment of Candidates

A major factor that contributes to the quality of school leadership preparation program is the strong, active recruitment of program candidates (Wallace Foundation, 2016). Recruiting the best candidates for the emerging leaders program was a top priority for both the university and school district. At the school district level, district leadership realized the need for developing pathways for building leadership capacity. In terms of campus leadership, the district leadership realized that eight out of the ten campus principals would be eligible for retirement within the next few years. This realization quickly prompted inquiry into methods for addressing this need. As the possibilities for the emerging leaders cohort began to take shape, it was clear that the school district was adamantly searching for individuals that demonstrated certain qualities that reflected the goals of the program.

After the active recruitment of potential candidates, a vetting process termed ‘assessment center’ was facilitated by school district leadership and staff. Several rounds of the assessment center were conducted in the district administrative offices. “We did an in-depth interview process for selecting the cohort group,” said Paul, “to make sure that we had people who could be administrative leaders or teacher leaders or classroom leaders to benefit the kids and community.” Fernando spoke more in-depth about this process:

So in that situation we used a selection model in which we read Haberman's (1991) article on the *Pedagogy of Poverty* and used it as a way to frame critically the role of the teacher and what it means to provide good pedagogy to children. That article was not just for conversation; it was an article that we used to

facilitate a group dynamic exercise where the candidates that came in and interviewed for us had read the article. We used it as a basis to try to gauge their disposition and really a way to get at the beliefs of those educators and their thoughts on what constitutes as good teaching and if truly a pedagogy of poverty existed because over 75% of the students in the district are considered low socioeconomic students.

The literature acknowledges the importance of selective recruitment of candidates entering principal preparation programs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Myong, Loeb, & Hornig, 2011;

Wallace Foundation, 2016). In this case, the school district heeded those recommendations and took an extra step by creating an organic, authentic assessment process that reflected the principles that informed and grounded the program. Fernando further elaborated on the assessment center:

In this model we sat in the similar circle format that we had done in previous CLE's. The first question that was asked was 'what gifts do you bring?' Much like you read in Block's (2008) *Community: The Structure of Belonging* book, so every person was asked to be introspective and to reflect on what gift they brought, not just to leadership but gifts that they brought to the room that day...that was an event that was held on a Saturday, again it was different from other preparation programs, we met in a school we didn't meet at the university all of these are symbols that are symbolic of what the preparation would be. Even when it came down to the refreshments we, I mean, the food was brought in a community perspective in that individuals contributed to that. And so having gone

through an educator preparation models and leadership models this was less institutionalized and more distributed to the community.

Aside from implementing and modeling the principles of community, the assessment model and facilitation process took on a deeper and significant meaning. Sitting in this circle on a Saturday morning and providing the prospective cohort members with an opportunity engage in reflection and dialogue, it became evident to Fernando and others present that this experience would be a unique one. In closing his commentary about the assessment process Fernando shared the following thoughts about being a part of that circle:

I think that that was the moment when we understood that this was more than just a traditional leadership program because often times adults aren't asked to reflect on their own consciousness and what it is that constitutes their belief system for educating children. I think just in the interview process that was an indication to the participants that they were about to be asked to really dig into understanding themselves before they could educate or lead others. After that day of interviewing which included written exercises and multiple panels of interviews, we were able to select a pretty good group of individuals that we knew were dedicated to being introspective to being reflective and to deciding that they would want to contribute to the improvement of the school district.

Similarly, Paul stressed the importance of selecting the candidates by sharing the following:

The other element is that you must select the right people for the program. They have to be committed; they have to not be doing it just to get a degree. It has to be truly for change. And if you don't select the right people then program won't be successful, there would be just people getting another degree

In sum, the recruitment and selection processes of candidates were distinctly structured and facilitated to reflect the guiding values, principles, and spirit of the emerging leaders program. The combination of individual and collective exercises provided candidates an opportunity to showcase their oral, written and social skills. Moreover, the selection process afforded them the opportunity to engage with one another and offer a glimpse of what the program would entail. Through the in-depth and robust assessment process, the assessment team evaluated and gathered sufficient data from each prospective candidate, which informed their selection of program participants.

Customizing the Learning to the Local Context: Pedagogy of Place

One of the essential components of the emerging leaders program framework was the focus on the local community context. As Paul indicated above, this partnership was geared to “developing our in house people to understand our community more, understand the needs of our kids and parents more.” The centering of place, context, and conditions served as the foundation for the educational journey the cohort members embarked upon. In the context of the program, it made clear sense to structure and modify the learning to respond to the realities of the local school community. The alignment of coursework to of the local school district and community is critical to development and preparation of school leaders to build effective relationships with parents and other community members (Fitzgerald & Militello, 2016; Hess & Kelly,

2007; NPBEA, 2015). The rationale for implementing a place-based leadership framework materialized through a series of conversations Fernando had with university faculty. The following account shared by Fernando explains the thought process and logic guiding the actions in constructing the framework:

Too often in school systems people who take leadership roles take them through longevity or take them through their own social network and often they are not tapped into in a concentrated effort to say what is it about our district that we want to continue to perpetuate or that we need to transform. And that is where our imagination started taking off and thinking about what if we used place as pedagogy, what if we use the context of the community and the issues of this community as the context for a preparation program for leaders. That is where the conversation began with establishing a cohort model of educators in San Marcos C.I.S.D. to help develop that leadership. When we developed the leadership it was always presented it as you could someday be a principal but this is not preparing about principals. This is about learning the assets of our community and learning what research we would like to do in our community to solve our issues. So it wasn't about reproduce leader preparation, it was about trying to formulate a model that would be specific to our context.

The guiding principles community and being responsive to the local community context permeated throughout the emerging leaders program. The program's structure, facilitation, content, and curriculum were informed by and responsive to the local community context. When asked what was the biggest takeaway from the partnership, Paul shared the following thoughts:

The biggest takeaway is that the partnership allowed us to truly develop and customize learning environment for professional development that would impact the population we serve. So it wasn't generic, anyone that participates in it could still go on and be a leader somewhere else because they'd have the skill set but it was customized for the population that we serve.

The commentaries of both Fernando and Paul suggest that both school district and university leadership intentionally worked to situate the emerging leaders program in the local community context from the outset. They placed significant value on developing and preparing the cohort by working to address community needs. In the case of the emerging leaders program, the institutional conceptualization of leadership transcended the prototypical notions of school leadership confined only to the parameters of the school building. As part of their development, the cohort members were exposed to a diverse literature base and immersed in their own school-community context to make valid connections to their daily experiences. By situating the learning in theoretical, personal and geospatial contexts, the topics, content, and theory being studied enriched the learning and more importantly became relevant and personal. Testifying to the value of a community grounded program, Dean Evans shared that, “You can do online all you want to, you can do try to build principals for cheap, but it's not going to work. It's not going to work until you're responsive to the community.”

Institutional Commitment for the Common Good

The emerging leaders program would not be possible without cohort member and institutional commitment. For the cohort members, committing to a two-year graduate program meant sacrificing both personal and financial responsibilities. For most of the

cohort members, finances were a prime concern. To help lessen the financial strain that a graduate program may cause to the candidates, the school district pledged to secure funds to help reimburse the costs of enrolling in the program. Every semester, the school district committed to reimbursing each student \$1,000 per semester through the completion of the program. Moreover, the school district also purchased the books required for each and every cohort member. When asked what challenges the school district confronted in establishing the program, Paul stated:

The only issue was funding and how to pay for it because we had people who were not able to afford the cost of going back to school and going through the program.

So we felt like this felt under our professional development services for training and so I was able to pay for it through our own internal budget to assist them.

At the university level, several arrangements had to be solidified for the emerging leaders program to come to fruition. Dean Evans administered the required logistical details in order for the program to come to fruition. At the department level, Dean Evans had to secure department approval and commitment from the department chair. Initially, there was some reluctance on the part of the department chair but ultimately reached an accord. Reflecting on this episode, Dean Evans stated, “It was a little tough for him to give that up a little bit, but we talked about it and I said 'look, this is a priority because we have to work with the local school district we have to, have to, have to.’” Dean Evans tactfully negotiated this situation with the department chair and received his support.

Aside from garnering departmental commitment, Dean Evans negotiated the utilization of human and institutional resources required to effectively and efficiently facilitate the emerging leaders program. This meant that Dean Evans had to negotiate

faculty obligations by figuring out a way to lessen the required course load and compensating faculty members for their participation in the program. Dean Evans spoke to this situation:

I got faculty members that have to have three courses. If I want to take time from this I have to pay that faculty member. I don't like people working for free. Among other things it means I don't value the activity. If I'm asking them to do it on top of everything else, that's not right. I do value the activity, and if I do, I have to put my money where my mouth is.

Other logistical necessities were the facilitation of program course. Being mindful of the needs of the cohort members, all courses were held in schools across the district. As part of the partnership, the school district agreed to waive any facility fees where classes were conducted. These arrangements reduced the cohort members need to purchase a parking permit and the possible stress and frustrations that normally come with fighting through cross-town traffic and struggling to find on campus parking.

Having Faith in the Process

The emerging leaders program was and still is a heavy investment. The operation and facilitation of the program requires the pooling of significant resources. Beyond the committed efforts of individuals, finances, and resources there was one other important element in institutionalizing the emerging leaders program: trusting the process. During my conversations with both the school district leader and university dean, they both alluded to trusting the process and allowing the program to develop and mature. Dean Williams offered the following thoughts:

What I perceive myself as doing in things like this is that I set it up and I let it run by itself. I don't micro manage it, I don't want reports every fifteen minutes, I will check in in six months or in a year and try to figure out if both parties are happy with the way things are going right, but I don't have a need to design the program. I want to do what makes sense on the front end. I want to make sure that we're utilizing resources in a smart way but then the program has to go where it goes.

Dean's commentary speaks to the necessity of possessing a strong level of confidence, trust and faith in the process. The process includes the individuals who are working diligently to secure program goals and effectiveness. Investing considerable resources into the emerging leaders program and not being guaranteed a successful program, Dean Williams displayed significant trust in the process and its people by allowing the program to 'go where it goes'.

Concluding Remarks

This section shone the spotlight on the organizational level of the study, which, in this case were the school district and university institutions. As the mediating spaces, the school district and university both poured in tremendous amounts of energy, time, and resources into the emerging leaders program. The vision for the program evolved from conversations that (re) imagined the type of leadership that would profoundly impact students, families, schools and the broader community. Numerous challenges had to be overcome in order for the program to come to fruition. First, the acquisition of institutional commitment had to be safeguarded. This commitment came in the form of allocating essential resources (i.e. human, financial, and physical) to the cause. Secondly, a renewed sense of trust and reciprocity had to be sowed and cultivated among the school

district and university. This meant reconciling inequitable past relationships and moving to a space of collaboration, accountability, and reciprocity. Thirdly, a shared vision and strategic plan of action are essential to program implementation. This includes positioning committed individuals, group or team who will work diligently to ensure the effectiveness and maturation of the program and the proper structures in place to select candidates with promise. And lastly, having faith in the process and trusting people integral factors in the health of a program. The process detailed above is not intended to provide a simplistic, formulaic solution to remedy the conditions of our schools. What is important to stress is that the guiding principles and ideas can inform decisions made in different contexts.

VI. LESSONS LEARNED: IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND PRACTICE

Porque si el árbol fuere cortado, aún queda de él esperanza;

Retoñará aún, y sus renuevos no faltarán. - Job 14:7

This final chapter of the research study concludes with implications and recommendations based on the research findings. To reiterate, the intention of this research study was to examine and understand why the emerging leaders pilot program merited attention as a research topic. The three driving forces behind this study were: 1) My own experiences journeying through a principal preparation program; 2) My proximity as a graduate research assistant to the emerging leaders program; 3) The need for high-quality programs to develop high caliber school and community leaders. Undertaking this study provided a deep and penetrating insight into the essence and spirit of the emerging leaders program. Drawing inspiration from the biblical passage above, the emerging leaders program has created hope for revitalizing the way teachers and school leaders are prepared. The narratives of my research partners serve as testimonies to the nature of a principal preparation program to profoundly transform the way in which aspiring school leaders are developed. Based on the research, several key elements surfaced in relation to building and sustaining an effective principal preparation program. The following sections outlines the a few of the impacts of the program, major contributions of the study to the literature, followed by specific recommendations, and concluding with avenues to pursue in future research endeavors.

Emerging Impacts of University-School District Partnership

Part of investing resources (i.e. time, energy, finances etc.) in any program and/or initiative is the expectation to see some return on those investments. The seeds of transformation that were initially sown in January 2012 and evolved into a partnership forged by Texas State University and the San Marcos that resulted in the emerging leaders program have yielded fruit in a variety of ways. This section highlights a few of the impacts that have been observed.

Cohort Members

I was a little confused and didn't see the relevance. Before we knew it, people were crying, it felt like a therapy session. Now I depend on circle to help set the tone for class, to reflect, share, and celebrate. – Cohort Member

Since the completion of the program, three of the cohort members have committed to furthering their education by enrolling in a doctoral program. One of those being Lydia, who is now working with a multimillion-dollar grant that aims to increase participation and retention of underrepresented students in STEM disciplines. Other cohort members have obtained various leadership roles such as serving as instructional coaches, while a few others have decided to remain in the classroom serving children and families with their newly acquired skill sets.

As the cohort members journeyed throughout the emerging leaders program, it was evident that their new-found knowledge and educational experiences served both theoretical, but more importantly, practical concerns. During their experiences in the program, the cohort members would often energetically and keenly share anecdotes about implementing different strategies and methods utilized to facilitate their own learning

into their own classrooms. The pragmatic nature of the pedagogical strategies employed in the program such as circle, gracious space, and meaningful conversations were readily adopted and implemented into their respective contexts.

Institutional Impacts

One of the most evident impacts of the partnership between Texas State University and San Marcos C.I.S.D. is the launching of a second cohort of school district educators. The educators embark on their educational journey last summer. Based on conversations with the cohort members themselves, faculty members, and personal observations, a distinct energy can be felt from this second group. The cohort members have been very active in their schools and the community in fostering productive change. This vibrant energy emanating from the group has been impacting lives, schools, and the broader community and does not appear to be slowing down anytime soon.

Building on the synergy that has been created from the partnership with the school district, the university has built on the emerging leaders program with the creation and continuation of similar programs in other Central Texas communities. The facilitation of programs with educators from Manor, De Valle, and now in Austin, serve as a testament to the value and significance of the cohort model. Moreover, Fernando, who transitioned to an East Texas community, informed me that a similar model has been implemented in his school district. Thus, the tiny ripples that were set in motion by a public declaration back in January 2012 are now being felt across our state and giving hope to many educators that change is possible in our schools and communities.

Institutional Implications

One of the vital components of the emerging leaders program has been the deep level of investment by both the university and the school district. Both institutions have demonstrated their investment by allocating valuable resources to the program. Research has noted that school district investment in leadership preparation has direct and indirect benefits (Wallace Foundation, 2013; Wallace Foundation, 2016). In the context of this study, San Marcos C.I.S.D. realized the absence of a systematic approach to leadership preparation and was compelled to address this need. The school district invested heavily in creating a vision for developing and sustaining future district leadership. This vision was realized through the emerging leaders program and was fueled by the desire to meet school-community needs. The vision was crafted and refined through conversations with university faculty and resulted in a mutually developed emerging vision of school leadership that aligned university goals with the organizational culture of the school district and the local community context.

The school district displayed their commitment to building leadership capacity by allocating district funds to reimburse each cohort member \$1,000 per semester. The financial investment reflects the school district's deep dedication to supporting the development of its in-house staff. These funds also assisted cohort members' by alleviating the cost of attending graduate school. Moreover, the district also purchased the required textbooks for every student and provided the venues for courses to be held. In the context of this study, this financial backing was paramount as many of the cohort members were hesitant to pursue their graduate degree due to financial reasons.

At the university level, the dean had to secure confidence and trust from the department chair before finalizing the partnership with the school district. After garnering support from the department, the dean proceeded with allocating institutional resources, both financial and human, to meet program needs. To meet these needs, Dean Evans reshuffled faculty responsibilities and worked to free up the required faculty to teach the courses.

Moreover, the university secured funds for providing the cohort numerous leadership development opportunities. These opportunities came in the form of professional development sessions, facilitating community dialogues, and participation to attend local, regional, and national conferences.

Institutional Recommendations

One recommendation for school districts working universities to develop the its leadership capacity is to strategically offering students enrolled in school leadership programs authentic opportunities to practice leadership roles. Traditionally, school leadership programs include a practicum component as part of the development of aspiring leaders, but usually comprise the culmination of the program. During this process, aspiring leaders shadow and learn under the tutelage from a practicing school leader and engage in other formal leadership duties. While this experience is undoubtedly valuable and necessary, school district administration would be wise to adopt a proactive approach and institutionalize strategic opportunities for aspiring leaders to practice leadership roles throughout the course of their graduate program. Many enrolled in graduate programs, which can greatly contribute to school improvement efforts fly under the radar and go unnoticed and underutilized by school administration. Thus, strategically

mapping this population and tapping into this resource has a dual purpose: Support aspiring leaders' capacity to lead and tap into a readily accessible reservoir of human resources with unlimited potential. This could serve to build the confidence and the capacity for aspiring leaders to enter formal school leadership opportunities and excel at their craft while significantly improving organizational culture, school outcomes, and student achievement.

Harnessing the Power of Partnerships: (Re) Investing in Relationships

Current research has highlighted the potential and power of improving school leadership development through effective school district-university partnerships. These partnerships have been deemed to be an essential component in establishing and sustaining high caliber leadership programs. According to the Wallace Foundation (2016), "Strong university-district partnerships are essential to high-quality preparation but are far from universal" (pg. 5). The benefits of these partnerships outweigh the costs often associated with collaborative work. In the long-run, it could be gleaned from this and other research that heavy and intentional investment in relationships at the front end have a much greater potential to sustain educational improvements as opposed to addressing this later in the process.

In the context of this study, school district and university personnel proceeded to nurture an effective partnership by developing a foundation grounded in a sustained two year dialogue that emerged from the Community Learning Exchange (CLE) hosted in January 2012. The CLE convening at the LBJ Museum, in San Marcos, TX provided the venue where the key institutional partners crossed paths and opened the door to a world of possibilities. Remaining in sustained conversation after the CLE, the school district

leadership and university personnel nurtured the relational trust that helped to forge the relationships required to enter a symbiotic partnership. Concerted efforts were made by both institutions to maintain a consistent, professional, and equitable discourse that coalesced around the welfare of schools, students, and the local community. Through these dialogues, both institutions collaborated and worked to establish a distinctive model for developing future district and community leadership.

Dynamic Curriculum and Pedagogies for Leadership Development

As much as institutional commitment and partnership have created a framework and pathway to increasing leadership capacity, the heart of the emerging leaders program has been the robust and engaging curriculum and the critical dynamic pedagogies utilized to facilitate the learning process. The domains of instructional leadership, culturally relevant teaching and leading, and community engagement collectively provided a robust educational experience by integrating key aspects of school leadership. The critical and interrelated nature of the three domains was emphasized throughout the coursework and served to bridge the life and systems world of school leadership. More over, the curriculum and learning was grounded in place-based framework that responded to local context and conditions and informed by the principles of community development.

As evidenced by their stories, the initial summer semester of the program had a profound and transformational impact on the cohort members. The introductory courses of Understanding Self and Understanding Environments created a solid foundation by nurturing relationships, commitment, and community among the cohort members. The emphasis on centering the self as opposed to focusing solely on the technical aspects of school leadership humanized the learning process by validating their own experiences as

individuals and fostered a gracious learning environment that permeated throughout the rest of the program. Through the curriculum, cohort members were invited to explore their own experiences and beliefs, think critically about their own roles as educators, and dive into issues affecting everyday practice. They emerged as school leaders with a deep sense of awareness of self, community, and commitment to change.

Program Recommendations

A central, reoccurring theme that emerged from the writings and conversations with cohort members was the significance of the pedagogical strategies employed to facilitate their learning. Time and time again the cohort members credited pedagogical concepts such as circle, gracious space, and the auto ethnography as critical to their development as praxis oriented educators. Unfortunately, many expressed their disappointment at the fact that most of the pedagogies they gravitated to were not employed consistently throughout the program. The emerging leaders program can greatly enhance the educational experiences of cohort members by intentionally integrating the pedagogical tools that were introduced at the inception in subsequent coursework.

Dynamic Processes for Selection of Candidates

The emerging leaders program was created specifically to build future district leadership. It was tailored to meet local school district and community needs by developing district staff that displayed a certain level of readiness and commitment to the public good. As such, considerable thought and effort was poured into developing a multifaceted, thorough, and robust selection process. The recruitment of candidates consisted of district wide emails, informative sessions, and personal invitations. The

selection process encompassed one to one interviews, small group conversation, reading and writing exercises, and introspective reflection. This approach was consistent with scholarly research that emphasize that effective principal preparation programs have rigorous selection processes to choose quality candidates which serve to strengthen program effectiveness and impact (Cosner, Tozer, Zavitkovsky, & Whalen, 2015).

Future Research

The scope of this research was focused on examining how a partnership between two institutions that resulted in the creation of the emerging leaders program can impact educational leadership policy and practice. Future research endeavors can focus on exploring other important facets of the partnership that was forged between Texas State University and San Marcos C.I.S.D. One aspect that merits future research consideration is to explore the experiences and impacts of the second cohort. The first cohort set a precedent for others to follow and now an opportunity has been presented to examine the second group of educators and their experiences in the program. This can further lead to a comparative analysis between the first and second iterations of the cohort and gather valuable information that can be utilized to inform the emerging leaders program.

Another opportunity to engage in future research is to develop a longitudinal study that chronicles the trajectory of educators during and after their participation in the program. Conducting a longitudinal study may be valuable for assessing the effectiveness of the program and help to inform any modifications required to improve the educational experiences of aspiring school leaders.

Lastly, potential research could focus on both the school district and the local community as units of analysis to explore the broader impacts that the school-university

partnership. While this study has documented some of the profound changes occurring at the most micro level (i.e. cohort members), examining school district, and community level change further can provide empirical evidence of the significance of the partnership that originated five years ago.

Embarking on a Spiritual Journey: A Closing Reflection

As I sat in circle and said my grandfather's name for the first time, I knew this was not going to be an ordinary journey. We were making a spiritual commitment to those of the past. No one had ever invited me to share my story much less invite my grandfather.

In her final written assignment of the program, Lydia shared about sitting in circle for her first class and answering the two questions posed to the group: Who are you and who are you inviting on this journey with you? Lydia's powerful commentary serves as testimony to the level and degree of commitment that she and her colleagues made upon embarking on their educational journey. While the scope of this study was confined to researching the merit of a school leadership preparation program, the core of the work has been about hope. Hope for our educational institutions to provide quality educators for our students and supply our schools with capable, morally conscious school and community leaders. Hope that these educators and school leaders can help to revitalize our struggling schools and communities. As evidenced by the words and experiences of my research partners, the emerging leaders program has fostered a renewed sense of hope and an individual and collective moral responsibility to safeguard a quality education for young people regardless of racial, gender, or socioeconomic factors. This is how the emerging leaders program distinguishes itself from other programs: It combines the hard,

technical aspects of school leadership and infuses it with a deep, moral and personal character that gives it life and meaning. The bridging of these two distinct spheres become so inextricably linked, that one cannot exist without the other. The program addresses the systemsworld of leadership but cultivates and nurtures the lifeworld and utilizes it a source of power (Sergiovanni, 2000). The emerging leaders program went beyond the normalized scripted approaches of traditional models to encompass a multifaceted, introspective, and detailed approach to leadership preparation. Through a dynamic engagement process, cohort members have been through a journey few could have anticipated. The educational experiences of these emerging leaders have given rise to a critical awareness of everyday issues and the moral obligation to actively work to address them. From stepping into that very first class, the cohort members would never be the same again. Through their participation in this journey, the cohort members have gained confidence to step out of the shadows and emerge as public citizens committed to serving the greater good.

Serving as both a witness and a participant in this change process has enriched me as an individual, educator, and public citizen. Seeing this brand of pedagogy that revitalizes learning and moves people to action is something to behold. At the time of writing this closing reflection, our great nation is undergoing profound, contentious changes in leadership. Naturally, changes in leadership at the federal level will have significant impacts at the micro level and will resonate throughout all facets of our society, including our educational system. Although changes to our educational system are imminent, we cannot prophesy neither the kind nor how new reform initiatives will affect our public schools, educators, and communities. One way to neutralize and

confront this uncertainty is to be vigilant about the structure, means, and methods of educator and school leader preparation. A bold vision for preparation programs, models, and strategies to prepare future educators and school leaders to respond to current and future challenges is required. A renewed vision for our schools and communities must guide the path and inform wise decision. Moreover, partnerships, of all different kinds, must be forged to achieving and sustaining these goals. Only a committed, unified effort will generate the hope and inspiration needed to forge the collective responsibility to act in the best interest of others. It is on this foundation of hope, inspiration, and responsibility to each other that this program firmly anchors itself and nurtures school leaders with the strength and capacity to lead with the head, heart, hands, and soul.

APPENDIX A

Description of Select Traditional Principal Preparation Programs in Texas

Texas A&M University – PK-12 Educational Administration (36 Hours)

- Foundations of Educational Administration
- School Principalship
- Applied Data Techniques
- Principal Professional Practices
- Admin. Auxiliary Services
- Admin. Of Change – Educational Organizations
- Public School Law
- Developing School/Community Partnerships
- Internship (2 hours)
- Instructional Leadership
- K-12 Finance & Budget
- Internship (1 Hour)

University of North Texas – Educational Leadership (36 Hours)

- Instructional Leadership
- Campus-Level School Law
- Management of School Resources
- Race, Class and Gender Issues in Education
- School Communications and Public Relations
- Administration and Leadership for Student Educational Services
- Organizational Change and School Improvement
- Professional Development and Supervision
- Administration of the K–12 Curriculum
- Practicum in Educational Leadership
- Internship in Educational Administration

University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley – Educational Leadership (36 Hours)

- Data Management for School Improvement
- Socio-Cultural Contexts of Education
- Organizational Leadership
- Ethics and School Law
- Curriculum Leadership for School Improvement
- Instructional Leadership
- Instructional Leadership for Diverse Learners
- Supervision of Instruction
- Change for Successful Schools
- School Community Relations
- The Principalship

- Administration of Human Resources and Budgeting

Texas State University – Educational Leadership (36 Hours)

- Understanding Self: Developing a Personal Vision for Leadership
- Understanding Organizations & Using Inquiry
- Understanding People: Professional Development
- Understanding Environments: Social, Political, Economic, Legal & Technological
- Supervision of Instruction
- Curriculum Design
- Campus Leadership
- School Law
- School as Center of Inquiry
- Integrative Seminar
- Field Based Practicum (2 Semesters)

University of Texas-El Paso – Educational Administration (36 Hours)

- Administrative Leadership
- Instructional Leadership
- School Community Leadership
- Data Based Decision Making
- School-Based Budgeting
- Educational Law
- Educational Leadership in a Diverse Society
- Administration of School Personnel & Services
- Curriculum Renewal
- 2nd specialized course
- School Management Internship (two semesters)

APPENDIX B

Study Title: CULTIVATING LEADERSHIP FOR SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY CHANGE: A CASE STUDY OF THEORY, RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Principal Investigator:

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Sponsor:

This consent form will give you the information you will need to understand why this research study is being done and why you are being invited to participate. It will also describe what you will need to do to participate as well as any known risks, inconveniences or discomforts that you may have while participating. We encourage you to ask questions at any time. If you decide to participate, you will be given a copy of this form to keep.

➤ **PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND**

You are invited to participate in a research study to learn more about school leadership preparation programs. The information gathered will be used to contribute to the existing knowledge base about training and preparing effective school leaders. You are being asked to participate because of your participation in the emerging leaders cohort.

➤ **PROCEDURES**

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to participate in two interviews during the summer. Each interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes. During the interviews, you will be asked about your experiences in the emerging leaders program. The interview will be (audio-recorded) and the researcher may take notes as well.

We will engage in one group conversation about the educational experiences in the emerging leaders program. The discussion topics include learning experiences, stories, and memories. To protect the privacy of focus group members, all transcripts will be coded with pseudonyms and we ask that you not discuss what is discussed in the focus group with anyone else. The focus group will last about 60 minutes and we will audiotape the discussion to make sure that it is recorded accurately.

➤ **RISKS/DISCOMFORTS**

In the unlikely event that some of the survey or interview questions make you uncomfortable or upset, you are always free to decline to answer or to stop your participation at any time. Should you feel discomfort after participating and you are a Texas State University student, you may contact the University Health Services for counseling services at list (512) 245-2208 or counselingcenter@txstate.edu. Services for participants are free to registered students, though the number of sessions allowed

may be limited. The following list includes providers who are available on a sliding fee schedule should the need arise. Austin: <http://www.integralcare.org/> Phone: (512) 472-HELP.

Hays County: http://www.hillcountry.org/services/mental_health/default.asp Ph.: (877) 466-0660 San Antonio: <http://www.chcsbc.org/> Phone: (210) 731-1300 Although there are not any known risks for participating in this study. Please feel free to call me or my supervisor if you have any questions regarding this study, please ask now or when you feel comfortable.

➤ **BENEFITS/ALTERNATIVES**

There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. However, the information that you provide greater insight about educational leadership preparation programs and strategies used to prepare school leaders.

➤ **EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY**

Reasonable efforts will be made to keep the personal information in your research record private and confidential. Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law.

Data will be kept for three years (per federal regulations) after the study is completed and then destroyed.

➤ **PAYMENT/COMPENSATION**

You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

➤ **PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY**

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw from it at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

➤ **QUESTIONS**

If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in this study, you may contact the Principal Investigator, Samuel García Jr.: (956) 532-9365 or s_g182@txstate.edu.

Pertinent questions or concerns about the research, research participants' rights, and/or research-related injuries to participants should be directed to the IRB Chair, Dr. Jon Lasser 512-245-3413 – (lasser@txstate.edu) or to Monica Gonzales, IRB Regulatory Manager 512-245-2334 - (meg201@txstate.edu).

DOCUMENTATION OF CONSENT

I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. Its

general purposes, the particulars of involvement and possible risks have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand I can withdraw at any time.

Printed Name of Study
Participant

Signature of Study Participant

Date

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

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