

TCWSE

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**LOVE.
SERVE.
LEAD.**

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JTWSE provides a forum to promote the development of women school executives through scholarly research and practice.

JTWSE recognizes the diversity of talents and skills of women school executives.

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The Journal of Texas Women School Executives (JTWSE)

The Journal of Texas Women School Executives (JTWSE) is an official publication of the Texas Council of Women School Executives (TCWSE). The purpose of JTWSE is to provide a forum to promote the development of women school executives through scholarly research and practice, as well as recognize the professional knowledge and wisdom of practicing and aspiring women school executives, higher education faculty, and other significant partners in education. Since leadership is both art and science, JTWSE solicits creative works that promote the journal purpose. The journal solicits original submissions in three categories to recognize the diversity of talents and skills of women school executives (see Categories of Articles).

Because of a commitment to leadership development and scholarly school women executives, Texas Council of School Women School Executives previously published an annual monograph until 2008. In January 2011, President Lu Anna Stephens and the Executive Board, commissioned Dr. Genie Linn and Ms. Karen Saunders to serve as co-editors to design and launch a new professional publication for TCWSE to be published in an electronic format with the first publication to be unveiled at the Annual Conference in January 2012.

JTWSE is a double-blind, peer-reviewed, open access e-journal publishing original scholarly research and creative works. The JTWSE, although originated by Texas women school executives, it serves as a national scholarly journal. For membership information: <https://tcwse.org/membership/>. At present, all editorial, Board, and reviewer services are provided without cost to JTWSE or its members by volunteer scholars and practitioners.





From the President

Dear TCWSE Members,

2020-2021 – From A Clear Vision to Finding My Joy

This year has been a challenging one to say the least. 2020 started out with high expectations and plans on how to grow and move our organization forward. Mindful of the diverse needs of our increasing membership, TCWSE leadership envisioned a year in which to refocus on the basic tenets and intentionally build regional capacity to better reach and mentor our sisters across the state. Instead we have all been challenged to refocus our priorities as we attempt to navigate our way through the unprecedented impact of a global pandemic.

As leaders, we often hear messages such as, “Don’t look back, you’re not going that way” or “Focus on the future, not the past.” However, there is a lot said as well about learning from our past to build a better future. The pandemic has forced us to stop and provided us time to reflect and re-examine our priorities, personally and professionally, as an individual, a family, an organization, a nation. While this year has been difficult for all and tragic for many, it has truly brought us to our knees and forced us back to the core of who we are as human beings. By stripping away all pretense of things I once thought were important, it has cleared my vision and made me focus on what is truly important in my life.

I heard recently that living in joy during difficult times is a sign of resistance. That statement has struck and stayed with me and I think applies well to the situation in which we currently find ourselves. As my vision cleared, I was reminded of and able to focus on those things that brought me joy. Instead of numbering my problems, I am counting my blessings. This change in mindset has definitely helped me survive and even thrive this past year. Here are few of the simple truths I have rediscovered over the past twelve months:

First and foremost is Faith – when you can no longer stand, kneel.

Reach out to those you love – let them know how much you value them

Hope and Kindness Matter – we can do great things through small acts

Never give up – live bravely and with intention

Heroes truly exist in the people who step up to take action when needed

Things can change quickly – although we can’t always be prepared, we can always be ready

And finally – *Living in Joy defeats all fear.*

Lisa Meysembourg
TCWSE 2020 President
Superintendent at Woodville ISD
TCWSE President

From the Executive Editors



Love all, find your joy!



Authors today and those to come, as you quietly sit down in front of your computer and stare at the screen anxiously waiting for the inspiration to flow from your brain to the keyboard, remember your why. You have often said that you LOVE to write and share your ideas with others in written form. Whether your writing is in the form of an article, poem, books, or creative art, you LOVE putting the messages out there for the purposes of instilling and increasing knowledge, healing, and entertaining. Some write because writing is a hobby and in it, they find JOY! Whatever the reason, be encouraged to FIND YOUR JOY in the process of researching, giving your perspective and writing to a larger audience.

A larger audience? Yes, a larger audience! That is who we SERVE. While loving to write will no doubt be a factor in the process of writing a great commentary, it is recommended that you write to SERVE. Service to others occurs because of the writing when the published materials are placed in front of those who read for a purpose. Readers are served when the commentary meets their needs by improving their knowledge or performance. Teams or clientele are served when the writing proposes ideas that impact the organization, individuals, or groups to a greater change! Servant leaders are right here in this journal. Writers who care about sharing research and perspectives for change and impact, which brings about a greater good. WRITE TO SERVE.

Ah! To SERVE is to LEAD. The writing you share sets you in the category of leadership. LEAD the pack in research. Share best practices and research-based strategies. LEAD the pack in communicating perspective views. Published journals reach a larger audience creating more opportunities for the written messages to be read, utilized, implemented, and shared. As a writer, you LEAD by getting the written commentary into as many hands as possible.

Texas Council of Women School Executive's offers this professional journal and writing opportunity to increase the reading audience of the featured authors in addition to offering research and perspectives that impact the educational arena. In this edition, you will find a unique style of loving, serving, leading, and finding joy in writing. 20/20, A Clear Vision was quickly impacted by a raging pandemic known as the Coronavirus of 2019 or COVID19. With

the pandemic came unprecedented operating decisions and new procedures. In addition, many people were burdened as well as challenged with the social emotional aspects of COVID19. Currently, there is a sense of revitalizing the climate as students return to learn. Perhaps suggested strategies in this journal will help you while improving education. As you read, it is our hope that you glean from ideas within these submissions and may you all FIND JOY in reading, learning, and growing!

“Can you imagine what joy our world would hold if every person loved what they did and was living to their fullest potential?”

Dr. Jill M. Siler
Thrive Through the Five

Joy in serving,

Sharon Ross, Ed.D. & Jennifer S. Jones Ed.D.
Executive Editors

Categories of Articles

Research

is the hallmark of educational professionalism and scholarship. The following articles reflect the scholarship of women school executives from universities and school districts. While university professors research issues that are vital to women as leaders and support women educators, district and campus authors share applied research from their experiences in the field.

The Cambridge English Dictionary defines research as a detailed study of a subject, especially in order to discover new information or reach a new understanding. May you read with clear vision and understand a new journey requires a fresh faith and a fresh fight to:

- Creatively collaborate with the intent to connect communities, universities, colleges and schools that prepare all students for success
- Intentionally operate as a culturally relevant, data-driven leader
- Collaboratively redesign programs that inspire and propel students beyond their wildest dreams and imagination
- Unapologetically owning a passion and love for the journey and the work required to sustain success
- Continuously advocating for all children
- Consistently providing communication of the organizations vision and work related, including successes along the way

Scholarly research builds leadership capacity and strengthens our voices.



Professional and Scholarly Perspectives

offers research both scholarly positions and professional understandings. The contributors represent the diversity of TCWSE members who are university professors, district administrators, and aspiring administrators. It is critical to include and consider perspectives that offer a view to education from inside hearts and minds of our various levels of leadership. It is with pride that we accept and cherish each life role as more evidence of our amazing capacity for leadership.

We are leaders.
We are learners.
We are women.



Creative Works

Picture this...

We are always inspired and amazed at the creativity of women school executives. To recognize diversity of talents and skills, JTWSE also solicits creative works that promote the journal purpose. Creative works include poetry and artwork.

Call for Journal Submissions
Journal of Texas Women School Executives
Submission for 2022 Conference
Deadline for Submission: To Be Announced at the June 2021 Conference

Women Leading in P-20 Contexts & Partnerships: From Dreams to Reality

The Journal of Texas Women School Executives (JTWSE) is a national double-blind peer-reviewed, open access e-journal publishing original scholarly research and creative works. JTWSE is an official publication of the Texas Council of Women School Executives.

After a yearlong exhausting experience of monthly and weekly meetings with state and local officials, school districts as well as institutions of higher learning are still at financial crossroads and work to seek lasting partnerships with those business and community organizations positioned to support defined efforts of school improvement. With the economic downfall from 2020, financial partners for P-20 organizations are crucial. Who are they? How are they created and sustained? What opportunities are the partnerships proposing? What do successful partnerships look like? As leaders across America worked tirelessly through the COVID19 pandemic, successful women leaders collaborated and mentored without reserve. With the enormous task of 100 percent reopening and return to learn, it is necessary not only to look at partnerships who assisted, but to look at the women themselves. Who are the women leading these districts, organizations, or departments and what was their pathway to success? How are these leaders creating pathways of reality for other women who dream to become school leaders? What pathways did leaders take to move from having and believing in a dream to achieving a professional goal and making that goal become a reality?

To address the topics described, we welcome single-study investigations, research addressing teaching and learning, educational leadership, policy and finance, school law, and other professional and scholarly perspectives. To recognize the diversity of talents and skills, JTWSE also solicits professional and scholarly perspectives as well as creative works that promote the journal purpose. Creative works include poetry and artwork.

Submitting Manuscripts/Submissions to JTWSE

Manuscripts and submissions should be sent to:

sdross@tarleton.edu

Subject line: JTWSE: Conference 2022 Issue

Each submission is reviewed by the editors and evaluated as appropriate for review and then sent to reviewers for double-blind peer review. Editorial decisions will be made typically within four to six weeks after receipt. For the June issues, these issues will be made in a more timely manner.

Manuscripts should follow the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association 7th Edition. The typical article submission is equivalent to 5 to 15 pages single-spaced. If selected, you may be asked to revise and re-submit. It is the responsibility of the author to adhere to deadlines provided at that time. Please be sure to carefully read all guidelines and prepare accordingly prior to submission.

Document Preparation

Your manuscript/submission should consist of the following:

- Cover Sheet – Title and information of authorship, name of author(s), current position, contact info, and brief bio for author(s) (no more than 100 words); email address, postal address, phone number.
- Include a statement confirming that the submission has not been published, is not under review for publication and will not be submitted elsewhere while being considered for approval with JTWSE. In cases in which the research involves human subjects, confirm that the IRB (Institutional Review Board) has exempt the study from any further review or that it has approved the investigation.
- Abstract – Place on a separate sheet. The title should be placed at the top of the page. The text following should be no longer than 200 words and should summarize the purpose, methodology and findings briefly.
- The body of the paper
- Charts, tables and/or figures
- List of References
- Use 12-point Times New Roman font
- One-inch margins

Prospective authors may view copies of past submissions and themes of the JTWSE at tcwse.org

Questions regarding the JTWSE may be directed to Co-Editors.

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In this Issue

At the end of the chaotic pandemic scene, stands champions robed in white, standing strong... those leading executives who empower others and usher in new opportunities and bring forth the dawning of a new light. Women School Executives and the many supportive business partners, higher education professors and aspiring administrators are represented in this issue, loving their careers and the networking, leading a larger territory, serving at the local, state, national and international levels, and finding joy in every classroom, every partnership, every accomplishment and most of all, in the inner core of the human soul.

Research

Playing Professorial: An Autoethnography of Imposter Phenomenon (Syndrome) at Work by Dr. Prairie Endres-Parnell and Dr. Lora Helvie-Mason. Endres-Parnell and Helvie-Mason provide an examination of the impact of assigned roles and imposter phenomenon, as well as a discussion of the long term impact of imposter phenomenon in education. Female faculty walk on stage often without a script, in the lead role, driven to ensure their performances meet the criteria of the critics that surround them, only to find that this feeling of “playing” the part creates stress, anxiety, and disassociation. Readers may mind comfort in knowing others have felt the stress but because of COVID19, have also held the world together for the next semester which can be attributed to journaling, mentoring, sharing and being active in accountability groups.

The Balance: Self-Care in a Time of Crisis by Dr. Kelly Brown, Dr. Kathryn Washington, and Dr. Sharon Ross. Brown, Washington, and Ross understand the demands of being on stage and performing as the main characters. That is why they brought the balance. Unlike normal times and life pre-Covid19, these unprecedented times call for self-care to withstand the lights of the stage. As the pandemic and civil unrest continue, organizations and caring leaders should urgently find ways to build a sense of trust and address the physical, mental, and social emotional strains to sustain human capital.

Women’s Mentoring Network – From the Keyboards of Intentional Women by Dr. Lora Helvie-Mason, Dr. Amber Harris-Bozer, Dr. Misty Smith, Dr. Prairie Endres-Parnell, Dr. Christy Tabors, Dr. Elizabeth Wallace, Dr. Nathalie Jones, Dr. Marcie Reynolds, and, Dr. Sarah Maben. Just as the mission of TCWSE includes leadership through renewal, mentoring, and career advancement support, the Women’s Mentoring Network at one Texas University offers the same, an intentional space by women, for women. The article features narratives that reveal the diverse impact and influence of mentoring which lessens the individual struggle or fight and start to make in-roads for systemic and structural change. Stars are born, discovered and grown.

Helping New Teachers Keep Their Joy: Beginning Teacher Perceptions Of Campus And District Onboarding by Dr. Megan Gist, Dr. Melissa Arrambide and Dr. Pam Winn. This research explored beginning teachers’ perceptions of the campus and district onboarding practices they experienced in a fast-growth Texas school district. Gist, Arrambide, and Winn provide beginning teachers’ perceptions of onboarding practices proven to build capacity, thus helping new teachers grow and thrive in their first years while keeping their joy.

Online Behaviors and Building Community by Therese I. Pennell. Pennell offers research that focuses on the most important individuals, the audience, our students. As educators learn new hybrid and hybrid strategies for online learning, they face new problems of interaction, knowledge sharing and community building. As technical communication increases, it is important that facilitators know how the power of positive interactions with peers and community building happen in online learning.

Virtual Mentoring and Coaching: The Perceptions of Female Principal Candidates by Dr. Nahed Abdelrahman, Dr. Beverly J. Irby, Dr. Rafael Lara-Alecio, Dr. Fuhui Tong, Dr. Zhou Chen, and Dr. Janice Koch. Abdelrahman, Irby, Lara-Alecio, Tong, Chen, and Koch introduce an innovative and revolutionary approach of mentoring and coaching that shares the same objectives as physical mentoring and coaching which aims to enhance trainees' knowledge and skills with guidance from their mentors. Virtual Mentoring and Coaching can be designed in a variety of platforms and, although VMC can be implemented anytime, is welcome during this time of forced changes and adjustments stemming from the COVID19 pandemic.

Life Lessons from 2020 by Lindsey Pollock. Pollock reminds us that it is not what happens to us but how we react that matters. One tip she shares is to keep a gratitude journal and cherish each day!

Leading with Love by Dr. Doreen Martinez. Martinez, one of five finalists for the National Distinguished Principals award, shares how she, other administrators, parents, and community members supported their front line generals. The front line generals then displayed their commitment by helping each other find solutions to the many challenges they faced.

LOVE, SERVE, LEAD...#FindYourJoy: "What 2020 has reminded us and taught us" by Shelly Slaughter. The End! The journal ends with the beginning theme of the conference. Slaughter's theme sparks a reason for writers to write and leaders to lead. This article inspires, encourages and motivates. It is a reminder to remember that our leadership is defined by the example we set in addition to our actions and words. Our inspiration and motivation, service to others and love for self leads to lasting joy.

...Helvie-Mason felt conflicted in her roles as professor and administrator. As a first generation college student from a low socioeconomic background, Helvie-Mason often felt that college wasn't "her" space, that she would be "found out" as someone who "wasn't college material." This was likely exacerbated by a high school guidance counselor telling her she was "too poor" to go to college, despite being near the top of her class. She learned early on in the academic world to "fake it". She spent her first year of college questioning if she belonged and constantly thought of dropping out. As she completed her first year, she determined to "figure it out" and doubled down on "faking it" to prove/justify her presence in that "elite" world. Endres-Parnell felt she had to put in extra efficacy work. She found herself asking internally, "did I present that accurately? Did I present the correct research? Do my students believe me?" Simultaneously, Helvie-Mason flounders through feelings of confusion and concern about her role, "Do I feel I belong here? Do others feel I belong here? Will others listen to me? Was this the right path?" A grain of hope remains in doing the research for this paper: those who experience Imposter Phenomenon are often high achieving and their doubts are unfounded. Perhaps as we return to traditional university settings we can have more robust and diverse discussions of imposter phenomenon, and maybe, hopefully, we are feeling less like an imposter and more like we have held our world together for the next semester.

Playing Professorial: An Autoethnography of Imposter Phenomenon (Syndrome) at Work

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to articulate feelings of imposter syndrome in education and use that articulation to explore solutions to the experience. Two faculty narratives are rhetorically analyzed using an autoethnographic lens and research about imposter syndrome/phenomenon, social identity theory, and performance theory. The faculty narratives are drawn from diverse faculty, one instructor and one tenured full professor. Both faculty have been teaching for more than 10 years in diverse settings including traditional universities, online, and in the prison system. Additional reflection on personal experience is gained through an examination of the impact of assigned roles and imposter phenomenon, as well as a discussion of the long term impact of IP. The authors draw several recommendations for dealing with IP including self-reflection, mentorship programs, self-awareness of triggers, and positive self-talk.

“All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players. They have their exits and their entrances, and in his life, one man plays many parts” Shakespeare, *As You Like it*, Act II, Scene VII.

The question that plagues some academics comes not from the stage or the performance; it is not stage fright. Instead, it is the feeling of walking onstage without a script, in the lead role, wondering how they got there, and when the metaphoric trap door will open and drop them into hell. Faculty, particularly female faculty, who experience imposter syndrome/phenomenon are driven to ensure their performances meet the criteria of the critics that surround them. Research in the areas of identity theory and performance theory have suggested scripts that faculty work within and have undertaken exploration of the impact of the imposter syndrome/phenomenon. Female faculty experience imposter syndrome when faced with departmental challenges, student challenges, course design challenges, and interpersonal interactions. The authors use the lens of autoethnography to explore the inter- and intra-personal aspects of performing the identity of “faculty.” This feeling of “playing” the part of faculty creates stress, anxiety, and disassociation with the experience of faculty life as it is anticipated to exist. This stress seems more impactful on female faculty over their white male counterparts, but research indicates that all faculty experience imposter syndrome/phenomenon at different times. This autoethnographic study explores the long-term impact of imposter syndrome at various levels of faculty life, as well as across academic transitions and arrives at a multiplicity of solutions and recommendations to stave off the phenomenon.

Judith Butler argues “philosophers rarely think about acting in the theatrical sense, but they do have a discourse of ‘acts’ that maintains associative semantic meaning with theories of performance and acting” (Butler, 1988, p. 519). Per Butler’s performance-based interpretation of feminist theory, we as humans perform not only our gender identities, but also our work, social, and familial identities. She argues constituting acts not only create the “identity of the actor, but as [sic] constituting that identity as a compelling illusion, an object of *belief* [sic]” (Butler, 1988, p. 520). Authors featured in “Working-Class Women in the Academy” and “This Fine Place So Far From Home” indicate that they feel as if they are playacting inside someone else’s story, imposters in a discipline that welcomes like to like (Fedukovich, 2009, p. 142). In this instance, the women are waiting for the trap door to fall, for someone to rip back the stage curtain and reveal the acting for the fakery it is.

As faculty members performing “teacher”, students read identity into the everyday performance provided to them in the classroom. Co-workers read identity into the performance provided in the office setting: research, collegiality, and service. Judith Butler’s (1985) performance theory, Henri Tajfel and John Turner’s (1975, 1978) Social Identity Theory, and Clance and Imes’ (1978) imposter syndrome/phenomenon applied to several pivotal performative moments of our own authorial scripts, allow us to posit that examining the performance of our identities in the educational setting informs the impact, stresses, and disassociation of performed identity and internalized identity, resulting in long term imposter syndrome/phenomenon effects.

Imposter Phenomenon/Syndrome

Imposter Phenomenon (IP) has been defined as “intellectual phoniness” felt by an individual who is unable to internalize successful professional experiences, though they are faced with objective evidence of success (Bernard, Dollinger, & Ramaniah, 2002; Clance & Imes, 1978). In the foundational article by Clance and Imes (1978), women who were deemed “high achieving” experienced “feeling like a fake” and struggled with legitimizing success though experiencing professional accomplishments. Aldridge Sanford, Ross, Blake and Cambiano (2015) found imposter feelings stemmed from a lack of experience or youth and not giving or accepting credit for one’s personal successes.

IP continued to be studied through the years with studies often focusing on the academy, in particular women and faculty members who identify as part of the non-dominant culture in some way (race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.). It is often experienced by those who have perfectionistic tendencies. Of particular concern is the ongoing impact IP can have on productive, successful faculty members. Over time, IP impacts faculty who are seen as competent, capable, successful. These faculty members are then more likely to experience emotional exhaustion and low job satisfaction compared to non- or low-IP colleagues (Legassie, Zibrowski, & Goldszmidt, 2008; Neureiter & Traut-Mattausch, 2016).

Considering the impact IP can have on faculty, research has focused on strategies to overcome IP, often with the idea that faculty find mentors, seek alternate validation, and consider “triggering” points in one’s career. Hutchins, Penney and Sublett (2018) applied the Conversion of Resources (COR) theory to examine high IP faculty and noted that such faculty deplete critical resources needed to avoid psychological strain. To combat this, their findings suggest IP impacted faculty should embrace learning and development interventions such as active coping approaches (training, coaching, and mentoring) that gets to the heart of how imposters internally attribute success and failures, increase social support, and normalize the imposter experience.

IP is largely connected to and studied through a gendered lens. Research describes the phenomenon as the feelings of wearing a mask for one's colleagues. The masks, and subsequent performances, vary based on gender, work expectations, and believability of performance.

Performance Theory

Judith Butler analyzed gender through the lens of performativity. Her work on identity theory has informed the past thirty years of queer studies, as well as the work of theatrical scholars challenging the positionality of the actor within a character, and the embodiment of the performance of self. Her work helped set the tone for the concept of "passing" in the transgender community; a concept that we utilize in this text. Faculty members perform the concept of faculty, try to look like a faculty member, and are judged by students and co-workers on their skills at passing. Phillips and Knowles (2010) utilize Butler's concept of gender as performative to investigate female business owners, arguing that "Butler conceptualized identity such that subjects are 'the resulting effects of a rule-bound discourse' in which they are compelled to repeat dominant and regulatory discourses" (p. 420). Their research suggests that identity is something that is performed "over and over, it is not a matter of *being* ... but something that is *done* and undone over and over" (p. 421). Butler's performance theory suggests the embodiment of strategies of performance that enable the performer, the faculty member, to pass as someone who is worthy of the role (Phillips & Knowles, 2010, p. 522). When combined with imposter syndrome, the need of a faculty member to "pass" as successful leads to a faculty actor who feels they are failing at their part. Feelings of inadequacy plague the faculty member and cause stress, debilitating feelings of ineptitude, and a loss of confidence. Additionally, female faculty experience the imposter syndrome more than male faculty, as do faculty of color (Bernard, Hoggard, Neblett, 2018). Butler argues, "gender is a performance with clearly punitive consequences" (1988, p. 522). Comparison of a gender performance to a work performance leads to an understanding of the consequences of a failed work performance. Butler suggests that humans agree to "perform, produce, and sustain ... [our] own fictions, whereby the construction compels one's belief in its necessity and naturalness" (1988, p. 522). Under this assumption, the performance of self identity must be maintained in order to survive the external pressures of social identity. Butlers' version of performance is immediately public; the performance "renders social laws explicit" (1988, p. 526). In academia, those social laws represent the expectation, both explicit and implicit, of faculty in the classroom, office space, and research space. In light of imposter syndrome and the impact therein, those who experience the syndrome must start by reminding themselves of Butlers' claim: "Reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed. ... These acts either conform ... or contest that expectation in some way" (1988, p. 527-528). The act being confirmed is that of the social identity. Within the scope of imposter syndrome, social and organizational identity is often the cause of female faculty feeling as if they did not belong in their own offices, leadership roles, and classrooms (Hutchins, Penney, Sublett, 2018).

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory enhances the identity formation elements of Butler's performance theory. Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1975, 1978) developed the Social Identity Theory as a method of examining the identities humans present to the world around them. Tajfel and Turner divide identity in two types of social categories, self-selected and other selected, based on individual and the others' personal schema. It is from these same schemas that stereotypes are assigned. Each individual has a self-concept composed of their personal identity, (physical body, physical

ability, psychological traits, and interests) in conjunction with their social identity, or feeling/perception of belonging. Social identity is meaningful in its performance only in relation to others: “The definition of others and the self are largely ‘relational and comparative’ (Tajfel & Turner, 1985, p. 16). We define ourselves relative to individuals in other categories . . . social identification is *not* an all-or-nothing phenomenon.” (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p. 21). This ties the concept of personal success and failure to the success or failure of the group identity.

If the dominant ideology of the group identity does not match our own concepts of success, then we fail at matching the identity, thus creating a disconnect and contributing to imposter syndrome. We fail to fit in, which means we are “faking it” until we fit in or give up. Ashforth and Mael suggest

Conflict between identities tends to be cognitively resolved by ordering, separating, or buffering the identities. . . . The individual must define him- or herself in terms of his or her most salient social identity, or personal attribute; he or she also might develop a hierarchy of prepotency so that conflicts are resolved by deferring to the most subjectively important or valued identity. (Ashford & Mael, 1989, p. 30).

Under the influence of Imposter Syndrome, individuals fail to create a functional hierarchy to resolve identity conflicts. The lasting identity conflicts enhance the feeling of being an imposter, a failure at tasks, as the individual cannot define him- or herself within the organization. When an individual identifies with a social category (IE Group Role), they do so to enhance self-esteem. If instead the individual feels that they do not belong in the social category, the self-esteem is actually decreased, because they fear rejection from the group if discovered. (Oakes & Turner, 1980; Wagner, Lampen, & Syllwasschy, 1986).

Social identity research suggests that the more aware one is of one’s group position, either in-group or out-group, the more like one is to perceive homogeneity within the in-group, and a personal position as an out-group member (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p. 25). Such awareness of group position could potentially increase feelings of imposter syndrome, particularly if an individual's performance does not seem entirely homogenized.

Considering the ideas of Imposter Phenomenon, gender, Social Identity Theory, intersectionalities of identities, and performative aspects of life in the academy, the authors applied a communicative lens to these arenas. Performance of identity is exposed and analyzed through the lens of autoethnography.

Methodology

Education is a culture where faculty balance multiple identities in the classroom (DeSimone, 2001). These identities are compounded for female faculty members or for faculty who don’t identify with the dominant culture of their institution (Kelly & McCann, 2014). As communication professors, we explore our identity construction through communicative channels, particularly the concept of performance. In order to examine these components, an autoethnographic approach was utilized through a content analysis of discussions, text messages, emails, class lecture notes, a shared Google document where reflections were stored, discussion of the imposter syndrome survey, and social media posts. This communication transpired over a five year period. Such personal narratives provide a foundation to theorize the Self (Danahay-Reed, 1997). The examination of the autoethnographic narrative provides a script which faculty experiencing imposter syndrome follow.

Kelly and McCann (2014) researched the experiences of women faculty of color with regards to why women left the tenure track. Their literature review, while focused on women of color, identified several barriers to women's experiences' in the professoriate: "sexist climate, gender inequity, a sense of mentoring ...being asked to teach and serve more than male faculty" all of which result in low job satisfaction (pg. 682). Additional research by Vargas (1999) suggests that muting of women at the peer-to-peer level is reflected in muting of female faculty by male students, an action which can increase feelings of imposterness. Being female in the male dominated world of tenured faculty limits the narrative that can be presented. In this way, the narrative told by both female faculty identifies them as "Other", ensuring a muted voice in the greater university dialogue. When a female faculty member, or a faculty member of color, internalizes this experience, she begins (or continues) to embody the imposter phenomenon/syndrome. Examining the script created both internally and externally enables us to recognize and dissect the impact of the imposter phenomenon.

Identity and self(ves) become an important part of the instructional environment and the college campus context. How we view ourselves is unerringly influenced by how we are viewed by others. Being situated in a context that contradicts one's personal perceptions can become a catalyst to work against the organizational culture or to try to work with it. Faculty must make conscious decisions to narrate personal scripts in class in order to create or deny consubstantiation, depending on whether the faculty feel they can push their students farther into learning by being joined or creating distance. The scripts used, whether for joining or creating distance, must have a sense of immediacy in order for students to engage in the performance of identity in the moment.

Autoethnography is part of our chosen theoretical framework, as it provides us an opportunity to combine analysis, feelings, narratives, and actions based on our own roles as faculty members. Ethnography is defined as "an attempt to study life and culture in all of its complexities. It is the process of watching people interact in their own society, under their own terms and in their own language" (Kirk & Miller, 1986 p. 109). Autoethnography takes a step past ethnography into the realm of the personal. Autoethnographers study their own interactions with society, using their own narratives, language, and terms. The authors are autoethnographers turning a critical eye to our own processes as we analyze the scripts we have created in our workplaces to deal with internal feelings of being an imposter at work. Previous work on autoethnography from Atkinson and Delamont remind us that our autoethnographic accounts

must be treated with analytic symmetry. We cannot proceed as if they were privileged accounts, or as if they gave the writer and the reader access to the private domain of personal experience. The autobiographical narratives of ethnographers are subject to the same cultural conventions as are any other of the social actions and performances they might document (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006).

Michaela Meyers (2007) writes that autoethnography "positions personal narrative and lived experience as the text, or data, for a particular study" (p. 21). Our use of autoethnographic writings gives us a performance text from which to draw long term implications for faculty members experiencing imposter syndrome.

Performances as an Imposter

We struggle with the casting we have been assigned and are using this paper to find our feet within our own internal scripts and our place in the larger script and performance of faculty at a

major institution. The two authors, Lora Helvie-Mason, Assistant Dean, and Prairie Endres-Parnell, instructor, sit in Helvie-Mason's new office in the spring semester of 2018 and discuss a survey we have both just completed dealing with feelings of imposter syndrome. We look at specific questions which were thought provoking for the both of us, and endeavor to write our reflections on the questions. Before we part ways, however, Endres-Parnell asks her how Helvie-Mason is handling the promotion to Assistant Dean. From Endres-Parnell's perspective, Helvie-Mason is an impressive, positive-minded, highly intelligent force to be reckoned with on campus. As we sit in Helvie-Mason's office, however, she shares that she does not think she belongs in the chair behind the desk. That prompts Endres-Parnell to laugh and reflect back to her office space; one where she has lost out (again) on a windowed office to another faculty member who outranks her instructor status. In Endres-Parnell's mind, Helvie-Mason has more than earned her office and her responsibility and is handling the position marvelously. She begs to differ. Endres-Parnell reflects that she was correctly denied the window (due to perceptions of being a "lowly" instructor), while Helvie-Mason reminds Endres-Parnell of her longevity and dedication to the university. Both authors perceive ourselves as undeserving of our current roles, or, at the very least, not deserving of more than our current roles.

A change in perspective of the same moment in time, viewed from Helvie-Mason's perspective sheds light on the double bind of imposter syndrome. Helvie-Mason sees Endres-Parnell as a leader in research across our entire department, outperforming many on the tenure-track. She is one of two faculty members to serve as an officer in multiple national and international organizations. Additionally, she does more service work with student groups than any of our faculty. Helvie-Mason perceives Endres-Parnell as someone with solid time management skills, effective as an instructor, researcher, and faculty member. It was news to Helvie-Mason that Endres-Parnell felt the sting of IP.

The scripts the authors both struggle with, as identified by P. R. Clance in the Clance Imposter Phenomenon Scale (CIP), include faculty evaluations, being in the right place at the right time, feeling like success has been an error, feeling like success has been due to luck, discounting or deflecting or deferring praise and recognition, and not telling others when we receive a promotion or gain recognition (Clance, 1985). The entire survey consists of a 20-item measure and is in the appendix. Helvie-Mason scored an 86 on the measure, while Endres-Parnell scored an 89. Any score higher than 80 indicates intense imposter phenomenon experiences.

Externally, the moments that give the two authors pause follow traditional politeness scripts, as anticipated in our university culture. We know the "correct" responses to the moments of interaction and have educated ourselves on the scripts to repeat. Our repetition of the appropriate scripts of interaction enables us to pass in the moment but does not ensure that our perceived identity is actually internalized. As noted in Jewett (2010):

Identities can be claimed, ascribed, contested, resisted, and adapted in a wide range of ways through both individual and collective performances and discourses (e.g., Hall, 2002; Lewis, 2003; Wortham, 2006). They are both a set of processes and a set of relations; the former emphasizing the "ongoing, interactive, mobilized, in-use nature" and the latter foregrounding the ways in which "we see or define ourselves in relation to various individuals and groups, specific life situations, and particular contexts" (Dolby & Cornbleth, 2001, p. 293). Moreover, identities are always situated in contexts of power and privilege, thereby shaping the ways in which they are understood and enacted.

Within the university structure, interactions with other faculty and staff, and the classroom, we feel required to fulfill the expectation of power and the shape of privilege while simultaneously feeling internally as if we were performing under a mask. Our practical scripts fail to penetrate the internal dialogue affected by the imposter phenomenon.

Griffin summarized the Social Identity Theory as a way of gaining insight into the continuum from personality identity to social identity. The process of developing social identity went from 1) desire for approval, 2) convergence with a group, 3) positive response within the group causing the individual to maintain identity. However, Griffin noted that when it's important to be "in-group" then the process changes to 1) need for distinctiveness of social identity, 2) acceptance that divergence may cause a negative response (Griffin, Ledbetter, & Sparks, 2019). We, as humans, are predisposed to focus on either individual or group identity. We suggest that those who are affected by the imposter phenomena are more focused on the group identity than the individual identity. Additional research needs to investigate the effect of cultural type on effects of imposter phenomenon. We question whether an individual who is predisposed toward collectivistic tendencies would experience greater or lesser imposter phenomenon impact in their work lives. Quantitative data would be needed to further explore this question. Anecdotal evidence from student evaluations suggests that collectivist teaching tendencies, spoken and written evidence of faculty support, help this instructor reduce feelings of imposter syndrome when teaching upper level courses.

After taking the IP survey, Endres-Parnell reflected that the results may have been different had she concentrated on her work in the equine industry. Endres-Parnell has been a college instructor since 2004. She has worked with horses daily since the age of 6. When riding a horse, there is no room for doubt or second guessing. While in the saddle, one cannot overthink, but must be in the moment. When she began teaching riding lessons in 1999, Endres-Parnell experienced flashes of doubt about her skills with horses. She struggled with allowing riding students to make their own mistakes on horseback, knowing that an error could potentially result in a serious injury. She began to develop what her riding students called the "resting instructor face," a name coined because they could not give the colloquial "resting bitch face" label. Over the years, Endres-Parnell continued to improve her equestrian skills, as well as her teaching skills. She got better at saying the "right" things to riders to help them learn, to gain confidence, and to improve their skills. Then, she began teaching adults. One adult was, in her everyday life, a doctor of physical therapy, extremely intelligent, quick to learn, and, initially, easy to teach. The longer she remained as a student, however, the more teacher and student pushed each other's buttons. Two years into lessons she bought her own horse and decided she no longer needed instruction. Endres-Parnell found that her role transitioned from valued instructor to friend, to friend who was randomly bossy. Despite the changes in roles, her confidence in her skills as an equestrian has not diminished. Endres-Parnell could claim clearly, "I know my skills around horses." She found she cannot doubt, because to doubt her own skills would be to invite injury. In the communication and theatre classrooms there are no life or death moments. She confounds her own cognitive processes when she doubts her skills as a faculty member, but has no problem directing a 1200-pound animal. In the faculty world, the advice was, "fake it till you make it - your students won't know," but in the horse world, your horse will tell on you every time.

Endres-Parnell paid close attention when she arrived at college to see what a professor did: how they maintained control of the classroom, when they lost control, how they spoke, which professors were easily respected and which were not. As a theatre major, she imitated her

professors, trying to repeat their performances. Moving into graduate school for her MFA, there was an assignment where students had to follow a classmate around and perform them the following week. She struggled with the assignment, wondering, “Am I giving a truthful performance? What if my classmate didn’t like my performance? What if I wasn’t believable? What constituted “them?”” Stets and Serpe (2013) write, “An important concept in identity theory is identity verification. *Identity verification* [sic] is individuals perceiving that others see them in a situation in the same way they see themselves” (Stets & Serpe, 2013, pp 35). Endres-Parnell worried that she was not performing her classmates as they would want to be performed. When it was her turn to be performed, she saw a performance of an energetic, shallow, horse-obsessed young (oh so young) woman. She rejected the performance. She rejected the perception of her performed identity. Following this assignment, she struggled with anxiety and her overall place within the MFA program for months, a struggle which culminated in being denied entrance to the DFA program, while simultaneously being cast for a main stage show. Again, two perceptions of self-warred: was she a good performer? Was she intelligent? Did she deserve to be a performer? Did she deserve an advanced degree, and a place to teach?

The show must go on, and so she did. Endres-Parnell moved through the main stage performances and threw herself into the field of rhetoric and communication. She felt it had been dumb luck that had gotten her that far. The scripts created by the anxiety about being an imposter in the MFA program had been written, and she repeated them and dragged them into her career as an academic in the field of communication. Christine Overall (1997) writes:

My teaching involves performance in at least two different senses. First, I (must) give a performance as I teach, warming up for my role as instructor, preparing to present a public exhibition of my philosophical skills. Especially with large classes, I must be ready to entertain, to sustain the attention of an audience accustomed to the excitement and fast pace of television and video. And whatever the size of the class, I must pretend enthusiasm on days when I feel none, withhold impatience at times when I am infused with it, and suppress anxiety or fear when these are my dominant emotions. Teaching is also a performance in a second way. If my feelings of fraudulence lead me to fear that I am not really an academic, then I can only pretend to be one. If I am not an authentic teacher, then I merely play the teacher, pretend to be the teacher. I don the behaviors and language of a genuine scholar. To act is not really to be. If I am giving a performance when I teach, then, it seems, I am not really being myself. If I cannot feel genuine while teaching, it is not surprising that I feel like an imposter. The nature of teaching as performance contributes to my feelings of fraudulence (pp. 5).

Overall’s reflection suggests that even as we “fake it till we make it,” the act of engaging in performance makes the feelings of imposter-hood stronger. What Endres-Parnell failed to realize as she embraced communication studies over theatre was that the need to perform never went away, neither in regards to wanting to perform a fictional role, nor in the need to perform as a faculty member.

Similar to horse instructor/human instructor, Helvie-Mason felt conflicted in her roles as professor and administrator. As a first generation college student from a low socioeconomic background, Helvie-Mason often felt that college wasn’t “her” space, that she would be “found out” as someone who “wasn’t college material.” This was likely exacerbated by a high school guidance counselor telling her she was “too poor” to go to college, despite being near the top of

her class. She learned early on in the academic world to “fake it”. She spent her first year of college questioning if she belonged and constantly thought of dropping out. As she completed her first year, she determined to “figure it out” and doubled down on “faking it” to prove/justify her presence in that “elite” world. To that end, she worked to be perfect at each class, often rewriting assignments and re-submitting drafts to ensure she showed comprehension of class materials, never missing a class, attending all extra learning opportunities and study sessions. She studied in shifts despite working multiple jobs; her goal was to avoid missing a single question (as if one red X would reveal that she was an imposter). She could out-work the doubt and somehow prove she belonged.

Graduate school involved her first teaching experience, one where she taught two people from her high school class. Her journals reflect that she had to “put on armor” to avoid being “found out” as someone who didn’t deserve their place at the podium. But, after teaching her first semester, she knew she had found a passion, a fit, regardless who was in the class. This was reinforced after teaching in a prison program with limited resources - if she can teach there, she thought, she could facilitate learning anywhere. Within her journey, Helvie-Mason found that her work within the classroom remained as the anchor of her academic identity. She often felt rejuvenated after teaching, felt centered, felt connected to university life.

When performing as administrator, however, she found herself cycling through assumptions, “people think I’m too young for this role,” “My budgetary experience is not enough,” “A better grant writer would have found more funding for this initiative,” “A better departmental advocate would have received approval for this position” - and the merry-go-round of doubt continued. Her confidence (and sense of self) stemmed almost holistically from teaching and the remaining items, though with years of experience, continued to push questioning aspects of identity and self to the surface when positions or institutions shifted. This became increasingly problematic when her teaching roles lessened as administrative responsibilities increased. Throughout conversations with Endres-Parnell, Helvie-Mason came to understand the true “administrator” performance that took place each day and how it often served to exhaust or deplete her at the end of her non-teaching days.

Rhetorical Implications

The concept of performance of a role is echoed time and again in the research on imposter syndrome/phenomenon. An aspect of the imposter literature we must take a moment to rhetorically analyze is that of the labeling of syndrome versus phenomenon. Per the Oxford English Dictionary, a syndrome is “a concurrence of several symptoms in a disease; a set of such concurrent symptoms” (2018). In comparison, a phenomenon is “a thing which appears, or which is perceived or observed; a particular (kind of) fact, occurrence, or change as perceived through the senses or known intellectually; *esp.* a fact or occurrence, the cause or explanation of which is in question” (2018). These definitions offer subtle differences relative to the application of the terms in the life of one who is experiencing the effects. Watson and Betts (2010) studied the impact of the Imposter Syndrome on doctoral students, citing the original Clance and Imes article from 1978. In 1978 the choice of syndrome reflected an attempt to codify and organize the identified experiences. Research in the intervening years uses the terms interchangeably. Watson and Betts (2010) even change their term usage from paragraph to paragraph. Rhetorically positioning the term as a phenomenon removes the direness of suggesting the anxiety is a disease and distances women from the hysteria of the early 1900s. Use of the term

phenomenon defines the experience as something known but not damaging and turns it into something that can be managed.

We must, as communication scholars, challenge the terminology used in our research. Imposter Phenomenon has also been known as Imposter Syndrome or Fraud Syndrome. Clance and Imes' 1978 work was inspired by an article by Martina Horner (1969) discussing the "double bind" women faced when attempting to perform well at school and work and contrasting that desire for external success with the expectations society held for women in the home. IP is not insecurity, nor is it an esteem issue, as people who have IP often have high self-esteem but feel like imposters in a specific aspect of their lives (Harvey & Katz, 1985; Young 2011). It is important, as Aldridge Sanford, et. al (2015) note, to realize that IP is not the fault of the individual, but rather is part of larger cultural expectations and long-standing systems. This further removes the phenomenon from the realm of disease. Therefore, we advocate further research on this topic to make use of the terminology of phenomenon, not syndrome. However, the language of those who came before binds us and is used in this text.

Imposter Teaching Performances

Mary Rose O'Reilly writes as if the imposter syndrome were a permanent feature of teaching, as if teaching performances are an immutable source of ethical paradox. She says,

If we are being honest and attentive, I think there is always a place of discomfort in our teaching practice, a place of incongruity between our beliefs and our conduct ... Maybe at certain stages you have to try on a lot of masks until you find one that fits your face, or until you feel comfortable appearing without one (and strong enough to take the consequences) (1993).

Overall (1997) expands on this concept:

I believe it can be productive to act as if you have confidence, as if you have authority, as if you know what you are doing. Teaching is acting; to be a good teacher is to be a successful actor. 'The best we can do is to be conscious about our choices, keep distinguishing in our own minds between the mask and the face: today I will pretend this much, risk this much. Aim to pretend less and less, but don't outrun your strength.' (O'Reilly, quoted in Overall (1997)).

Changes in the requirements of the assigned roles can trigger new onsets of Imposter Phenomenon. In our journaling and discussion in working on this paper, both authors took the Clance Imposter Phenomenon Scale (CIP).

As was evidenced in discussion after taking the Clance Imposter Phenomenon Scale (CIP), IP was triggered for Helvie-Mason by a change of culture and role. Though IP was felt intermittently throughout college -- especially in the doctoral program as a first-generation college student, the IP felt conquerable and manageable after "bouts" or down times. After years of teaching at a four-year, two-year and within a prison education program, Helvie-Mason felt at ease with teaching and felt she could relate to all students under a variety of stress-filled cultures (prison, post-hurricane, etc.). It was not until she moved to an incredibly different culture (Texas, predominantly white, rural) to embrace a new position (Director) that IP began to creep up again. It was still manageable and fell more in the realm of culture shock than troubling issues of self-efficacy, but doubt began to creep in after years of feeling secure in who she was and what she was doing in the classroom/institution. (external recognitions, awards, etc.).

IP tackled, smacked, and floored Helvie-Mason the minute she transitioned “up” to Department Head five years after taking the Director position. Within moments of taking the position, she realized that she would be “discovered” as a fake, that the faculty would “see through” her, and that she would surely fail at this transition. This feeling manifested itself into a certainty that she had grossly overreached. Journals from the time reflect her self-doubt noting, “Why did I ever think I could or should do this?” and writing that people would realize she was incompetent. She wrote others might think she was unable to handle the job, and that “no one else had wanted the job, she was a last resort candidate.” This feeling took over all parts of her work, seeping into her self-efficacy around conferences, service, research and even teaching.

Endres-Parnell and Helvie-Mason shared social mediated reflections of work. Helvie-Mason noticed her social media feeds no longer showed her holistic self, but almost exclusively turned to daily exhaustive details of how much work she had to do, how she was “at work” or “still working” or tackling work. As she recently reflected on the feeds, over a year’s worth, she realized that the change in role had deeply impacted her self-perception, her self-efficacy as a professor, and had frozen her. She had always believed she gotten to where she was by “outworking” the other or “working when others slept”(as evidenced by her time as an undergraduate) -- but as she explored more about IP, she realized the truth of Vergauwe, Wille, Feys, DeFruyt, and Anseel’s (2015) findings, imposters will overwork in an attempt to overcompensate for the weaknesses they see in themselves. Social media has now provided a platform for this imposter to announce/declare/share the fact she is working, almost as though she has to prove to the world she deserves her space at the table.

The literature supports the importance of role in the experience of IP, noting that people are most susceptible to IP when they tackle a new job, project, promotion or degree (Clance, 1985; Harvey & Katz, 1985; Jarrett, 2010). As individuals become more secure in their expected roles, IP can settle into normalcy, only to be exacerbated by changes or additions to the assigned role. This extended moment in Helvie-Mason’s work life illustrates how a change in role can trigger or enflame IP and how IP in one aspect of work can start to influence self-efficacy in other aspects of work and self, if not actively addressed. Additionally, Watson and Betts (2010) note that the common elements of analysis they found in their own autoethnography reveal tensions between role expectations. The three themes that emerged in their research were fear, family, and fellowship, all associated with role expectations (2010).

The concept of role performance is seen in email and text exchanges between authors as well as written documentation of reflective conversations during Helvie-Mason’s time as Department Chair. Fears about the ability to perform roles warred against fears associated with being uncovered as frauds. Endres-Parnell reflected back to a meeting with Helvie-Mason as department chair in the fall of 2017. Helvie-Mason encouraged Endres-Parnell to expand her teaching scope, and assured her that she could teach more upper level courses despite being “just” an instructor. The classes were successful, and Endres-Parnell recalls feeling “wonderful” when she performed the “faculty” role in challenging upper level students. Moving forward a year, however, Endres-Parnell was back to teaching introductory classes and Helvie-Mason left the chair position for assistant dean of the college. Endres-Parnell felt she had to put in extra efficacy work to believe that the return to introductory classes was happenstance, not a reflection of having been discovered as being fraudulent in her teaching skills. She found herself asking internally, “did I present that accurately? Did I present the correct research? Do my students believe me?” Simultaneously, Helvie-Mason flounders through feelings of confusion and

concern about her role, “Do I feel I belong here? Do others feel I belong here? Will others listen to me? Was this the right path?” A grain of hope remains in doing the research for this paper: those who experience IP are often high achieving and their doubts are unfounded.

Implications and Recommendations

Our research returns to the purpose of this paper - performing the role of professor. Research is a bit contradictory in overall recommendations. Some research suggests “fake it till you make it”, while other research suggests that the performance must be truthful. Work using a grounded theory approach to the imposter phenomenon identified consistent experiences and concerns: perceived fraudulence, discrediting evidence of competence, and self-doubt (Lane, 2015). As Hutchins, Penney, and Sublett (2018) note, IP is manageable with active coping approaches. With that in mind, and considering the high CIP scores, Endres-Parnell and Helvie-Mason actively consider opportunities to challenge encroaching IP. They have started a women’s writing accountability group, continue meeting with mentors, share journals (emails) about the survey results, discuss IP concepts and work on developing increased awareness of triggers and situational stressors. As Aldridge Sanford, Ross, Blake and Cambiano (2015) note, high-achieving women who don’t experience IP attribute their confidence in academia to strong mentoring relationships, romantic partners, and other women in leadership. With that in mind, both authors are striving to read, post, and explore social media that offsets IP overworking behavior and are reserving moments to journal with self-appreciative insight.

Conclusions

Readers who are also wrestling with IP may find comfort in knowing the diverse impact of this phenomenon. We encourage everyone to journal, self-reflect, and become more aware of situational stressors. As of the final editing of this essay, Covid-19 has impacted the educational environment in more ways than could ever be predicted. Faculty are being tasked to teach in ways that are alien, and it has been interesting to observe that in many departments the younger instructors have stepped up to guide tenure track faculty in online tools and teaching. This momentary necessity is tempered by the knowledge that future budget issues could ring the death knell for instructors and adjuncts across the American university landscape. Covid-19 has brought many educators to a sense of fraudulence. Even as we sit in our homes or silent offices working, we are dealing with our own stresses and moments of anxiety and depression. Yet, in Zooms across America faculty are showing up, cracking jokes, listening to students, helping parents, checking in on students who have become lost, and keeping their finger on the pulse of their classrooms despite distance and fatigue. Perhaps as we return to traditional university settings we can have more robust and diverse discussions of imposter phenomenon, and maybe, hopefully, we are feeling less like an imposter and more like we have held our world together for the next semester.

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Many teachers become dissatisfied and burnt out for a variety of reasons. As the pandemic and civil unrest continue, organizations should urgently find ways to build a sense of trust and address the physical, mental, and social emotional strains in order to sustain human capital. School leaders who exercise caution and self-care, will be more likely to help individual educators find ways to take care of themselves as they find the daily challenges and struggles more difficult to balance. Treating self-care as a serious measure during these critical times, educators are able to sustain themselves and give of themselves to others.

The Balance: Self-Care in a Time of Crisis

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In March of 2020, all school buildings in Texas were closed, leaving millions of students and parents worrying about the growing pandemic, and how this would affect their children academically. As a result, very quickly, educational leaders and teachers began the process of turning an eight-hour face-to-face curriculum into a virtual program. For most districts, the effort required unknown hours of work, as well as additional stress in an already tense environment during a crisis.

A couple of months later, everyone was beginning to settle into the reality of a quarantined summer and the anxiety of fall semester. Then, a series of racially motivated events renewed a movement of racial and social justice. Again, it was incumbent for district and school leadership to show support for their families, communities, students, and Black lives in general. The notion of being held accountable for the physical, social-emotional, and cognitive well-being for all children in words and actions during two concurrent crises loomed large.

The combination of the pandemic, social justice movement, planning for fall semester, and personal problems like family and trying to balance many roles has put undue stress on educators. Learning and practicing self-care will be vital to confront the struggles that lie ahead for schools, families, children, and school faculty. Teachers and leaders who are committed to investing their students and community may become overwhelmed and overstressed. The number of investments educators make daily can foretell feelings that, over time, lead to burnout (Kovan & Dirkx, 2003).

During the in-between times when the future of safe and secure schools is being debated, it is imperative that faculty and staff of each district learn quickly, become comfortable with change, manage stress, and produce programs and policies that equitably support students. If the pandemic highlighted the inequities that already existed in schools, then the social justice movement highlighted how bias and racism add to those effects. But it also leaves an opportunity to address these issues in creative ways and with a committed group of people dedicated to the effort. Knowing that the road ahead will be long, how can educators balance their self-care before burnout upends our most valuable asset? The following model for Sustainable Self-Care is based on empirical studies related to burnout, self-care, resiliency, and activism. The sustainable self-care model is also one way to prioritize the needs of educators to continue the work of ushering communities through this time and attending to your own care routine.

Burnout

Pines (1994) definition of burnout is “the end result of a process in which idealistic and highly committed people lose their spirit” (p.381). “Staff burnout likely leads to high rates of turnover

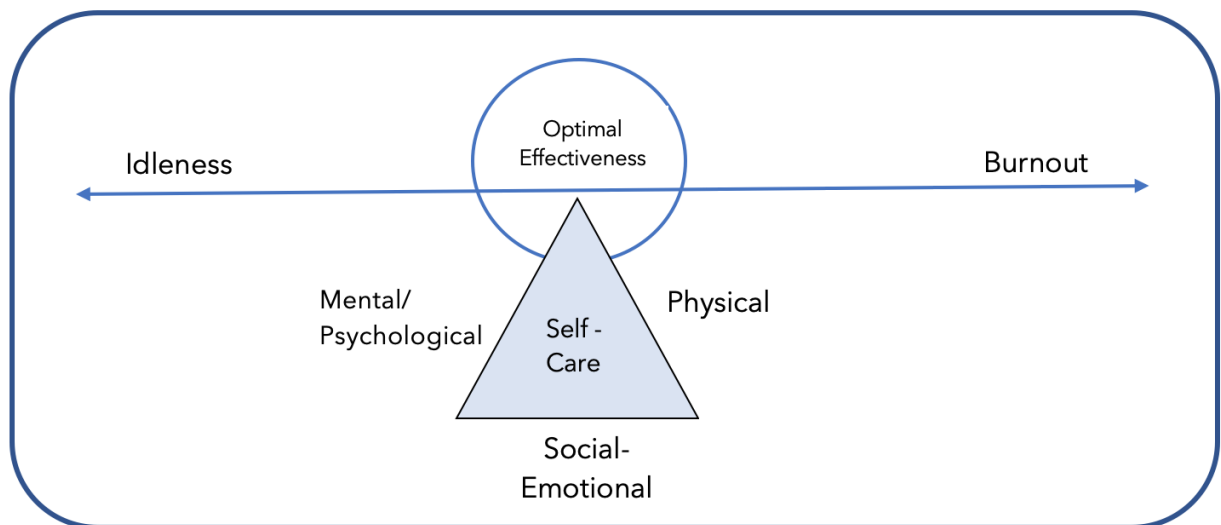
generally (Kolaski & Taylor, 2019), but can be seen more intensely during times of crisis. Burnout is one of the main reasons many educators become disillusioned or fatigued with the work they are doing for children. Various reasons can contribute to teacher attrition, but those most susceptible may leave because their passion and identities are tied to the job and, thus, they expend emotional labor into their work (Gorski & Chen, 2015; Hochschild, 1983). Teachers are dissatisfied with organizational structures that inhibit them from doing their job effectively (Santoro, 2019).

Research supports the linking of burnout with turnover (Siefert, Jayaratne, & Chess, 1991), negative behaviors on the job (Randall & Scott, 1988), and symptoms of fatigue, insomnia, and illnesses that could lead to depression (Norcross & Guy, 2007). Studies have also linked burnout to age, training, job satisfaction, lack of supportive relationships with peers and lack of coworkers' support (Lakin, Leon, & Miller, 2008). Maslach and Gomes (2006) synthesized symptoms of burnout by into three categories: "(a) exhaustion (feeling emotionally and physically drained), (b) cynicism (having negative associations with the work that once seemed so important), and (c) inefficacy (doubting self-worth and lack of activist achievement)" (p. 43). Many teachers become dissatisfied and burnt out for a variety of reasons. As the pandemic and civil unrest continue, organizations should urgently find ways to build a sense of trust and address the physical, mental, and social emotional strains in order to sustain human capital.

Balance Between Burnout and Self-Care

The definition for sustainable self-care is the individual process of attending to and awareness of one's basic physical and psychological needs as well as an awareness of the routines, relationships, and environments needed for optimal functioning (Cook-Cottone & Guyker, 2018). Self-care is not an excuse to exit or disengage in the process of addressing the educational needs for students in trying times. Instead, the educational community must still persevere even within the daily grind. Sustainable self-care should support educators' rejuvenation to continue in the work. The figure below (Figure 1) represents a model of self-care that balances the preservation of self and the work of an educator. It may look different for each person, but the model is a guide to help reflect on the process.

Figure 1.



While burnout is well known and researched. Idleness, while not discussed often, is just as detrimental as burnout. The absence of productivity produces idleness (O'Connor, 2013) not to be confused with rest or rejuvenation. This is, indeed, an action to preserve cognitive, social/emotional, and psychological functioning. "Rest is indeed not idleness, nor is it a wasted opportunity for productivity" (Immordino-Yang, Christodoulou, & Singh, 2012, p. 360).

Idleness and burnout can be two sides of the same coin. Idleness can be caused by fatigue or exhaustion. When an educator burns out due to an overabundance of stress, the result can be that state of inaction. Idleness can be seen in educators who have lost their purpose and effectiveness but are still responsible for children and the community. Or it can be unseen in educators who are not present and choose to be inactive, physically, psychologically, or emotionally. In either case, burnout or idleness renders the educator ineffective to the population they serve. The goal is to stay balanced because to tip to one side or the other, diminishes the ability to be productive and influence students.

The sustainable self-care model shows that in the middle of those two extremes is where educators are of optimal effectiveness. In the middle, school and classroom leaders have effectively learned to balance rest and rejuvenation with positive stresses. The mechanism to do this is shown in the fulcrum of the model. Learning to attune to your mental, physical, and psychological self and utilizing strategies to support the part of self that is being depleted.

Physical

The physical health of educators, especially during times of crisis, can be negatively affected by stress. The chronic daily stressors that educators are facing during this pandemic can manifest themselves through eating, drinking, and smoking (Morgan, Corrigan, & Baune, 2015). Chronic stress can also bring about a host of medical conditions and negatively affect the brain (Morgan et al., 2015). Educators will be more effective when they engage in healthy activities that counteract the negative effects of stress. Unfortunately, during times of crisis, leaders can't eliminate stress. The pandemic has created an environment where additional stresses have been added to their daily lives. However, Rotter's (1966) theory has been linked to a positive well-being (Spector, Cooper, Sanchez, O'Driscoll, & Sparks, 2002) and higher job satisfaction (Pavalache-Ilie & Ursu, 2016) for those who show an internal locus of control. An internal locus of control characterizes individuals who believe their actions determine their rewards (Rotter, 1966). Educators can control how they experience stress by addressing their physical needs through self-care.

Physical activity is a reliable way to increase blood flow and, hence, oxygen to the part of the brain that processes movement and learning (Jensen, 2005). Physical activity is required for students in our schools because its benefits to memory, attention, and cognition have been well documented (Jensen, 2005). Yet many educators are not engaging in those same practices that will support their role as they navigate this current period in history. Creativity, innovation, and focus are skills that are needed to address the unique needs of our community during a pandemic and social unrest.

Physical self-care will also combat exhaustion, tiredness, cynicism, and disengagement when one prioritizes their physical needs (Pavalache-Ilie & Ursu, 2016). These symptoms are signs that regaining balance is needed by creating a consistent schedule of physical self-care. The key to sustainable self-care is creating a daily routine in order to stay balanced. Listening to their body and attending to its needs means the educator is engaging in daily work to maintain balance and

optimal effectiveness. Whether the routine consists of proper sleep, yoga, walking, or running, simply moving the body helps to combat many of the symptoms of stress, burnout, and idleness.

Social-Emotional

Emotional intelligence is the ability for teachers “to perceive, understand, express, and manage emotional information” (D’Amico, Geraci, & Tarantino, 2020, p. 64). The management of emotional information is also known as emotional balance. This refers specifically to an employee’s ability to manage their emotional experiences internally when confronted with difficult situations in the workplace (McEwen, 2011). The ability to control and regulate emotions is directly related to burnout and job satisfaction (D’Amico et al., 2020).

Managing emotions does not suggest teachers won’t experience a variety of emotions. Specifically, during a crisis, educators may be more emotional than in “normal” times. Addressing our emotional self-care includes learning to regulate emotions to match the situation at hand. Teachers who improve their emotional balance and regulation create a better educational environment for their students (Fried, Mansfield, & Dobozy, 2015).

However, as teachers learn to regulate their emotions in a positive way, it becomes a protective factor against burnout, or another way to practice self-care to stay balanced. Strategies that will support your emotional sustainable self-care include journaling, internal reflection, improving self-awareness, and daily check-ins to learn how to appreciate and value experiences and choices.

Mental/Psychological

Without a doubt, the success of an educator will also depend on mechanisms that support mental fortitude, determination, and perseverance. Crust (2008) labeled it mental toughness (MT) and related it to optimal performance in the role of an educator. MT is conceptualized as a characteristic that allows individuals to buffer themselves against the effects of stress (Crust, 2008). Mental toughness is related to various characteristics such as self-efficacy and mindset. More recent research has broken MT into two components including: reframing problems and embracing life (McEwen, 2011). These two components support educators in addressing novel problems related to teaching and learning in this context, while also enjoying the challenge and the benefits.

Reframing problems is also connected to resilience, a trait that helps educators be present and effective regardless of outside circumstances. Just as we foster this for students, it must also be nurtured in teachers. The ability of educators to be resilient can also be fostered through personal interactions in the job and the broader community. Employees who have been described as optimistic frame problems as challenges which leads to higher levels of job satisfaction (Healy & McKay, 2000; Stagman-Tyrer, 2014). Educators can practice these skills as a part of their self-care routine through reflection (personal and with peers), meditation, and being intentional about seeing problems as challenges and not roadblocks.

In addition, educators need to understand their job has meaning and significance. Psychological meaningfulness must also be addressed. According to Gorski and Chen (2015), one component to activist burnout for those interested in educational and social justice is: (a) exhaustion (feeling emotionally and physically drained); (b) cynicism (having negative associations with the work that once seemed so important); and (c) inefficacy (doubting self-worth and lack of activist achievement) (Gorski & Chen, 2015; Maslach & Gomes, 2006).

If current teachers can be characterized as warriors for educational justice during this crisis, then the same psychological constraints can be applied. Educational leaders, parents, and community members can support educators in understanding that the planning and the work being done for students is important and valued.

Supporting teachers' sense of purpose and validating the meaning of the work behind the scenes also supports teachers as they care for themselves and others. Building positive relationships with coworkers and the community should also be a part of the daily self-care regimen for educators. While the pandemic may not allow for face-to-face connections, personal connections can still be done through digital avenues. Educators should also prioritize and cultivate their current positive relationships as a part of a sustainable self-care routine in times of crisis.

Lasting Effects of Not Taking Care of Self

There are lasting effects of not taking care of one's own personal self that have been documented. Rettig (2006) lamented that the burnt-out activist "also deprives her organization and movement of her valuable experience and wisdom" (p. 16). An organization that loses talented employees also see those effects in the bottom line. In education, the bottom line is directly related to the physical, cognitive, and social-emotional well-being of the students and families in the community. Teacher retention has been a concern for the field, considering most teachers will leave the profession within the first five years (NCTAF, 2010). Research (Santoro, 2019) shows that many teachers will cite burnout as a reason for leaving the profession. Even before educators leave physically, checking out mentally also does a disservice to the community and others. This is because activists who experience burnout nearly always cut back on or completely disengage from their activism (Maslach & Gomes, 2006; Rodgers, 2010; Vacarro & Mena, 2011).

Rettig (2006) concluded, "The worst problem, however, may be that when an activist burns out, she deprives younger activists of a mentor, thus making them more likely to burn out" (p. 16). In other words, understanding the nature of, and then finding ways to mitigate, activist burnout in education is an important step toward sustaining the efforts of other committed individuals. Tapping into the knowledge and expertise of those who came before is vital to understanding and continuing the work of supporting out students and families. It is also a crucial step toward sustaining social justice movements that validate the lived experiences of students who have been marginalized by the system (Lorde, 1988; Plyler, 2006; Wollman & Wexler, 1992).

Likewise, school leaders who exercise caution and self-care, will be more likely to help individual educators find ways to take care of themselves as they find the daily challenges and struggles more difficult to balance. Treating self-care as a serious measure during these critical times, educators are able to sustain themselves and give of themselves to others. The model of sustainable self-care is a measure to support the care, talent, and mission of the educators and education.

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A women's mentoring program can offer an opportunity to connect and elevate women faculty members, and research has shown positive effects from institutional mentoring programs for women (Dashper, 2018; Voytko, 2018). The Women's Mentoring Network has been a safe space for young women to receive invaluable mentorship from other women who have been successful, and for women to practice their mentorship skills.

Women’s Mentoring Network — From the Keyboards of Intentional Women

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Abstract

Women from a mentoring network in Texas share through letters what the mentoring project has meant to them. The women represent staff and faculty at different stages of their careers within higher education. Through their narratives, they reveal the diverse impact and influence of mentoring, both giving and receiving, and what a fledgling mentoring program can accomplish for a campus.

Keywords: mentoring, higher education, women, Women’s Mentoring Network

Women’s Mentoring Network — From the Keyboards of Intentional Women

From informal to formal programs, women are bypassing existing, and sometimes exclusive, networks, to create and improve academic spaces for other women. At one university in Texas, the Women’s Mentoring Network was developed with that exact purpose in mind. Educational campuses involve informal networks where paths may traditionally overlook women. On the campus at an institution of higher education, faculty and staff members who are women may find themselves out of the communication loop, unaware of opportunities presented to counterparts, or simply overlooked by the academic structure.

The launch of the Women’s Mentoring Network in 2018-19 was an effort to redirect traditional campus channels and involve women more directly in leadership and administrative opportunities. By focusing on women’s leadership and administrative skills, more women can move to the “table” and have input on their campuses. Moving to the table requires navigating waters that may be unfamiliar and collecting and polishing emerging skills needed. Mentoring is one way women can gain the confidence, networking, goal-setting, and career planning (Dashper, 2018; Montgomery, 2017) they may need for climbing ladders in their institutions. Kalbfleisch (2002, 2007) defines mentoring as a relationship of care and assistance between mentors and mentees. Mentoring can help inform and equip women to navigate and negotiate their surroundings. Kolb (2009) says organizational catalysts (term from Sturm 2001, 2009) play “a major role in shaping the contexts in which individuals negotiate by providing them with information and helping them make key connections and uncover the root causes of inequalities” (p. 526). We argue one such catalyst is a mentoring network.

A women’s mentoring program can offer an opportunity to connect and elevate women faculty members, and research has shown positive effects from institutional mentoring programs for women (Dashper, 2018; Voytko, 2018). To date, about 45 members have invested in the Women’s Mentoring Network (WMN) and represent every corner of the academy. Women from all disciplines join virtually or physically when they can from multiple campuses within the university’s system. From sciences to liberal arts to student affairs, professionally, the women are instructors, librarians, assistant professors, managers, directors, associate professors, former department heads, and even full professors. Members of the network were invited to write letters to the Women’s Mentoring Network about what it means to them. What follows is a collection of letters about an intentional space by women, for women.

From a “Fight” to “Lifting Up”

Dear WMN,

I remember being in graduate school and being told that women have to “fight for their place” in higher education, particularly considering the glass ceiling. It evoked such a sense of struggle, where my vivid imagination pictured women clawing one another to move up. As an advocate, I encourage us (the academy) to disavow the former “one woman at the top” mentality that plagued higher education. The idea that only one woman could advance made women distance from one another, feel in constant competition, and avoid showing perceived areas of weakness. In fact, there is room for everyone and the academy benefits from diverse voices. For this reason, I serve, informally or formally, as a mentor to students and faculty. We are better working together.

After my work with many junior faculty members focused on planning for tenure and balancing that avalanche of service requests with time for research, I formed an informal group to offer advice on writing accountability. In my mind, this was focused on combating the over-expectation of service often disproportionately piled on female faculty and to help them emphasize their research and writing. Selfishly, such a group would be an efficient way for me to manage common threads of need. I named this the Women’s Writing Accountability Group in April 2018 and invited mentees, colleagues, and voices who could help speak to women’s experiences in the academy.

However, in the conversations that were supposedly about research, we dipped into issues of work/life balance, career advancement opportunities and risks, navigating expectations of others, mentorship, fatigue, course redesign, strategic needs, grant writing, and how to navigate political waters in higher education. It was clear – my once-little writing group had grown into something much bigger than our initial charge.

With this desire for community present, the focus shifted to a true network where women could connect, learn, share, grow, and be vulnerable. I drafted the initial focus for the Tarleton Women’s Mentoring Network (WMN) and was, in a happy accident, nearly simultaneously asked to serve as our institution’s representative for Texas Women in Higher Education. That role brought some small resources to the table to allow us to gather around food and consider different campus space for our conversations. WMN launched in September 2019. It had the writing accountability sub-group, a leadership series of speakers, and the option for “minute

mentoring” matches, as well as the informal goal of community building for women in higher education.

Listening to women over the past few years it was clear we did not need to feel any guilt or expectation with attendance, so it is optional. The mentoring matches rotate several times a year and the only expectation is a cup of coffee conversation for those who opt to be matched with someone, and the leadership series informs us on career decisions, identity, and mountains of relevant advice. The hunger for information was clear from our first panel speakers – the guests filled our meeting room (and connected virtual space) and fired off questions to our unsuspecting panelists. The discussion was robust and enlightening.

As the depth of our conversations spread, so did our size. Instead of one person “running” a program, we have a committee of dedicated women offering programming, leadership, and insight. Women attend seeking different items: community, space to share, advice, networking, research collaborations, or just to listen. The size varies from week to week and we are still figuring out a structure that makes sense to us, but we have hit on a space that works well for many women on campus.

Though unintentionally, we have also discovered that this style of network-based communication dismantles previous silos and separations within our institution. We have new paths to explore, collaborate, consider, and question.

When women look at one another and think, “How do I lift her up?” instead of “there’s only room for one,” we become a true community of support, a true network, true mentors and mentees. This approach can help lessen the individual struggle or fight and start to make in-roads for systemic and structural change.

Sincerely,

Lora Helvie-Mason

Founder

Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs

Few Seats to Formidable Team

Dear WMN,

I was raised to believe that I can achieve anything with hard work and confidence, yet the toolset required to be successful in the academy is more multi-faceted. Young women in the upper echelons of the academy can be few. A PhD prepares us for scholarship and teaching in our area of interest, but academia is a place where there are unspoken rules that contribute to our success. There is no manual or guidebook for navigating institutional norms, politics, or unwritten rules.

The Women’s Mentoring Network has been a safe space for young women to receive invaluable mentorship from other women who have been successful, and for women to practice their mentorship skills. In the first months of the organization, we have heard from some of the most successful women at our institution, and the contributing factors to their success. In each case, the stories contained powerful moments in early careers where a more experienced woman empowered them, underscoring the importance of women viewing each other as partners in developing a formidable team rather than competitors for a few seats at the table.

Signed,

Amber Harris Bozer

Assistant Professor, Psychological Sciences

A Pathway and a Safe Environment

Dear Women's Mentoring Network,

As far back as I can remember, I have always had a passion to give; I love to pour into other people whether that be through offering support, sharing words of encouragement, addressing challenges, identifying solutions, or providing help. I entered the profession of social work because I firmly believe that no person is immune from the need for help at some point in the course of their lifetime. We are all one step away from heartache, loss, unemployment, financial struggle, familial strife, or poverty. I always wanted to be the helper with individuals when life happens and help is needed. However, needing help and asking for help are very different. Although I praise the step of reaching out and asking for help with my clients as a social worker and teach the importance of doing so to my students as a social work educator, as a woman I have found this hard for me to do personally in my own life.

Like many women, I hold many roles, working professional, mother, spouse, friend, daughter, teacher, and the list goes on. As women, I think, many times, we are afraid to be really vulnerable for fear of being judged or to ask for help for fear of appearing weak or incapable. We compare and look around us seeing other women who appear to make it look easy and have it all together in their life, which only reinforces this notion of keeping our real struggles hidden, resolving our challenges alone, and remaining insulated and closed off.

My wakeup call, to my discomfort in being able to ask for help, came when my first child was born. I had read every possible parenting book ahead of time but nothing truly prepares you for the experience and the level of exhaustion that ensues. I had strong signs and symptoms of postpartum depression, and I knew from my professional background that I was struggling, yet, I was too afraid to disclose this to anyone for fear of judgment and my feelings of shame. I mean after all this was supposed to be the most joyous time in my life and I did not see other mothers around me encountering this experience when they had their children. If it was not for a very good friend, who picked up on my symptoms and recognized through her own observation that I was not okay and of her insistence to help me, I am fearful of what the alternative ending would have been. This made me realize that although I knew I needed help, asking for it was really hard, especially as a woman, but this help was crucial and became a fundamental turning point for me personally realizing the strength built through connection and reaching out.

Being a part of the Women's Mentoring Network has served as a pathway for women, like me, to provide support through offering a safe environment (without judgment) to be open, share struggles, and celebrate successes. I initially joined the mentoring network to give back and pour into other women; however, it has proven to be reciprocal for me as a safe space to universalize my struggles as a woman, learn new ideas, and identify solutions, especially as a working mother. Women face so many pressures internally and externally to meet high expectations today. I know I strive to be the best in all of my varying roles. And I have come to learn that the women of this group face similar challenges, and they are willing to open up because of the

creation of this safe space and share their vulnerabilities. My heart has come to finally realize what my mind has always known that asking for support and help is an incredible strength to be admired, as it is not easy, but vital for women to come together as a collective unit to empower and support one another as fellow women through the realities of life.

Our Women's Mentoring Network is important to modeling this value to our colleagues and the students that we teach, to encourage them to seek out support and build networks in their careers, moving the needle forward among women to embrace support and mentorship for growth and development. Indeed, strength has a million faces and we should share those strengths together with one another.

As Ever,

Misty G. Smith

Assistant Professor, Social Work

My Place, Our Place

Dear Women's Mentoring Network,

I am a lax participant, sadly! I wish I had more time to interact, and each time we meet I enjoy the discussions so much I am jazzed for the next session, which inevitably comes around and is forgotten in the moving parts of life. This program, despite my own lack of consistent participation, has no concern about my drop in and out status. The strong, dedicated women that make up the whole of this group understand and applaud and commiserate and gently chide me as needed to keep me on track. I have been mentored, helpfully, by this program, and have been assigned to mentor, an ongoing experience that forces me to step outside my comfort zone and admit that I do, sometimes, know things. This act of knowing things about my campus, about the people who work there, and the act of knowing these women who make things happen enables me to know that I can keep doing the uphill work that is important to me on campus.

The women in this program have supported one of the most important, near and dear to my heart programs that I work with: a yearly production of *The Vagina Monologues*. Within the space of this group, I can articulate the difficulties of staging such a show year in and year out, in a conservative, rural environment. These ladies know, and they show up. They donate, they participate, they purchase from the silent auction, they pass information out to their areas and classes. My students in the gay/straight alliance know these women, they hear me talk about what us women are accomplishing, and they know they have new allies on campus. Each year these women come to see our performances, even though the script does not change, sometimes the actresses don't change, but always we try to make change in our world. These women show up.

Through the women's mentoring network, I have written with wonderful women. I have had the opportunity to publish a book chapter, which would have been unfathomable without their support and encouragement. Two other group members and I submitted and were accepted for a journal article we wrote together. That publication was my first in a long, long time. I had considered myself outside of the realm of research as an instructor. The WMN changed that. The group reminded me that I have research to offer. I am submitting an article with another colleague from the group as well, and this article stemmed directly from early conversations

about the WMN and how the group would work, how we needed it to work, how we wanted it to work. Those conversations grew into an amazing article that I would not have felt prepared to write in other circumstances, but I feel wholeheartedly needs to be written and read. Perhaps this seems a bit much like a love letter to a group of ladies whom I wouldn't necessarily call friends, but that's ok. It is a letter of recognition for the importance and impact of those ladies in my life, whether they realized it or not.

So, from a lax participant who nevertheless needs this group, I will resolve once again to come to the meetings each time, to represent myself and my perspectives, and hold a space that is my own. This group allows me to be me: faculty, instructor, researcher, uncertain, smart, silly, motivated, yet slacking. This is my place, and it is our place.

With love,

Prairie Endres-Parnell

Instructor, Communication Studies

A Catalyst and Game-changer

Dear Women's Mentoring Network,

Your presence in my life has been a blessing; you have served as a career game-changer for me. Through you, my network has grown significantly—I started my journey with no idea how to find a mentor and now I have several professional women who I consider to be mentors and friends. I have learned so much from these women, as well as others in the group. I know that no matter where I go from here, I have people in my corner who I admire and respect.

When I graduated with my doctoral degree last year, I had no idea what my next steps would be moving forward. I also had doubts about my abilities to be a professional woman and a mother successfully. I took a leap of faith and awkwardly attended the inaugural meeting of the Women's Mentoring Network. It was one of the best decisions of my life. I have worked at my university for almost a decade without hardly speaking to anyone outside of my department until I joined this group. I always looked on at campus events and wanted to speak to people but never knew how to start the conversation. You served as a catalyst for me to step out of the sidelines and my comfort zone to speak with the people that I always wished I could be friends with or could be. I now know that these people are human, and they are kind. All one has to do is ask for help and there will be people who step up to do so.

Going forward, I wish to be a supportive and friendly mentor to someone who finds themselves in the predicament I was previously in not that long ago. As such, I have joined the advisory group for the network. I want to see you grow. I want to meet more women beyond my university. I want to give back because I have been given so much this year.

Sincerely,

Christy Tabors

Manager of Research and Learning

Renewal, Support, and Encouragement

Dear Women's Mentoring Network,

I've always marched to the beat of music only I hear. At times (and by at times, I mean until now) that powerful beat has caused me to stand apart from most of my peers. A sentence from a description of my personality states that I am an "idealist, tending to be an introvert, and driven by high values." In my desire to make the world a better place, those high values have tended to place me away from a community. As I have navigated my career, primarily as a student affairs practitioner, I operated with the academic mission as my anchor because let's face it, if a student isn't successful in the classroom, they leave and we've then lost the ability to influence for good.

The Women's Mentoring Network has given me appreciation for the ongoing creation of knowledge and the value of vulnerability in the community. At each meeting, we share research efforts, publications (or rejections), and the navigation of environments. It is through these stories I have begun to find connections and a community. I listen to stories detailing the passion of research efforts while also hearing about struggles I know well, how to balance the important with the urgent, how to navigate deep-rooted norms, and how to explore self-care or professional development in a time of world pandemic.

Each meeting offers exciting news of publications and milestones along the research path. The excitement and celebration have allowed me to rediscover my own research interest in student identity development and begin drafting my own plans and contributions. I leave each meeting even more committed to knowledge creation and promotion of best practices. I have energy to move forward with a research path, to vigorously support women across the university, and to allow myself to feel supported by these incredible women.

In many structures and environments, vulnerability would not yield a benefit but as we work diligently to live by higher values than we may have experienced previously, I believe our investment in this community will prove a worthy endeavor. I appreciate the Women's Mentoring Network for giving me renewal, support, and encouragement.

Yours truly,

Elizabeth Wallace

Director for Assessment & Strategic Initiatives

Learning and Sharing to "Win"

Dear Women's Mentoring Network,

I embarked on my full-time position in higher education in 2012. I was enrolled in a PhD program at the time, I had three children (one being an infant) and a husband. I was overwhelmed to say the least and very uninformed on the specifics of higher ed, let alone a tenure-track position. I received an email about the Women's Mentoring Network, but I was not fully aware of the meaning or the purpose. After attending the first meeting, I was very intrigued and felt that I had found "my people". During the first meeting, most shared how they were winning in their roles and what steps they were taking to succeed. For instance, a few were in writing groups, writing blocks on calendars and others committed a specific amount of time daily to their projects. This network provides a cohesive platform for women in academia to win.

I am ecstatic that I have had the opportunity to become an active member of this community of women. There are several different roles within academia that are represented and prepared to discuss their perspectives. While on the higher education journey, there are several moments that are filled with fear. For instance, when glancing around a room full of colleagues preparing for a monthly committee meeting everyone seems to have everything under control looking fully equipped to handle their workloads. However, there are several who are feeling confused, overwhelmed and exhausted from the many tasks on the to-do list.

The Women's Mentoring Network (WMN) is a breath of fresh air, consisting of a platform to become a mentee and to provide mentorship. For instance, our meetings start with reporting positive and challenges of the higher education journey. Sometimes I listen and absorb all of the wonderful information that is shared during our times together. Other times, I appreciate sharing nuggets that I have learned. This is a community of like-minded women, in that all of us want to be our best professional selves and to make our families proud while moving in that direction. Academia has been nicknamed the big ugly beast. It is described as a place where only the strong survives. Therefore, a community such as the WMN is necessary and helps with professional production as well as mental health during our monthly scheduled meetings. Each member seems to be committed and willing to help one another with navigating the system. Sometimes suggestions such as, "give yourself grace" are used, or have you tried hot yoga or discussing topics related to work, life balance.

In conclusion, there are several positive aspects of the WMN. Although, some of us enter the meetings feeling somewhat exhausted and stagnant. Somewhere towards the half-way point there seems to be a burst of "I can-do-it-ness" based on information shared and encouragement from other members of the network. I have been mostly impacted by the resource sharing process. They are mostly in efforts to assist with the teaching, service and scholarship requirements of our institution. The resources are as small as the "post-it app" and as large as let's collaborate and submit a manuscript in three weeks. Undoubtedly, all are necessary and helpful for tackling the big hairy beast with ease. This group has affected my career advancement in that I've received tenure and promotion through learning and using the information shared to "win". As well as staying connected to various members who continue to provide encouragement along the way.

With Respect,

Nathalie P. Jones

Associate Professor, Social Work

North Stars: Collective Comradery and Individual Support

Dear WMN,

In 2007, Bill George and Peter Sims published their book, *True North*. The book is based on interviews with men and women whose careers illustrate ethically grounded leadership. Conjoining these leaders' examples with true north, or for me the North Star, created imagery that continues to inspire my career journey. Over the years, I have met and worked with women who I consider to be North Stars, embodying a direction I want to follow. With some luck and a lot of experience, I hope to one day become a part of their constellation.

It has been my good fortune to join Tarleton State University Women's Mentoring Network. During our meetings and activities, I have been introduced to authentic, ethically grounded leaders who I might not have had a chance to meet otherwise. One of our most memorable events was a panel presentation by university administrators. Their stories of achieving significant professional milestones in an institution of higher education while remaining true to their personal lives illuminated how to work within—instead of against—real challenges that most of us face. Their narratives suggested how to maintain a healthy balance of life at work and life outside work. This type of balance is something I struggle with, so hearing their observations and solutions helped me see a way forward. At the same time, it promoted a sense of comradery, that although we are on different paths we are striving toward similar goals.

In general, the Women's Mentoring Network advances a sense of collective comradery and individual support. It is a unique opportunity to network across the campus within what may be considered a safe space. Regularly, achievements are celebrated and challenges noted. If I mention a challenge, then suggestions are offered by others who are experiencing—or recently experienced—comparable situations. Another way support is given is by holding me accountable to my own goals. It is easy to get distracted by the demands of the day but knowing I shared a research goal with the network helps keep me on track.

I am grateful to Dr. Lora Helvie-Mason for her tireless efforts to provide a Women's Mentoring Network on our campus. Her leadership style leaves room for everyone to have a voice so the group really belongs to us all. Also, I am grateful to the women who are involved in the group. Their insights broaden understandings and strengthen connections. Our gatherings are a place for North Stars to share their lights and thereby help us all grow in brilliance.

Sincerely,

Marcie Reynolds

Instructor in the Government, Legal Studies and Philosophy Department

Intentional Mentoring

Dear WMN,

When I joined the Women's Mentoring Network (WMN), I was simply helping a friend with a vision. Little did I know that the group would have such an impact on me. For one, WMN has made me more intentional about mentoring. I now find myself looking for opportunities for other women. I read calls for participation and think of women from our group and try to match research interests with opportunities. WMN has motivated me to be more active and assertive with mentoring. Instead of just suggesting conferences to colleagues, I facilitated the formation of two panels of new professors for a particular conference. Many want to contribute, but may need a direct invitation or encouragement to submit. I can be that cheerleader, helping others along their journey, and because of WMN I am more conscious of my potential in a supporting role to others' successes.

Likewise, I have been on the receiving end of WMN's mentoring. Networking and "working a room" have never felt natural to me. It is always a function where I must mentally prepare and make myself move beyond departmental friends for conversation. My network of allies has doubled and is intertwined with scholars from all disciplines. Now, when I walk into a room of

colleagues on campus, I see the women from our group and feel more at home. People I once knew by name only, I can now call for advice. I have safe spaces to ask questions of trusted women, and I benefit from the sage advice of others as I prepare my tenure packet.

The true connections created by WMN are the kind that will propel all of us forward in our careers. With intentionality, we are linking arms and hopefully making the path carved for us by the women in the past, even wider and easier for the ones who will come next.

Sincerely,

Sarah Maben

Assistant Professor, Communication Studies

Conclusion

From the letters above, the Women's Mentoring Networking is earning good reviews in its first year from a handful of participants. The work continues for these women as they mentor the organization in return and foster its development. A similar organization, the Earth Science Women's Network (ESWN), founded in 2002, has a membership of 2000 women in 50 countries. In its almost two decades of experience, ESWN offered lessons learned: 1) connect women to reduce isolation, 2) use social media for easy opt-in for participants, 3) create safe spaces for real discussions, and 4) participation—however it occurs—is where members will see benefits (Adams, Steiner, & Wiedinmyer, 2016). Likewise, the WMN is connecting women in safe spaces physically and virtually for discussions, support, and growth.

From their voices, the women of the WMN narrate how the organization has influenced them over the course of the last year. With some success under its belt, the Women's Mentoring Network will continue to develop spaces for women to mentor other women in Texas.

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According to the American Institutes for Research (2015), it is the mentor's role to support the mentee through the sharing of best practices and offering other job-related support. Experiencing that support from a mentor was a critical onboarding practice that the participants perceived to be beneficial. The beginning teachers in this research wanted to know what they were doing well through the eyes of these observers and specifically in what areas they needed to grow. Clearly, onboarding practices noted by beginning teachers as beneficial will help new teachers keep their joy!

Helping New Teachers Keep Their Joy: Beginning Teacher Perceptions of Campus and District Onboarding

Dr. Megan Gist
Principal, Linda Lyon Elementary

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Texas A&M University-Commerce

Dr. Pam Winn
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Abstract

Research has shown school district induction and mentoring programs have a positive influence on beginning teachers and result in increased job satisfaction, commitment to their job and profession, and a higher retention rate (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Sowell, 2017). Texas House Bill 102 (effective September 1, 2019) required Texas public school districts to assign a mentor to beginning teachers; however, the implementation could vary by each campus within a school district (H.B. 102, 2019). This research explored beginning teachers' perceptions of the campus and district onboarding practices they experienced in a fast-growth Texas school district. The participants completed a questionnaire in Qualtrics. The themes emerged regarding district onboarding practices that the participants perceived as beneficial: (a) instructional rounds, (b) mentor teachers, and (c) professional learning. Three primary themes emerged as campus onboarding practices that the participants perceived as beneficial: (a) support, (b) professional learning, and (c) instructional rounds. District onboarding practices that the participants perceived as not beneficial emerged into two themes: (a) time and (b) a lack of personalized professional learning. Two additional themes emerged regarding campus onboarding practices that the beginning teachers perceived as not beneficial: (a) a lack of communication and (b) a need for more feedback.

Keywords: new teachers, onboarding, beginning teacher perspectives

Introduction

Increasing the capacity of first-year teachers to meet the academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs of their students often falls on the campus principal. In a fast-growing district, campus and district leaders often work together to increase the capacity of first-year teachers to meet the needs of their students (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Building capacity is about increasing or enhancing the knowledge, skills, and abilities of an individual or group to increase student learning (Fullan, Cuttress, & Kilcher, 2005).

Human capital in education is described by Coleman (1988) as building the capacity of educators in the areas of subject knowledge and pedagogy. Developing human capital can occur through professional learning, formal education (such as the pursuit of an advanced degree), or through experiences gained over several years (Leana, 2011). Social capital in education is about educators building relationships and trust through collaboration and partnership (Coleman, 1988). Human capital, when combined with social capital, can impact student achievement in a

positive way (Leana, 2011). Induction and mentoring programs are vehicles through which educational leaders can facilitate collaboration and partnership to increase the instructional capacity of beginning teachers (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011).

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore beginning teachers' perceptions of the campus and district onboarding practices they experienced in a fast-growth Texas school district. The goal was to describe how beginning teachers perceived onboarding practices at the campus and district levels, including which practices the beginning teachers perceived as being beneficial and which practices the beginning teachers perceived as not being beneficial. Much of what a beginning teacher needs to learn to be effective does not occur in pre-service training or teaching but in on-the-job training (Hopkins & Spillane, 2014). It is up to the campus and school district to provide a system in which the beginning teacher can acquire necessary skills while on the job to be successful and thrive (Hughes, Matt, & O'Reilly, 2015).

Review of the Literature

Legal Requirements for Mentoring Programs

The Texas Education Code, Section 21.458 defines a beginning teacher as a teacher who has less than two years of teaching experience in a grade level or subject area. Further, the 86th Texas Legislature passed a bill (House Bill 102, 2019) to amend the Texas Education Code, Section 21.458 to require the pairing of a beginning teacher with an experienced mentor teacher for the first 2 years of the mentee's public school teaching career. The mentor teacher must agree to serve in that role for a minimum of 1 year, and the assignment of the mentor to the mentee must occur no later than 30 days after the first day the beginning teacher is employed. To the extent possible, mentors should be teachers who teach at the same school, in the same grade level, and the same subjects as the beginning teacher. The code was further amended to require supervisors to consider how many mentees are assigned to each mentor. A minimum of 12 hours of mentorship is now required by the code, and the code outlines the expectation mentors and mentees are either provided release time to participate in the mentoring activities or all meetings should occur during the teachers' contracted hours. Each mentor teacher is required to have completed a minimum of 3 years of teaching that includes exemplary student achievement results. Mentor teachers must also complete commission-approved mentor training program provided by the district. There are no onboarding practices mandated by the state at the campus level.

Section 42.161 of Texas House Bill 3, introduced in the 86th legislative session and effective September 1, 2019, provides an opportunity for districts to apply for a fund allotment called the Mentor Program Allotment. Districts are eligible to apply when they have implemented a mentoring program for beginning teachers that meets the best practices outlined in Texas Education Code Section 21.458 as described previously. The purpose of the allotment is to provide support for districts to provide high-quality mentoring programs to increase the capacity of the beginning teachers in Texas to retain high-quality teachers in the profession. The allotment can be used to fund stipends for mentor teachers, to provide release time for mentor teachers and beginning teachers to collaborate and work together, or to support mentor program training. This funding, for example, can provide for the cost of substitutes so the mentor teacher and beginning teacher can collaborate, go on instructional rounds, and engage in professional learning activities together (TEA, 2019).

A total of \$3 million was allocated annually for the Mentor Program Allotment. The amount of funding a district receives is calculated based on the number of beginning teachers the district employed. The district would receive \$1,800 per beginning teacher with a cap of \$100,000 per district. If more districts apply for funding than the allotment can support, a priority point system is employed to determine how the funding is distributed. Priority points are awarded based on the size of the district, the rural status of the district, and the percentage of economically disadvantaged students who are enrolled in the district. A district that is awarded funding through the Mentor Program Allotment must reapply for funding each year. Those beginning and mentor teachers who participate in a district mentoring program supported through the allocation of Mentor Program Allotment funds are required to complete a survey conducted by the TEA. The district is also required to provide a compliance report at the end of each year for which the district receives funding (TEA, 2019).

Instructional Practices

Knight, Hock, Skrtic, Bradley, & Knight (2018) evaluated a new video-based instructional coaching method that involved teachers recording their classroom instruction, reviewing the videos alongside an instructional coach, setting goals, tracking progress toward the goals, and evaluating the improvement of their teaching over the semester. After one semester of implementation, the researchers found teachers significantly changed their instructional practices for the better after collaborating with an instructional coach using this video-based method. Additionally, student engagement, measured as student time on task, increased dramatically. An additional contribution of this study was the evidence is provided to support a new model of professional learning for improving the instructional practices of beginning and experienced teachers alike (Knight et al., 2018).

Instructional Support.

The role of the principal as an instructional leader, to manage the curriculum and instruction (DuFour & Eaker, 1998), is a common concept in 21st-century public education (Hallinger, 2005). An increased focus on school improvement in the mid-1980s led to increased attention by policymakers on the role of school leaders in education. Thus, a shift from principals as managers to principals as instructional leaders began to take place. As the 21st-century began, the role of the principal viewed as one of instructional leadership and performance standards gained popularity internationally. As the state and federal government became increasingly involved in dictating curriculum standards and increasing accountability measures, it would have been a risk for a principal to not monitor curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices on his or her campus (Youngs & King, 2002). Through developing shared beliefs as a campus and putting structures in place to allow the campus to operate as a PLC, the principal's actions should reflect those shared beliefs in his or her actions as the principal hires the best teachers, monitors the implementation of the district curriculum, designs professional learning opportunities, and monitors instructional practices (Youngs & King, 2002).

Professional Learning.

Overstreet (2017) explored how teachers learn and how professional learning can be designed to grow them in a culture that positively empowers teachers and impacts students. Changing a teacher's practice is not as simple as following a model; instead, Overstreet proposed each new, well-planned professional learning experience plants a seed that is to be tended and watered, which then leads the practitioner back through the cycle of learning and reflection, thus causing

the practitioner to continue to grow. Further, Allen and Topolka-Jorissen (2014) identified three advantages of beginning teachers participating in learning walks, or instructional rounds, as a part of their induction process: (a) reducing isolation, (b) changes in instructional practice, and (c) changes in professional culture. Teacher dialogue and collaboration, increased student engagement, and an increased commitment to the mission and vision of the school can be additional advantages to implementing learning walks (Allen & Topolka-Jorissen, 2014).

De Neve and Devos (2017) acknowledged the implementation of PLCs is an indicator of a school that nurtures a supportive culture for teachers, but they sought to understand how PLCs can specifically support beginning teachers in the area of differentiated instruction. The researchers found in the schools that intentionally supported professional learning for beginning teachers in the area of differentiated instruction, evidence of successful PLC implementation existed. Of particular note in the schools that supported an intentional focus on learning more about differentiated instruction was not only the collaborative culture that PLCs helped to nurture but also a shared sense of responsibility that meeting the needs of all learners in the school was a joint effort (De Neve & Devos, 2017). This is an example of the shift from the “my kids” mindset to the “our kids” mindset that DuFour and Eaker (1998) indicated is a characteristic of strong PLCs. The “my kids” mindset refers to a teacher only being concerned about the students enrolled in the class for which the teacher is responsible. The “our kids” mindset refers to all educators on a team or campus accepting responsibility for all of the students on that team or campus.

Before the implementation of induction or mentoring programs, it was common for new teachers to be expected to figure out their content and how to teach it on their own. Martinie, Kim, and Abernathy (2016) found that simply adopting a common set of standards and giving those to teachers does not necessarily translate to a change in practice or improved practice for teachers. Each teacher’s level of commitment to the standards can impact how the teacher implements them in the classroom. The researchers asserted that when teachers are treated as professionals, invested in quality professional learning, and given opportunities to engage in professional dialogue, their commitment to implementing the standards with fidelity increases (Martinie et al., 2016). The commitment and retention of beginning teachers, how induction and mentoring programs support the instructional capacity of beginning teachers, and the role of the principal as instructional leader in establishing campus supports for beginning teachers including the role of PLCs are effective strategies to elicit positive outcomes in the induction and mentoring programs on the commitment and retention of beginning teachers.

Methods

While there is a wide body of knowledge on mentoring programs for beginning teachers, very little research has been conducted to understand beginning teachers’ perceptions of the broader scope of onboarding practices offered by the campus and district where they experience these supports (Kelchtermans, 2017). A questionnaire was used to examine the perceptions of beginning teachers regarding the campus and district onboarding practices. The following research questions were central to the study:

1. What district onboarding practices do beginning teachers perceive as beneficial to their decision to remain in the profession?

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2. What campus onboarding practices do beginning teachers perceive as beneficial to their decision to remain in the profession?
 3. What district onboarding practices do beginning teachers perceive as not beneficial to their decision to remain in the profession?
 4. What campus onboarding practices do beginning teachers perceive as not beneficial to their decision to remain in the profession?

Procedure

A digital questionnaire facilitated through Qualtrics was sent to the participants via their school district email address. The use of a questionnaire provided the participants with an opportunity to contribute feedback in a transparent way that, when combined with the feedback shared by the collective group, guided the researcher to an understanding of what onboarding practices the participants perceived to be beneficial and not beneficial at the campus and district levels. The questionnaire was developed by the researcher with input and approval by an expert panel. The questionnaire consisted of 10 open-ended questions based on a review of the literature and aligned to the research questions. The questions were designed to specifically address each research question as follows:

Research Question 1. This question targeted the identification of district onboarding practices beginning teachers perceived as being beneficial to their decision to remain in the profession.

1. Have you participated in the district mentoring program during your first year of teaching?
2. Do you have an assigned mentor?
3. Is the mentor on your campus, and does the mentor teacher teach in the same department or grade level as you?
4. What is your perception of the primary purpose of the district mentoring program?
5. What components of the district mentoring program do you perceive as most beneficial for your growth as an educator?

Research Question 2. This question targeted the identification of campus onboarding practices beginning teachers perceived as being beneficial to their decision to remain in the profession.

6. What supports were in place on your campus to help you grow as an educator?
7. Which campus supports do you perceive as the most beneficial for your growth as an educator?

Research Question 3. This question targeted the identification of which district onboarding practices beginning teachers perceived as not being beneficial to their decision to remain in the profession.

8. What components of the district mentoring program would you change to grow as an educator? How would you change it?
9. What components of the district mentoring program do you perceive as least beneficial for your growth as a teacher?

10. What feedback do you have to offer regarding the district mentoring program?

Research Question 4. This question targeted identifying which campus supports beginning teachers perceived as beneficial and perceived as not beneficial.

11. What campus supports would you change to grow as an educator? How would you change those supports?

12. What campus supports do you perceive as least beneficial to your growth as an educator?

13. What feedback would you offer your campus administrators regarding the campus supports that were provided to support you during your first year as a teacher?

Sample Selection. Criterion-based purposive sampling was used to identify the participants. The participants from whom the researcher collected data were first-year teachers within the selected district. The participants were selected based on what they could contribute to the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The criteria for purposive sampling were set based on the characteristics that would assist the researcher in answering the research questions of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The selection of first-year teachers included all willing participants who met the criteria outlined in Table 1.

Table 1
Selection Criteria for Participants

Criterion No.	Criterion
1	Participant is a first-year teacher assigned to a campus in the Texas school district.
2	Participant actively participates in the school district's induction and mentoring program

Data Analysis

Both during and after the data collection process, specific steps were followed to understand and derive meaning from the data. Priori codes (Table 2), defined as preset categories that guided the researcher's process of coding (Creswell & Poth, 2018), were used to sort and synthesize the data collected so that emerging themes could be identified. Qualtrics was used to assist the researcher with both the data collection and analysis processes.

After the data were collected, they were analyzed and organized into preset categories into common themes which were then categorized and coded. The preset codes were derived directly from the data. After all, data were initially coded, further data analysis was conducted to look for larger categories and patterns within the categorical data (Saldaña, 2016). The data were examined to look for connections, variations, and patterns among the participants' responses as central themes emerge. The focus of the data analysis process was to categorize the themes that emerged from the beginning teachers' perceptions of which onboarding practices were beneficial and which onboarding practices were not beneficial at the campus and district levels.

Table 2

A Priori Codes

Code No.	A Priori Code
1	Mentor Teacher
2	Teacher Retention
3	Professional Relationships
4	Learning Environment
5	Instructional Practices
6	Communication
7	Instructional Rounds
8	Administrator Support
9	Professional Learning Communities
10	Professional Learning

Findings

The findings for each question are presented in identified themes and nodes. The themes were derived from the a priori codes, which were developed from the research questions and the review of the literature. The nodes were derived from the data gathered by the responses the beginning teachers offered in the questionnaire.

Research Question 1

What district onboarding practices do beginning teachers perceive as beneficial to their decision to remain in the profession? Three themes emerged from the data to communicate the district onboarding practices that beginning teachers perceived as beneficial to their decision to remain in the profession: instructional rounds, mentor teacher, and professional learning on specific topics relevant to teachers who are new to the profession. The three themes that emerged as well as the respective nodes within those themes are depicted in Table 3.

Table 3
Emerging Themes and the Respective Nodes Related to Research Question 1

Theme 1: Instructional Rounds	Theme 2: Mentor Teacher	Theme 3: Professional Learning
Observing professional educators	Reflection	Professional growth

Observations	Reflect together	New teacher orientation
Visit classrooms	Guidance	Learning
Observe veteran teachers	Feedback	Growth
Experienced teachers in action	Support	Job-embedded learning
Making learning visible	Best practices	Professional learning communities

Emerging Theme 1. The first theme that emerged from the data, instructional rounds, was derived from the comments made by beginning teachers who participated in the district mentoring program regarding the benefits of having the opportunity to visit other teachers' classrooms. Participating in instructional rounds can support a collaborative culture, improve instructional practices, and enrich the professional culture within a school in addition to increasing the level of student engagement and reaffirming a sense of commitment to the instructional goals and vision of the school (Allen & Topolka-Jorissen, 2014). Participants explained that having the opportunity to see veteran teachers in action was one of the most beneficial aspects of participating in the district-led mentoring and induction program. Some beginning teachers specifically discussed the value of participating in the instructional rounds with their mentor so that they had an opportunity to reflect on the classroom visit together. The beginning teacher was able to make connections and applications to practice through the process of reflection. Further, the practice of participating in instructional rounds was specifically helpful for beginning teachers in understanding campus and district initiatives. The application of theory to practice gave beginning teachers an opportunity to draw meaning from the experience as they constructed their learning (Bada, 2015). The practice of the beginning teacher seeing what was learned put into practice in a veteran teacher's classroom in an authentic classroom environment, coupled with the support of a mentor, allowed the beginning teacher to construct new knowledge and understanding (Richter et al., 2013).

Emerging Theme 2. The second theme that emerged was the mentor teacher. The high-quality support that is provided through the pairing of a mentor teacher with a beginning teacher can deeply enrich the experience a beginning teacher has in the first year of teaching and can influence the teacher's level of job satisfaction and decision to remain in the profession (Thomas et al., 2017). The participants expressed through their responses on the questionnaire how vital the assignment of a mentor was to them. The mentor and mentee relationship were especially valuable when the mentor was assigned to the same campus and grade level or department as the mentee. According to the American Institutes for Research (2015), it is the mentor's role to support the mentee through the sharing of best practices and offering other job-related support. Experiencing that support from a mentor was a critical onboarding practice that the participants perceived to be beneficial.

Emerging Theme 3. The third theme that emerged from the data related to district onboarding practices that the beginning teachers reported as beneficial was professional learning. Job-embedded professional learning in which a comprehensive plan is developed to increase the capacity of beginning teachers has become a valuable onboarding practice (Templeton &

Tremont, 2014). The participants expressed in a variety of ways how much they valued the professional learning offered as a district onboarding practice. The in-depth orientation offered over 2 days to all teachers new to the district was described as a beneficial onboarding practice. Further, the professional learning embedded in the district mentoring and induction program provided by the district was noted as a beneficial experience for beginning teachers. Overall, the comments from the participants indicated that professional learning tailored to the unique needs of beginning teachers was a beneficial onboarding practice.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 related to questions about which campus onboarding practices beginning teachers perceived as beneficial to their decision to remain in the profession. The questionnaire data collected and analyzed by the researcher were used to answer this question. The onboarding practices that the beginning teachers perceived as beneficial on their campus were similar to the district onboarding practices that they perceived as beneficial. While it was clear that onboarding practices at the campus level vary from campus to campus, the three primary themes that emerged from the data were support, professional learning, and instructional rounds. It was clear from the data that the campus onboarding practice that was most widely valued by beginning teachers was the system of support put in place at their campus from their assigned mentor, the campus instructional coach, and the administrative team. Further, additional themes that emerged from the researcher’s analysis of the data were professional learning and instructional rounds. The three themes that emerged as well as the respective nodes within those themes are depicted in Table 4.

Emerging Theme 1. The first theme that emerged from the data regarding campus onboarding practices was *support*. This theme emerged as a primary theme in response to this question as it was clear the beginning teachers valued being wrapped in support by their mentor, instructional coach, and principal. Support was described in a variety of ways by the beginning teachers. The safe environment that the leadership team cultivated in which the beginning teachers felt safe to approach their administrators and other campus leaders with questions was greatly valued.

Beginning teachers expressed gratitude for the proactive way administrators checked in with them to see how they were doing rather than wait for the beginning teacher to approach them with questions. Further, the time the leadership team provided for teachers to collaborate enriched the beginning teachers’ experiences and helped them have a tangible support system as well as cultivated their professional growth. Brown and Wynn (2009) asserted that administrative support is a crucial aspect of teacher retention; when administrators proactively seek out ways they can support teachers through providing resources, problem-solving, and collaboration opportunities, teachers are more likely to remain in their position.

Table 4

Emerging Themes and the Respective Nodes Related to Research Question 2

Theme 1: Support	Theme 2: Professional Learning	Theme 3: Instructional Rounds
Safe environment	Training	Experienced teacher in action
Check-ins	Orientation	Visit classrooms

Collaboration time	Professional growth	Observing other teachers
Team	Collaboration time	Seeing quality teaching
Approachable	Professional learning communities	Observe in classrooms
Available	Job-embedded learning	Learning through observation

Emerging Theme 2. The second theme that emerged regarding campus onboarding practices was professional learning, which was also a theme that emerged about district onboarding practices. It was clear from the data collected that providing opportunities to grow as educators through job-embedded professional learning opportunities on campus was also something that was greatly valued by the participants. The data also clearly indicated PLCs, specifically, were an effective way to not only onboard teachers but also grow teachers. Actively participating in the PLC process develops a sense of shared responsibility for all students on the campus and serves as a continuous process of improvement that impacts the way teachers do their work (DuFour et al., 2016). Clear communication of instructional expectations, how to access the curriculum, and systems for collaboration all supported the participants' perceptions of professional learning as a valued campus onboarding practice.

Emerging Theme 3. The third theme that emerged from the data about which campus onboarding practices the participants perceived as most beneficial was instructional rounds. While instructional rounds were a district onboarding practice organized through the district's mentoring and induction program, the data showed that some campuses provided additional opportunities for beginning teachers to participate in instructional rounds on campus. Therefore, instructional rounds emerged as an onboarding practice that participants valued at both the district and campus levels. Engaging in this professional activity prompts dialogue among colleagues that may have limited interaction, increases collaboration, and aligns teacher behaviors across the campus to the mission and vision of the school (Allen & Topolka-Jorissen, 2014).

Research Question 3

For Research Question 3, aimed to discover what district onboarding practices beginning teachers perceived as not beneficial to their decision to remain in the profession. The questionnaire data collected and analyzed by the researcher was used to answer this question. While feedback regarding district onboarding practices was generally positive, the participants were specific about what they perceived to not be beneficial as well as how those practices could be changed to increase the benefit to the beginning teacher. The first theme that emerged from the data was time. Participants expressed that the time, including frequency and duration, they were expected to invest in meetings after school was sometimes a burden due to other teaching demands such as planning, PLCs, faculty meetings, and parent conferences. The second theme that emerged from the data about district onboarding practices that the participants did not perceive as beneficial was the lack of personalized professional learning. The participants reported that the professional learning provided both before school started as well as throughout the year in the beginning teacher mentoring and induction meetings were geared toward general

education teachers and did not always apply to specialized teaching assignments. The participants expressed a need for personalized professional learning specific to their assignment. Further, some participants suggested asking the beginning teachers what professional learning they felt they needed so the professional learning sessions could be tailored to meet the needs of the beginning teachers. The two themes that emerged as well as the respective nodes within those themes are depicted in Table 5.

Emerging Theme 1. The first theme that emerged from the data regarding district onboarding practices the participants perceived as least beneficial was time. The participants expressed that the amount of time they were expected to commit to meetings that occurred after school was stressful. Because the meetings occurred in-person, participants were expected to make arrangements to attend these meetings after school each month. Because the beginning teachers were also expected to participate in meetings, events, and activities that all teachers on campus were expected to participate in, the additional time requirement was stressful for some participants. However, the beginning teachers made several suggestions regarding how to mitigate this concern. One suggestion was to facilitate the meetings virtually, perhaps with different time options so the teachers could sign up for the time slot that worked best with their schedule.

Another suggestion was to allocate that time differently to where experienced teachers came in and taught beginning teachers specific instructional or classroom management strategies. Another idea was to use that time for mentors to work directly with the beginning teachers either one-on-one or in small groups to reflect on their week or even have a small teach piece on the topic that would have been taught to the whole group.

Table 5
Emerging Themes and the Respective Nodes Related to Research Question 3

Theme 1: Time	Theme 2: Personalized Learning
Frequency	Choice
Duration	Context
Time of Day	Content
Setting	Quantity

Emerging Theme 2. The second theme that emerged from the data in regard to district onboarding practices the participants perceived as least beneficial was the lack of personalized professional learning. Some of the participants reported feeling a need to have more training in their area of specialization, such as special education, music, art, or a specific career and technical education specialization. One suggestion was to build in choice sessions so that the teachers could select the professional learning sessions that were applicable to their teaching assignment. Another suggestion was to compile a library of virtual professional learning opportunities that the mentor and mentee could participate in together as the need arose. For example, if the beginning teacher needed to learn more about standards-based report cards for

general education students or writing goals and objectives for special education students, the mentor and mentee could schedule a time to watch professional learning on that specific topic and immediately apply the new learning. The real-time professional learning at the point of need was a solution offered to make the professional learning opportunities offered through the district mentoring and induction program more personalized.

Research Question 4

Research Question 4, focused on what campus onboarding practices beginning teachers perceived as not beneficial to their decision to remain in the profession. The questionnaire data collected and analyzed by the researcher were used to answer this question. While most participants reported feeling supported at the campus level, several were not able to name onboarding practices specifically employed at the campus level. However, two themes specifically emerged in relationship to campus onboarding practices that the participants perceived as not beneficial, lack of communication, and a need for more feedback. The participants expressed a desire to have expectations communicated from their administrators. Those who experienced that clarity of communication expressed that they valued it while they also valued how open and approachable their administrators were for questions, concerns, and support. The participants also expressed a desire for frequent and specific feedback from their administrators. The data indicated a strong desire for the participants to know how they were performing in the classroom including both strengths and weaknesses. They wanted to arm themselves with this information to seek out ways to grow in the areas where they needed to further develop their practice. The two themes that emerged as well as the respective nodes within those themes are depicted in Table 6.

Table 6
Emerging Themes and the Respective Nodes Related to Research Question 4

Theme 1: Communication	Theme 2: Feedback
Clarity	Quantity
Timeliness	Frequency
Organization	Specificity
Proactive	Availability

Emerging Theme 1. The first theme that emerged from the data regarding campus onboarding practices the participants perceived as least beneficial was communication. Clear, strong communication from the principal coupled with opportunities for communication to be two-way is something the research shows contributes to the climate and culture of a school (Beltman et al., 2011). While the participants valued clear communication from their administrators regarding expectations, curriculum, instruction, and campus processes and procedures, the data indicated that this desire for clarity in communication was not met. Participants expressed being unsure of what to do or who to go to with questions beyond the mentor. Beginning teachers expressed a desire to have informal opportunities to meet with their administrators apart from the

experienced staff to ask questions in a safe environment. Further, the data indicated that the participants valued the leadership team, including administrators, counselors, and instructional coaches, being proactive in supporting them and communicating with them.

Emerging Theme 2. The second theme that emerged from the data regarding campus onboarding practices the participants perceived as least beneficial was feedback. Teachers want administrators to offer specific, descriptive feedback after a classroom observation of any length; they want principals to be available to them at their point of need; and they also value being recognized privately or publicly by administrators when they have done their job well (Hughes et al., 2015). The data indicated that the participants had a strong desire to receive feedback from their administrators, instructional coach, and mentors regarding how they were performing in the classroom. The beginning teachers wanted to know what they were doing well through the eyes of these observers and specifically in what areas they needed to grow. The data indicated that the lack of feedback offered to beginning teachers was something that the participants perceived as not beneficial to their growth as a beginning teacher.

Summary

This research explored beginning teachers' perceptions of the campus and district onboarding practices they experienced in a fast-growth Texas school district. The literature indicates teacher retention remains a concern in the education profession (Ramsay, 2019). Understanding the onboarding practices that beginning teachers perceive as beneficial and not beneficial at both the campus and district levels can help campus and district leaders provide the support that beginning teachers need to grow and thrive in their first years in the profession (Hughes et al., 2015).

The perceptions of 22 (65% of the population) beginning teachers regarding onboarding practices at the campus and district levels were examined. District onboarding practices perceived to be beneficial to their decision to remain in the profession were represented based on three themes that emerged: (a) instructional rounds, (b) mentor teachers, and (c) professional learning. The data showed that instructional rounds were greatly valued by the participants as having the opportunity to see experienced teachers in action helped beginning teachers understand expectations as well as best practices. The data also indicated that the assignment of a mentor to the beginning teachers was one of the onboarding practices that the participants reported as most beneficial. The mentor and mentee relationship were especially valuable when the mentor was assigned to the same campus and grade level or department as the mentee. Further, professional learning was a district onboarding practice that the participants reported as beneficial. Opportunities to learn about district expectations, curriculum, and procedures in a way that was specifically tailored to the learning needs of new teachers was a district onboarding practice the participants reported as beneficial.

While some participants expressed that no onboarding practices were implemented at the campus level and others indicated satisfaction with the onboarding practices that were employed on their campuses, three primary themes that emerged from the data about campus onboarding practices that the beginning teachers perceived as beneficial were (a) support, (b) professional learning, and (c) instructional rounds. Beginning teachers reported that the support they received from their administration at the campus level was one of the most beneficial onboarding practices that contributed to their decision to remain in the profession. Some campuses provided additional opportunities for beginning teachers to participate in instructional rounds beyond what

the district coordinated through the mentoring and induction program. The data indicated that the participants who experienced instructional rounds at the campus level reported that this was a beneficial onboarding practice. Like instructional rounds, some campuses provided additional professional learning opportunities specifically for beginning teachers at the campus level. The data also indicated the participants who experienced professional learning tailored to the needs of beginning teachers at the campus level reported this as a beneficial onboarding practice.

The research also examined which district and campus onboarding practices the participants perceived to not be beneficial to their decision to remain in the profession. While the participants generally perceived the district onboarding practices to be positive, two themes emerged concerning district onboarding practices that the beginning teachers perceived as not beneficial: time and a lack of personalized professional learning. Because of the demands on teachers' time, regardless of experience level, the data indicated that beginning teachers found the additional time required of them to participate in the mentoring meetings after school was a stressor. Further, the learning provided during that time was often very general, thus it lacked the specificity that some participants needed to grow in their specific teaching assignment.

The data indicated that some participants reported not experiencing any campus onboarding practices. Of those participants who did report experiencing campus onboarding practices, two themes emerged regarding onboarding practices that the participants did not perceive as beneficial: lack of communication and a need for more feedback. The beginning teachers expressed a desire to have a clear understanding of administrators' expectations at the campus level as well as to understand campus communication channels including to whom the beginning teachers should go for questions beyond the mentor. Further, the beginning teachers craved feedback from the members of their campus leadership team. They wanted to know how they were doing relative to the campus expectations related to such areas as curriculum, instruction, and classroom management. The data indicated the participants perceived that the lack of feedback was not beneficial to their decision to remain in the profession. The data indicated that 91.43% of the beginning teachers were retained in the district for the following school year.

Conclusion

There is not a state or federal mandate to require school districts to implement onboarding practices; however, research has shown that induction and mentoring programs implemented by school districts have a positive influence on beginning teachers. Induction and mentoring programs can result in increased job satisfaction, commitment to their job and the profession, and a higher retention rate when compared to beginning teachers who did not participate in an induction or mentoring program (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Sowell, 2017). While a district mentoring and induction program is one example of an onboarding practice, other district and campus onboarding practices can be employed to retain teachers new to the profession as well. Onboarding practices principals put into place at the campus level can vary widely, even within a district that implements a district-wide induction and mentoring program. Some principals have relied solely on the district-provided induction and mentoring program to onboard beginning teachers while giving little attention to the variety of onboarding practices that campuses can employ to strengthen the experience beginning teachers have in their first years (Kelchtermans, 2017).

The findings indicated that beginning teachers perceived the following onboarding practices as beneficial at the campus and district levels: (a) instructional rounds, (b) mentor teachers, (c) professional learning, and (d) support. The themes that emerged regarding onboarding practices at the campus and district levels that the beginning teachers perceived as not beneficial to their decision to remain in the profession were (a) time, (b) lack of personalized professional learning, (c) lack of communication, and (d) a need for feedback. Clearly, onboarding practices noted by beginning teachers as beneficial will help new teachers keep their joy!

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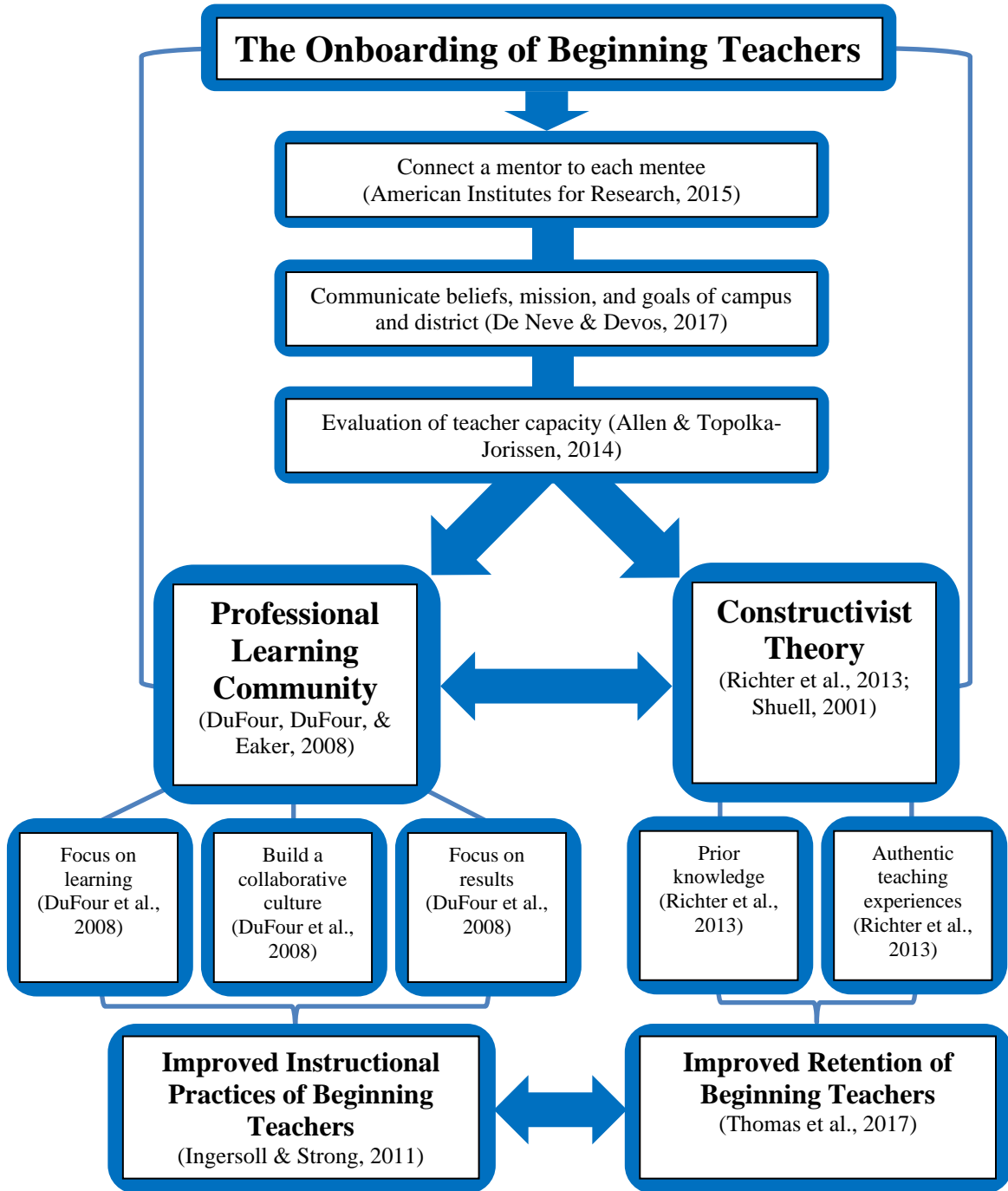
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Appendices

Appendix A - Theoretical Framework



The theoretical framework of the onboarding practices of principals. The process begins with assigning a mentor to each beginning teacher. As the teacher learns more about his or her new position, professional learning communities and constructivist theory are introduced, and through those resources, both instructional practices and retention improve.

A positive interaction with peers, the facilitator, content, and the technology fosters community building, but how much do facilitators know about how it happens? Or what can be done to help make it happen? What behaviors do students enact in the online learning forum that contributes to community building? In this research, the facilitator set the tone of the course in the first two weeks and this interaction helped guide the course. The diverse behaviors that participants displayed contributed to building their learning community.

Online Behaviors And Building Community

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Abstract

One of the biggest complaints about online learning is how remote we often are to everyone, the idea of community, evident in seated courses, students and instructors often feel is absent. But, community can be formed in online spaces, in fact it is very important that a community develops in learning environments. Various researchers (see [Liu, Magjuka, Bonk, & Lee, 2007](#); [Chao, Hwu, & Chang, 2011](#); and [Roberts, 2005](#)) give evidence that a sense of community fosters knowledge-making which is the aim of online learning environments. This study explores student behavior in an online course. It isolates behavior in the controlled setting of an online course and determines what behavior contributes to building community. Using [Yuh Chu Yeh's \(2010\)](#) study of online behaviors, roles, and learning communities, I analyze participants' posts in a technical communication graduate course. This paper reveals that with facilitator guidance and well-established course policy, online participants displayed behaviors consistent with building community that can be translated to marketable skills in other virtual/professional contexts.

Keywords: online pedagogy, student behaviors, community building

This study comes from the perspective of technical communication which focus much of their teaching via online methods. Technical communication programs have increased over the years and with it online courses. Research has shown an increase in research-based practice to train instructors and design courses. But research is also needed to consider what takes place in the online learning environment. The (textual) content of online courses are the foundation for the forum, but a combination of the participants' interaction with content, peers, and the facilitator ([Chao, Hwu, & Chang, 2011](#)) as well as with the technology (Svinicki & McKeachie, 2011) all come together to build the online learning environment where students feel free to exchange ideas, and create knowledge. A positive interaction with peers, the facilitator, content, and the technology fosters community building, but how much do facilitators know about how it happens? Or what can be done to help make it happen?

This research focuses on student interaction in an online course, and building community. It attempts to answer the following question:

- What behaviors do students enact in the online learning forum that contributes to community building?

Understanding how to build community is important, as noted by authors in International Professional Communication Design, and Research, ([Hanson, 2015](#); [Sorenson, Hammer, Maylath, 2015](#); and [Ludwig, 2014](#)). Technical communication acts as a bridge, especially in online courses, to professional contexts. In their online courses, students were encouraged to learn about each other (about the individual, their culture, and country). Sorenson, Hammer, and Maylath (2015) note that in their TAPP project, participants are “encouraged to connect with their partners... . While this activity seems at first glance to be less task-oriented and more social, the seemingly peripheral communication facilitated by social networking technologies

actually contributes to more satisfying and successful partnerships, as well as meaningful personal and professional relationships” (p. 161). Hanson (2015) provides from her article, what this interaction looks like: “Throughout the project, students shared their experiences, suggestions and mutual encouragement through discussion board interaction with classmates and posts to a shared project wiki” (p. 98). Over time and with facilitator’s guidance students developed the safe environment where they exchanged ideas and created knowledge. These examples are what technical communication programs use to help students understand—how to interact in “internal social media communities” (Ludwig, 2014, p.61). The interaction develops knowledge inimical to the outcome of the course (see Hanson’s 2015 teaching case), because the communication stressed in the course focuses on “knowledge of the audience, well-written texts, courteousness, sincerity, and respect,” (Ludwig 2014, p. 62) which translate neatly in professional contexts where prospective employees are expected to have these skills to connect with clients/customers in face-to-face and virtual contexts.

In online learning pedagogy, interaction, knowledge sharing, and community building are equally important as it is in intercultural technical communication. While in intercultural technical communication, community building is observed as important to connect with peers from different countries and cultures: In online learning pedagogy, the goal is to stimulate knowledge sharing (Liu et al, 2007), learning effectiveness (Chao et al, 2011), and retention (Roberts, 2005). The researchers, Liu, Magjuka, Bonk, & Lee (2007) studied an MBA online course and, based on both instructors’ and student perception, found a correlation between sense of community and increased “perception” of learning in the course and increased retention where students are invested in their learning community. This correlates with Chao, Hwu, and Chang (2011) whose research in the use of technology in online learning focused on student interaction. The researchers modified their course in order that knowledge sharing propeled interaction (Chao, et al, 2011). The researchers found that the appropriate amount of “student interaction is supported by knowledge sharing” (Chao, Hwu, & Chang, 2011). Gina Phipps Roberts (2005) underscores community building in her research in collaborative learning, a new pedagogy she invesitgated for online/multimodal learning. Roberts defines collaborative learning as “a relational process involving all participants, teacher and students, in meaning-making and knowledge creation” (p. 2). Roberts explains collaborative learning shifted the learning process because the students took on a bigger responsibility in their learning with dialogue being key as participants took a meta approach to learning: they learned relevance of the content, about each other, and how they learned.

In this study I analyze students’ behaviors to better understand about community building as it happens in the online course. Student behaviors as they interact with peers, facilitator, content as they use the online technology, help me understand community building in the course. This case study is based on a completed online learning course in technical communication; it received an exempt status: UMCIRB 14-000339. The graduate level course was offered at a doctoral granting university. It was five weeks long with twelve students enrolled. After one week one student stopped posting, leaving the course with eleven participants for the next four weeks. For students in the English Department of the university who want to complete the master’s degree or the certificate program in TPC, this course is a required course, but is an elective for English majors from other concentrations or even in the doctoral program. The participants, therefore, are a mix of TPC majors, part-time students, graduate students at different levels and experience in TPC. From their biographies posted in the first week, I gathered that at

least one student was an international student (and participated from another country), some of the students were local and full-time, the majority were out-of-state and part-time participants.

The study only looks at the discussion board shared by the students over the five week period. The study uses Yuh-chu Yeh’s (2010) “collaborative communities” frame to identify and categorize student behavior in building community.

Collaborative Communities

Yuh-chu Yeh’s (2010) article, “[Analyzing Online Behaviors, Roles, and Learning Communities Via Online Discussions](#),” reports on his online learning course of 48 students. The author placed students in groups and gave them 2 activities to accomplish. Based on their collaboration within groups and participation in general within the course, Yeh (2010) identified 13 behaviors; determined 8 roles, and delineated 4 different types of online learning communities (see Table 1) based on students’ collaborative and participatory efforts.

Table 1: Online Learning Communities (Yeh, 2010 p.150)

		Collaboration	
		High	Low
Participation	High	Active Collaboration	Individualized Participation
	Low	Passive Collaboration	Indifferent

Table 1 shows that students who frequently participated and aided in peer work were considered active collaborators, but if they frequently participated but did not aid peers in work, this was considered individualized participation. Students who infrequently participated but aided in peer work are considered passive collaborators and if they infrequently participated in the discussion forum and did not aid in peer work, they were classified indifferent. I use the 13 behaviors Yeh (2010) identified to classify the actions students make in the course. Because Yeh’s (2010) study was based on students working in groups, he was able to identify roles students played in their groups by combining the behaviors students most performed (p.145). Since the course I analyze does not utilize groups, I will not be categorizing students behaviors into roles. This means I will solely be using evidence of students’ behavior to determine the learning community that develops. To adjust, I will use the course requirements to determine whether students’ behaviors positively correlates with the online course community building. In this study I isolate students’ discussion responses to determine behaviors and whether these behaviors contribute to meeting course guidelines and developing community.

The difference in how the students completed activities (in Yeh’s course the online activities were completed by groups, the course analyzed here did not use collaborative groups), obliges me from the outset to adapt the definitions of behaviors Yeh (2010) lists. The behaviors are described from the lens of group work rather than individual work, e.g. “providing opinions for

group functioning” rather than as individual actions as completed in this case study. Table 2 (below) shows Yeh’s (2010) established behaviors and the modified definitions of the behaviors.

Table 2: List of behaviors as established by Yeh (2010) and its modified definition

Yeh (2010) results	Redefined behaviors
B1 providing opinions for group functioning	*B1 providing opinions—personal, emotional, severe
B2 providing opinions for group assignments	*B2 providing opinions about the assignments
B3 encouraging opinions about/responses to group assignment	*B3 encouraging opinions about/responses to ones post by asking questions for feedback
B4 sharing information	B4 sharing information
B5 clarifying concepts and misconceptions	B5 clarifying concepts and misconceptions
B6 constructing a positive atmosphere giving encouragement and blessings, expressing gratefulness, forgiveness and caring	B6 constructing a positive atmosphere giving encouragement and blessings, expressing gratefulness, forgiveness and caring
B7 answering questions	B7 answering questions
B8 providing reminders of assignment-related work	B8 providing reminders of assignment-related work
B9 explaining personal problems	B9 explaining personal problems
B10 explaining problems of others	B10 explaining problems of others
B11 solving problems that can hinder group progress	*B11 solving problems that can hinder others’ progress
B12 setting schedules	B12 setting schedules
B13 assigning work	B13 assigning work
	<i>*Modified behaviors definition</i>

Data Collection Method and Analysis

I completed a read-through of the data from the completed technical communication course to orient myself about the course content. This information came specifically from the course syllabus which delineated the course objective, course requirements, and, finally, the course discussion board that showed the student participants interacting with the course content, facilitator, and each other.

The students were expected to read literature based on the course topics that were assigned each week. A list of requirements were then shared with the participants to be able to meet discussion requirements. To determine community building behaviors students would have to meet or exceeded the requirements of the course and their behaviors, identified by Yeh’s (2010) list of 13 behaviors, would have to correlate with the ones Yeh (2010) identified as “active collaborative community” which includes high cooperation and high participation (p. 148).

The various posts and responses were then coded along the lines of the behaviors established in the modified section of Table 2.

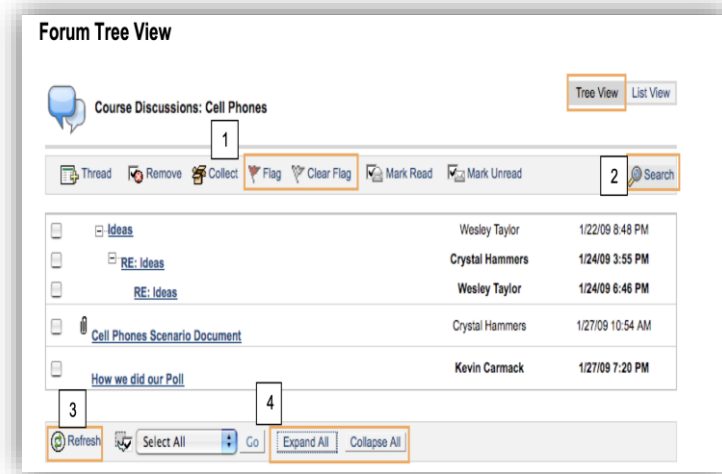
Research Tool 1: Blackboard

I used the tools available on Blackboard’s learning management system software® (Blackboard for short), the official course forum, to identify the various behaviors in the online learning

forum. Blackboard allows users to filter posts by specific authors using either “Search” or “Filter” or under “Tree View,” the user can choose “Expand All” and all students who posted for that week will appear.

Using the “Tree View” tool (see Figure 1), I identified how many times an author (student) posted in any given thread and when they posted.

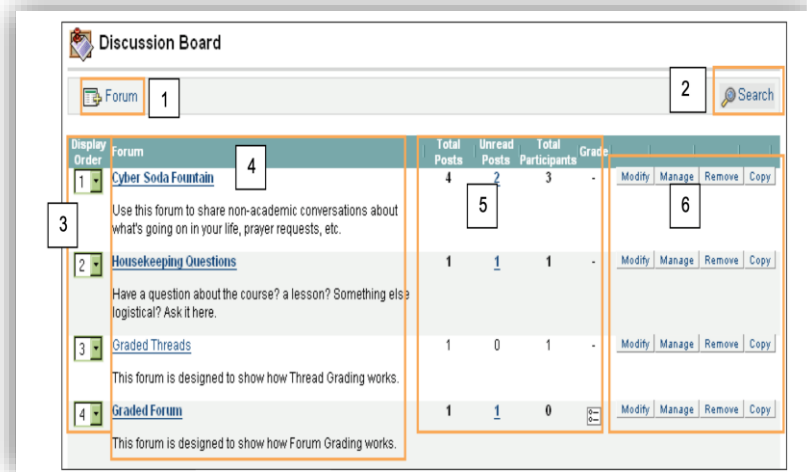
Figure 1: Blackboard Discussion Tree View/Search (Neilsen & Koehler, 2009, p. 4)



Since my initial category was to first determine who met the number of posts per week set by the course guidelines, I used the “Tree View” tool to determine, per week, who met these requirements. I then used the “Search” tool (see Figure 2) to determine whether the posts met the requirements as per the course syllabus, as listed below:

1. Post response to weekly reading assignments in 1-3 paragraphs where students must
 - Share opinions, or
 - Comment on ideas covered in the readings with questions set by the instructor as a guide, or
 - Apply ideas covered in the readings with questions set by the instructor as guide.
2. Post response or comments to 2 classmates’ postings. The responses should pertain to the subject matter of the post and not be a commentary on the person (personal attacks).
3. Questions will be set by the instructor posted on Mondays and participants should post within 7 days; participants should post more than one time during the week. (Course Syllabus found on Blackboard “Course Docs”)

Figure 2: Blackboard Discussion Forum Search View (Neilsen & Koehler 2009, p. 3)



Using the “Search” tool (see Figure 2) allowed me to count the participants who did not meet, met or exceeded the requirements of the course-

- a) posted 3 or more responses per week
- b) posted on time
- c) posted to 2 or more peers’ reading response threads
- d) posted on different dates

These were then recorded and inputted in an [MS Excel® spreadsheet](#).

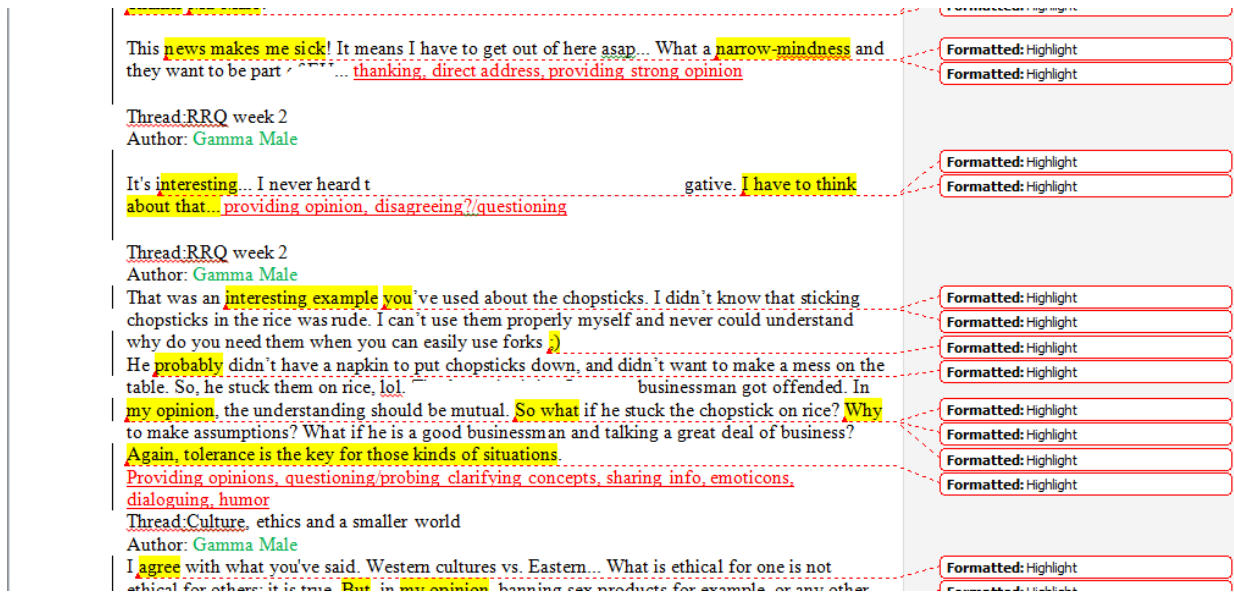
Research Tool 2: MS Word®

All discussion posts were copied to an MS Word® document by week. To keep participants anonymous, each student participant was given a pseudonym and his/her posts, regardless of where the student posted, were compiled as one set. For each week the student’s pseudonym is color coded as follows:

- 1. Red: Those who did not meet the requirements
- 2. Blue: Those who met the requirements
- 3. Green: Those who exceeded the requirements

The color scheme was important to note the participants who posted in excess; it revealed when the participant posted on the threads of other participants who were not meeting the requirements. Each post was then read and coded for a behavior. Figure 3 is an example of how the participants’ posts were collated, coded, and analyzed in MS Word.

Figure 3: Screenshot of MS Word document as tool



MS Word Track Changes In-line

Using track changes in MS Word, I highlighted the apparent behavior(s) (see Figure 3 above) from the students' posts and responses. Each behavior and the number of times the behavior occurred was recorded in an MS Excel spreadsheet.

Research Tool 3: MS Excel Spreadsheet

Based on a per week basis, I logged each behavior expressed by the participant and copied the behavior in another section of the spreadsheet. Figure 4 shows how behaviors were logged.

Figure 4: Counting behaviors per week in MS Excel

Behaviors	Sigma Female	Iota Female	Mu Female	Kappa Female	Upsilon Female	Tau Female	Alpha Male	Kappa Male	Gamma Male	Iota Male	Delta Male	Mu Male	total	
Behaviors Week 2 post														
B1 providing opinions -personal, emotional	3	1	4		4	3	1	4	6	8	3	6	43	43
B2 providing opinions about the assignments													0	0
B3 encouraging opinions about/responses	1		2		2				3	1	1	1	11	11
B4 sharing information	4	1	3		3	2	1	3	2	3	2	3	27	27
B5 clarifying concepts and misconceptions			1						2	1		2	6	6
B6 constructing a positive atmosphere givi	1												1	1
B7 answering questions	1	1							1				3	3
B8 providing reminders of assignment-related work													0	0
B9 explaining personal problems													0	0
B14 Disagreeing									2	2	1	1	6	6
B15 Agreeing	3					2		1	1	1		2	10	10
B16 sharing personal stories	4		2			2		1	2	1			12	12
B17 thanking									1				1	1
B18 dialoguing-using you to reference the	1		1		1	2		1		2		1	9	9
B19 direct address and or signature	3		7					3	3	1		2	19	19
B20 kudos													0	0
B21 Humor									2				2	2
	B 1,3,4,6,7	B1,4,7	B1,3,4,5,16,18,19		B1,4,3,18	B1, 4,15,16	B1,4	B1,4,19,15	B1,3,19,4,	B1,34,14,1	B1,4,3,14	B1,4,5,15,19,3,14,18		

The three tools: Blackboard, MS Word, and MS Excel allowed me to place the data into the categories of meeting the requirements and then coded to identify the behaviors of the student participants.

Adapting The Tool

After week one, seven additional behaviors were included to describe what some of the student participants were doing. By week two an additional behavior appeared. After reviewing week one for this additional behavior it was noted that the behavior was not evident before. The following behaviors, then, (see column 3 in Table 3) are the ones that were eventually coded. The behaviors increased to twenty-one from thirteen behaviors: disagreeing, agreeing, sharing personal stories or experiences, thanking, using ‘you’ to dialogue with peers, using direct address and a signature to respond to peers, giving kudos to peers, and, finally, using humor within posts and between responses—were added. The following table, therefore, reflects how the behaviors were further modified:

Table 3: Additional Student Behaviors

Yeh (2010) results	Behavior redefined	New findings
B1 providing opinions for group functioning B2 providing opinions for group assignments B3 encouraging opinions about/responses to group assignment B4 sharing information B5 clarifying concepts and misconceptions B6 constructing a positive atmosphere giving encouragement and blessings, expressing gratefulness, forgiveness and caring B7 answering questions B8 providing reminders of assignment-related work B9 explaining personal problems B10 explaining problems of others B11 solving problems that can hinder group progress B12 setting schedules B13 assigning work	B1 providing opinions—personal, emotional, severe B2 providing opinions about the assignments B3 encouraging opinions about/responses to ones post by asking questions for feedback B4 sharing information B5 clarifying concepts and misconceptions B6 constructing a positive atmosphere giving encouragement and blessings, expressing gratefulness, forgiveness and caring B7 answering questions B8 providing reminders of assignment-related work B9 explaining personal problems B10 explaining problems of others B11 solving problems that can hinder others’ progress B12 setting schedules B13 assigning work	B1 providing opinions—personal, emotional, severe B2 providing opinions about the assignments B3 encouraging opinions about/responses to ones post and asking questions for feedback B4 sharing information B5 clarifying concepts and misconceptions B6 constructing a positive atmosphere giving encouragement and blessings, forgiveness and caring B7 answering questions B8 providing reminders of assignment-related work B9 explaining personal problems B10 explaining problems of others B11 solving problems that can hinder others’ progress B12 setting schedules B13 assigning work B14 disagreeing B15 agreeing B16 sharing personal stories B17 thanking B18 dialoguing-using you to reference the posting participant B19 using direct address and signature B20 giving kudos B21 sharing humor

In the course, several behaviors identified by Yeh (2010) were also non-existent, these included behaviors eight, ten, eleven, twelve, and thirteen:

- B8 providing reminders of assignment-related work- “Such reminders were related to meeting times, assignment content and progress, and distribution of assignments” (p.145)
- B10 explaining problems of others- “Such behaviors were performed to tell group members why someone could not participate in group discussions or complete their assignment on time” (p. 145)
- B11 solving problems that can hinder others’ progress- “Such behaviors were performed to work out problems that could hinder group progress” (p.145)
- B12 setting schedules- “Such behaviors occurred when no group members had proposed a specific time for discussions” (p.145)
- B13 assigning work-“Such behaviors included asking group members to be responsible for certain work or asking for volunteers to complete work” (p. 145)

A closer look at the behaviors suggest that in a collaborative group these would be required as students distributed work and attempted to complete course activities. In the particular course studied, however, there were no such reason for students to carry out these particular behaviors.

The Troublemaker

A troublemaker, according to Yeh (2010), is the student participant who did not complete the work on time and displayed B9 behavior, constantly “explaining personal problems.” The only instance of a similar behavior occurring was when a participant did not have access to a tool to complete a suggested (so optional) activity by another participant, it was a behavior that reflected something out of the control of the participant, not necessarily of one trying to upset the learning environment. But there was an instance of discursive actions by a student participant in this forum that did not fit Yeh’s (2010) definition of troublemaker. The student’s behavior would fit what Yeh (2010) defines as “Indifferent,” low participation and low cooperation. The student posted a response to the weekly prompt four of the five weeks but did not respond to peers even though other participants were responding to this participant’s post. By the final week, the participant stopped posting. Since this research was constrained only to the Blackboard discussion forum and not other tools the participants had access to, it is unclear whether the participant was in communication with other participants using other tools. The participant’s lack of responding on the Blackboard forum, however, went contrary to the course requirements and community building.

Results

A notable observation of the entire course was that the facilitator’s presence was very limited. This seems to fit in with the pedagogical strategy suggested by King (1993) “From Sage on the Stage to Guide on the Side” advocating for constructivist type learning, the instructor “provides students with questions at the higher level of Bloom’s taxonomy of thinking” and allows students to respond and discuss the topic among peers (p.33). According to King (1993) this form of teaching/learning allows for active learning unlike the passive learning encountered in teacher-centered instruction. In the course, the instructor commented on the students’ posts in the first two weeks only. The first week was to all participants who posted on time. By the

second week the instructor’s participation was significantly reduced, and by the third week, the instructor stopped commenting on the Blackboard forum altogether¹.

For the student participants to meet the objectives of the course, they could not simply post 3 times to the forum, but they had to specifically:

- a) post 3 or more responses per week
- b) post on time
- c) post to 2 or more different peer participants responses
- d) post on different dates

From the data analysis, two of eleven student participants did not meet the requirements over the five week period; one of these two did not even post in the last week. Five of eleven participants met the requirements by either exceeding in one week and then not meeting the requirement in one or more weeks. Lastly, four of the eleven participants exceeded the requirements every week for all five weeks (see Table 4).

Table 4: Participation Results

Week	Did Not Meet Requirements	Met Requirements	Exceeded Requirements	Total
One	3	2	6	11
Two	2	2	7	11
Three	4	2	5	11
Four	5	2	4	11
Five	4	2	5	11
Mean	3.6	2	5.4	11
Overall #of individuals	2	5	4	11

Week one had three students who did not meet the requirements either by not posting the required number of times or else not meeting the other requirements as posted in the syllabus, for example, one student only posted once but posted on time and two participants posted three times but all on the same day to two different peers. While meeting the course requirement is important, this alone is not evidence that students attempted to or built community. It does show student participation, on average students responded 4.2 times in a given week with a maximum of eight responses per person and minimum of one response. The type of behaviors students displayed helps us understand whether community building was attempted. Did students merely respond to the facilitator’s prompt and share information (B4)? Or did they provide opinions, share personal experiences, that bell hooks (1994) calls “confessional narratives” where students “establish communal commitment to learning” or Nonaka, Toyama, and Konno’s (2000) SECI process where individuals in the community share their ideas/expertise in a socializing

¹ The limitation of this study is that the researcher was not privy to any other tool used to communicate outside of the discussion board on Blackboard.

environment? The behaviors identified in students' posts help us better understand their attempt at community building.

By far the most expressed behavior was "providing opinions"- B1. This behavior is significant because Yeh (2010) points out that this behavior "seems to be the key role for distinguishing the active collaboration communities" (p. 150). Participants provided opinions about the reading, the memory of an experience the reading triggered, or an opinion about another participant's experience shared in their post. Opinions ranged from very disgusted, to interested in peer's post, to "great" with several exclamation points. The second most expressed behavior was "sharing information"- B4, not only responding to the discussion prompt, but students also summarized and recommended other resources for further reading, and shared their experiences and expertise with other students. The third most expressed behavior was "using direct address and signature"- B19. This last behavior was a new one added to the list. All three of the behaviors, however, reveals students attempting to build a community with their peers.

"Using direct address and signature"- B19, was one of eight new behaviors that arose from the course. From the outset of the course one student consistently used a salutation and signature for all responses and a signature at the end of all posts. Soon other participants began using the salutation and signature as well. This new behavior seemed to encourage new behaviors in the responses, for example, direct address (Hi peer's name), disagreeing-B14, agreeing- B15, sharing personal stories-B16, thanking-B17, using "you" to refer to participants within the responses- referred to as dialoguing-B18. These additional behaviors were apparent in the first week, but by week two an additional behavior had to be added, that of using humor-B21. By week three yet another behavior was added, that of giving kudos- rewarding interesting perspectives or opinions with exclamatory compliments-B-20. The behaviors correlate with roles Yeh (2010) developed as follows:

- "atmosphere constructors" role of constructing "a positive and harmonious atmosphere," (p.145)- B-6, 17, 20, 21
- "supervisors" role of "asking for opinions" and "key to good group functioning" (p.145)-B1 and B3
- dialogue stimulators, a new role students played where they attempted to get peers involved and stimulate conversation- B14,15, 18,19

An interesting anomaly was when one member posted a response to the wrong prompt, none of the student participants expressed B 8- "reminding about the assignment-related work". In fact, the participant received replies from other members who responded to the content of the post.

While humor - students making fun of a situation presented in the readings or of themselves- became present in week 2 by one participant, by week 4 other participants began expressing it. By week five, it had disappeared. Kudos- using terms like "Great job" and "well done/said"- emanated in week three and was expressed for the rest of the course. Kudos may have been initiated by the facilitator who used the said language, students then began using that behavior for the rest of the course.

Table 5: Tally of behaviors by week

	week 1	week2	week3	week4	week5	total
B1 providing opinions -personal, emotional, severe	45	43	35	34	34	191
B2 providing opinions about the assignments	1	0	0	1	0	2
B3 encouraging opinions about/responses to assignment, asking questions	13	11	14	6	4	48
B4 sharing information	30	27	21	18	12	108
B5 clarifying concepts and misconceptions	5	6	12	12	19	54
B6 constructing a positive atmosphere giving encouragement and blessing	21	1	1	2	4	29
B7 answering questions	3	3	3	0	3	12
B8 providing reminders of assignment-related work	0	0	0	0	0	0
B9 explaining personal problems	1	0	0		0	1
B10 explaining problems of others	0	0	0			0
B11 solving problems that can hinder group progress			0			0
B12 setting schedules		0				0
B13 assigning work	0					0
B14 Disagreeing	10	6	2	0	1	19
B15 Agreeing	17	10	8	8	17	60
B16 sharing personal stories	11	12	12	11	7	53
B17 thanking	2	1	2	0	1	6
B18 dialoguing-using you to reference the posting participant	15	9	10	14	14	62
B19 direct address and or signature	23	19	17	17	16	92
B20 kudos	0	0	9	1	3	13
B21 Humor		2	2	5	0	9

The eight new behaviors fits the ideas of Politeness, a theory based on Grices' Cooperative Principle, but Politeness "attends to social issues" (Lakoff as cited in Eelen, 2001, p. 2). According to Robin Lakoff, politeness is "[...] a system of interpersonal relations designed to facilitate interaction by minimizing the potential for conflict and confrontation inherent in all human interchange" (Lakoff as cited in Eelen, 2001, p.2). The course topics (an ethics course that focused on a cross-cultural element) required navigating social rules. Students used Politeness strategies to "minimize conflict" while getting their points across.

Implications

The analysis gave some insight to the question:

- What behaviors do students enact in the online learning forum that contributes to community building?

The high rate of students who exceeded the course requirements revealed high participation, the students' behaviors revealed their attempt to build community while using Politeness strategies to navigate this community building. For example, many of the participants who tended to disagree, whether subtly or explicitly, also tended to foster other ideas within their peers' posts. In one response, a student would disagree with an idea, agree with some aspects, and share information for the purpose of clarification. The facilitator set the tone of the course in the first two weeks and this interaction helped guide the course. The diverse behaviors that participants displayed contributed to building their learning community.

The direct address, signature, and dialoguing behaviors were significant finds. These behaviors can be explained by Walter Ong's (1972) assertion from "The Writer's Audience is Always a Fiction," that to reach an unknown audience, the writer must fictionalize one. It is only in fictionalizing an audience, giving the audience an identity, that writers can begin to write. Not being able to see, much less meet fellow peers, participants humanized them by naming them each time they replied to their posts. Once the participants used a personalized address, either using a name or referring to the participant as "you," responses began to show multiple behaviors and denser, longer content. Dialoguing and direct address, therefore, seemed to assist the student participant in creating a persona in the asynchronous, image-less online environment.

What the results of this small sample reveal is that, once course policies have been established, the participants will perform behaviors consistent with the established forum. Students' posts revealed "knowledge of the audience, well-written texts, courteousness, sincerity, and respect," (Ludwig 2014, p. 62) in their interactions with each other and with the instructor. Notable, then, is that with strategic pedagogy, online students can learn important writing strategies that can translate into writing in virtual spaces in professional contexts. The online course must include this as a specific objective that should be assessed.

Future Research

The analysis was based on a small sample. Future research should utilize follow-up interviews with the students to determine level of experience with technology, whether technological experience played any role in their participation, and to clarify what they were doing when they expressed certain behaviors. Consideration of these factors could better determine the rhetoric behind participants' actions- why did they do what they did in the online forum. Future research could also focus on online behaviors in other digital spaces, like social media interaction.

This study acknowledged the importance of studying how students' actions-their interactions with content, instructor, peers-build community in the online learning forum. Understanding how behaviors build community and how technical communication programs can foster writing for virtual spaces in the online course is an important consideration in international professional communication and design. Along with giving students valuable experience in communicating in online/virtual contexts, this knowledge could help designers and instructors aid novice students understand how to participate, which may improve online student retention, and overall better the online learning environment.

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Unlike the physical mentoring and coaching process, Virtual Mentoring and Coaching requires mentors to be qualified with the awareness, knowledge and skills of mentoring via online technology. E-mentors are expected to be self-motivated and competent to provide mentoring and coaching experience online with knowledge and skills in building relationships with mentees, maintaining the engagement and involvement of online mentoring and coaching, and delivering meaningful and effective mentoring experiences. It was critical to the female leadership students for the virtual mentors/coaches to have deep conversations, discussions, and constructive feedback in which reflective questioning was used so that the students could develop a deeper understanding of the leadership concepts being discussed in the classes.

Virtual Mentoring and Coaching: The Perceptions of Female Principal Candidates

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The terms, mentoring and coaching, have been used in many organizational contexts (e.g., companies and educational settings), and a mentor may take on both mentoring and coaching responsibilities (Bose, 2016; Irby, 2012). According to McPartland (1985), the term of mentor was defined as: (a) one who provides mentees with guidance, advice, and assignments for promotions and (b) a protector of taking the blame and shouldering criticism for mentees' mistakes. Thus, mentoring refers to the relationship between individuals in which mentees/trainees improve their skills with the assistance from mentors. According to Irby (2012)

Mentoring is generally long lasting and involves a shared relationship. Additionally, there is a focus on the deeper development of the individual being mentored such as with his/her job goals, self-esteem, and perceived success. (p. 297).

In general, mentoring is referred to as a developmental relationship of trust and respect between the mentor and mentee for long-term career and social development (e.g., Clutterbuck, 1991; Kram, 1988). In the education setting for our study, a mentoring relationship is a close, individualized relationship that develops over time between a graduate student and a faculty member and includes both care and guidance as the student develops leadership skills within a principal preparation program. They learn that experienced school leaders can move between assuming the role of a mentor and/or the role of a coach throughout their career (Bevan & Irby, 2019).

In contrast, coaching refers to the partnership between the coach and trainee on short-term development of professional skills and performance (e.g., Grant, 2001; Pelan, 2012; Wisker, Exley, Antoniou, & Ridley, 2013). Irby (2012) stated

Coaching is typically focused on a performance event in the coached individual's life. In a coaching event, the coach may be selected by the individual, but typically, the organization pairs the coach with the individual who is perceived as needing coaching. (p. 297)

We further define coaching for our study as academic coaching which moves students to reflect and act on the range of their goals, interests, and passions during their degree-seeking term or during a course.

Our conceptual framework for this research rests squarely in the definitions and the literature on mentoring and coaching, and more specifically, virtual mentoring and coaching. The differences between mentoring and coaching can be identified in different aspects such formality, focus, structure, expertise, and agenda (Bose, 2016; Passmore, 2007; Zust, 2017). Specifically, mentoring is a long-term process (e.g., one to two years) which aims to enhance current and

future professional, social and personal development. During the mentoring process, the mentor who has more seniority and expertise is expected to provide guidance and share experience based on the mentees' needs. In another world, the mentoring process and process is mentee-oriented, and can be changed and shifted over the time. Therefore, the mentoring schedule is relatively more flexible and is usually set by mentees. Compared with mentoring the process, coaching is a short-term process (e.g., 6 months to 1 year) with the objective of promoting current job and career performance such as specific job-related professional skills and knowledge. The coaching process is coach-driven with more formal and structured plans and schedules set by coaches. Irby (2012; 2018) indicated that “mentors can coach, but coaches hardly ever mentor...” (p. 297). In our study, the mentors and coaches were the same individuals and actually engaged in both. Capraro (2019) indicated that both mentors and coaches can learn from the process of mentoring or coaching; however, they may learn different things.

With the dramatic improvements in technology, the mentoring and coaching process has been affected by technological advancement. Virtual Mentoring and Coaching (VMC; Irby, 2015; Watson, 2006) refers to mentoring and coaching activities that use a video-conferencing format for observing and for providing feedback. Furthermore, Lavin, Colky, and Young, 2006, as well as Neely, Cotton, and Neely (2017) wrote about e-mentoring, but not a combined VMC model. Other electronic mentoring has been noted as computer-mediated mentoring, tele-mentoring, e-mail mentoring, internet mentoring, online mentoring, or cyber mentoring (Bierema & Hill, 2005; Lavin, Colky & Young, 2006; Neely, Cotton, & Neely, 2017). Compared with the physical/face-to-face mentoring and coaching experience, VMC is designed and offered through utilizing communication technology, such as a combination of emails, on-line chats, on-line platforms, blogs, and video-conferencing. Similar to traditional/physical mentoring and coaching, VMC can be also designed and performed in different mentioned approaches such as one-on-one mentoring, group mentoring, and/or team mentoring.

As an innovative and revolutionary approach of mentoring and coaching, VMC shares the same objectives as physical mentoring and coaching which aims to enhance trainees' knowledge and skills with guidance and advice from mentors. Considering the benefits of applying technology, e-mentoring was first found to be effective to overcome barriers of traditional and physical mentoring experience (Bierema & Hill, 2005). Thus, advantages are associated with VMC: (a) availability, (b) flexibility, (c) effectiveness, (d) connection, and (e) community. Specifically, the availability of time, location and budget is one of the common challenges in traditional mentoring programs. physical mentoring experience may be limited by geographical distance, time conflict and budget limit (Abu-Tineh & Sadiq, 2018; Ghods & Boyce, 2013; Lavin Colky & Young, 2006; Hahn & Lester, 2012). Therefore, both mentors and mentees may face challenges such as scheduling mentoring meetings or appointments. With the help of internet-based tools, VMC can be applied at any time and any place. In addition, compared with physical mentoring experience, virtual mentoring is a more flexible approach (Kirk & Olinger, 2003). For instance, if mentees have questions and problems, they can pose questions via emails and on-line chats, or have a virtual meeting with the mentor. In this case, the mentoring experience is relatively more timely and flexible.

Although research on the effectiveness of VMC for teachers is relatively limited, , Irby (2015) indicated the following from her grant studies that include VMC: (a) just conducting mentoring or coaching virtually does not make for effective lessons by the teachers; rather, preconference notes and purposeful, supportive structured observation and feedback sessions with a followup

processing session can improve instruction for teachers, (b) the mentors must create a collaboration and must communicate well with the teachers, (c) provision of times of silence when processing the lesson with the teacher is called for as the teacher is reflecting on the lesson, and (d) the use of a reflection cycle that advocates for analysis, appraisal, and transformation is needed during the mentoring sessions. In addition to promoting knowledge and skills for both mentors and mentees in organizational contexts with electronic mentoring and/or coaching (Briscoe, 2019; Brasili & Allen, 2019; Franko, Rinehart, Kenney, Loeffelholz, Guthrie, & Caligiuri, 2016; Sugar & Tryon, 2014), mentees from mentoring and/or coaching programs consistently acknowledged the effectiveness of virtual mentoring and coaching experience in developing an equal and rigorous relationship between mentors and mentees (McConnell, Parker, Eberhardt, Koehler, Lundeberg, 2012; Parsons, Hutchison, Hall, Parsons, Ives, & Leggett, 2019). According to Kirk and Olinger (2003), the use of online technologies has been found to be effective to build the bridge between mentors and mentees regardless of personal backgrounds such as age, race, gender, physical ability, cultural background. Thus, the electronic or virtual mentoring and/or coaching can provide the effective platform to build and sustain the mentoring relationship between different people with the consideration of egalitarianism (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2002; McConnell, Parker, Eberhardt, Koehler, & Lundeberg, 2012).

Although specific benefits and effectiveness of VMC have been identified, the challenges of virtual mentoring and coaching should also be highlighted. In general, major challenges of VMC are: (a) accessibility of technology, (b) skills and knowledge regarding virtual mentoring and coaching, and (c) building and sustaining the mentoring relationship. First of all, any type of e-mentoring requires both mentors and mentees to develop their knowledge and skills of internet-based technology such as knowledge of online platforms, online literacy skills, and communication skills (e.g., (Bierema & Hill, 2005; Fodeman, 2002; Guy, 2002; Hill, Wiley, Han, & Nelson, 2003). Thus, having access to technologies with necessary and appropriate skills is significantly associated with effective VMC experiences. The lack of on-line knowledge and skills may hamper the effectiveness of VMC and give rise to possible misunderstandings. Therefore, both mentors and mentees are expected to be familiar and comfortable with using internet-based technologies of mentoring and coaching. In addition to technology-related knowledge, Considering the e-contexts of mentoring through emails, messages, and online meetings, communicative and mentoring skills are also expected to be appropriate in the on-line context. Moreover, privacy is another significant challenge of e-mentoring (Bierema & Hill, 2005). Given that the e-mentoring is conducted through internet platforms and software, the mentoring process has the potential to be publicly recorded (Kirk & Olinger, 2003). In this case, both mentors and mentees are required to be aware of protecting privacy during such a virtual process. Three additional challenges regarding the virtual mentoring relationship are: (a) matching mentors and mentees appropriately, (b) building mutual respect and trust with the online platform, and (c) sustaining the mentoring and coaching activities. Unlike physical mentoring relationships, both mentors and mentees may have difficulties in building and developing the mentoring relationship (e.g., the lack of communications and the ignorance of e-mails). Therefore, finding approaches and techniques to construct and sustain the virtual mentoring relationship is significant.

Tele-mentoring and coaching set higher requirements/qualifications, especially for virtual mentors who are responsible to lead and facilitate the mentoring experiences. Unlike the physical mentoring and coaching process, VMC requires mentors to be qualified with the awareness,

knowledge and skills of mentoring via online technology. E-mentors are expected to be self-motivated and competent to provide mentoring and coaching experience online with knowledge and skills in building relationships with mentees, maintaining the engagement and involvement of online mentoring and coaching, and delivering meaningful and effective mentoring experiences. As for E-mentors, VMC offers experiences and opportunities of becoming an effective leader in the digital era. Virtual mentoring and coaching can be designed and offered through various communicative tools. In this section, several commonly-used communication platforms, which can be used for virtual mentoring and coaching, are introduced such as Google Meet, GoToMeeting, Webex, and Zoom. Each of these online communication tools has its own features for online meetings. VMC may prove to be beneficial as more research is produced on this topic, and as technology and skills for VMC improve.

Context of the Study

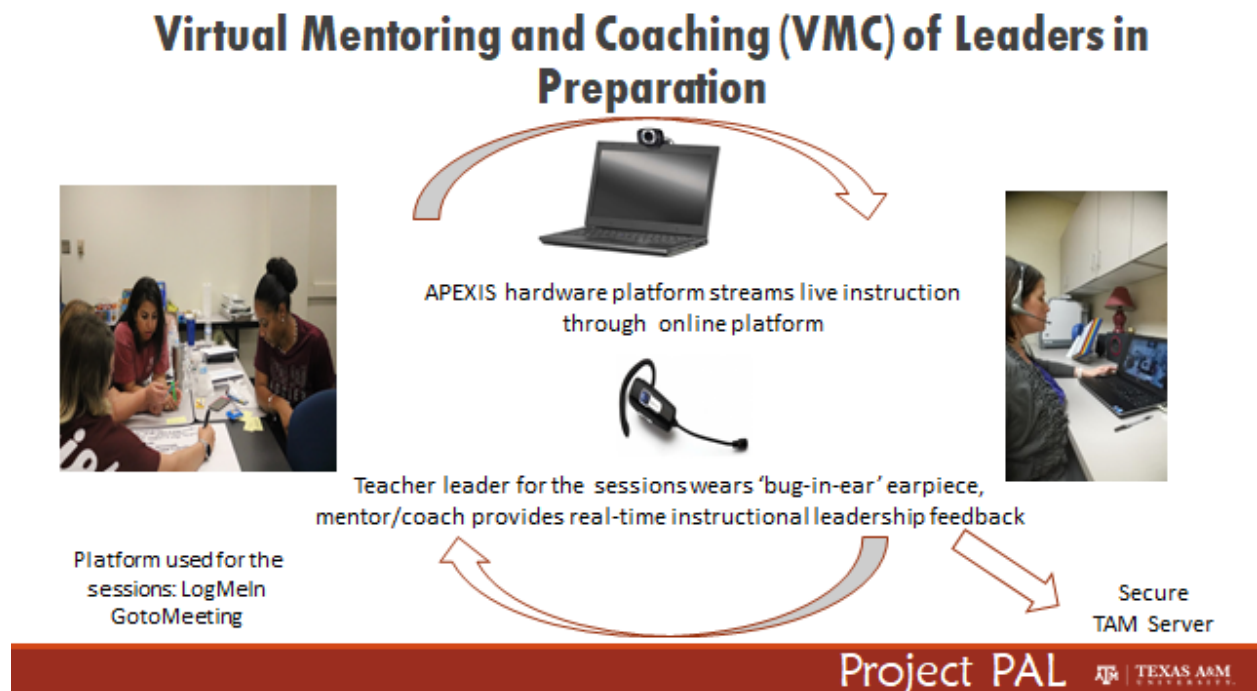
Preparing Academic Leaders (PAL), Texas A&M University, is a fully online dual master's program in educational administration and bilingual education. PAL is a national professional development (NPD) grant (Award# T365Z170073) for 120 certified in-service teachers (three cohorts of 40 teachers each), who serve on campuses with large numbers of English learners (ELs), with the intent to improve instruction in order to improve ELs academic achievement. The in-service teachers meet high professional standards as they receive dual (two) advanced professional certifications in bilingual or English as second language (ESL) education and leadership. Project PAL (PAL) responds to the NPD use of the grant under two items: (a) the development of program curricula appropriate to the needs of the consortia participants involved and (b) provide financial assistance to pay for tuition toward the certification training. PAL meets the requirements of What Works Clearinghouse without reservations (RCT) by including a rigorous external evaluation with random assignment at the individual level—randomized to either treatment or control. Treatment teachers receive Virtual Mentoring and Coaching (VMC) sessions. We designed the VMC program to offer multiple ways of support to the principal candidates to identify the leadership and professional growth based on their needs. The VMC program is designed to respond to the needs of the principal candidate. The mentors share a prompt in each session and ask the mentee (principal candidate) to reflect on this prompt. These prompts related to leadership development and leadership needs for campuses that serve high needs students. The program includes a coaching section in which the mentor coaches the mentee while they are practicing leadership activities. The mentor and the mentee are connected with the TAMU CRDLLA/ELRC Applied Pedagogical Extra Imaging System (APEXIS; Figure 1); however, all 120 candidates receive the same PD and information inclusive of leading bilingual/ESL programs for improving instruction of ELs' achievement. The control group does not receive virtual mentoring and coaching (VMC). For control teachers there is no continuous bi-weekly mentoring/coaching sessions.

For the purpose of the virtual mentoring and coaching program, two mentors were hired to support the principal candidates enrolled in the PAL program. The first mentor/coach is a retired Professor in the Educational Leadership Department. Her career path included High school mathematics teacher, mathematics and curriculum specialist, curriculum director, and professor. She has focused much of her work on improving teaching and learning mathematics as it relates to gender, leadership, and early childhood. Her expertise lies in professional development in teaching mathematics (PK-20), campus/district curriculum audits, and writing and evaluating grants.

Mentor/coach 2 has 40 years in education. She taught students in public schools and in administrative positions in large Texas school districts. She also taught graduate students in some colleges. She also has a long history of developing individual leadership and teamwork through quality professional development in a wide variety of administrative assignments and responsibilities. She is successful in establishing effective work teams using PLCs and educational programs.

Figure 1

Applied Pedagogical Extra Imaging System (APEXIS)



Procedures for VMC

The virtual mentoring and coaching program consists of five steps. Step 1, all PAL treatment group participants meet as a group in a one-hour whole group virtual meeting. The session is designed as an introduction of the treatment participants in one setting to discuss the VMC process. The main purpose of this session was to clarify expectations and establish norms. Example questions for this discussion included: What mentoring experiences have you had in the past? What do you consider effective mentoring? Why is mentoring important? What are your expectations for our virtual mentoring and coaching program?

Step 2. The mentors schedule an individual hour session for each participant. Each participant receives an email from their mentor asking their preferred time and day of the week to meet. Sessions are scheduled to occur within a one-week block of time (Monday-Friday).

In step 3, the mentors conduct virtual sessions utilizing both camera and microphone tools in the gotomeeting platform.

Step 4. The mentor develops a prompt (a question or two) to share with her mentee in each session. Sessions were recorded and mentees were told the purpose and limits of the recording tool. After each session, the mentor converted the session into a MP3 (data) document. These sessions were then uploaded to Google folders for transcription and analysis. In step 5, the mentors write a reflection over all mentee-mentor sessions.

Methods

A phenomenological approach (Cresswell, 2017) with a convenience sampling (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012) was employed for this study. The phenomenological approach allows for scholars to explore a phenomenon within the context of the participants and to report from their perspectives.

Research Question

One research question was developed for this study which centered in exploring the impact of the virtual mentoring and coaching on the principal candidates. The question was: What was the impact of the virtual mentoring and coaching (VMC) provided to principal candidates on their leadership growth and the completion of the principal preparation program?

Participants

Convenience sampling is appropriate for this sub-study of the randomized control study that was shared in the context section of the paper. The treatment group of PAL cohort two participated in this study as a convenience sample and as the group that received the VMC. Convenient sampling requires all participants are available, accessible, and willing to participate (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). Since PAL participants are students in the program and signed a consent form to participate in all research activities of the program, thus, they are available and willing to participate. The cohort has 44 students, only treatment group students are included in this study (n=22). The 22 participants were all female masters students in the principal preparation program, and they received the VMC program.

Data Collection

PAL has an approved IRB to conduct the research. The data were collected using an open ended online questionnaire. A comprehensive 27-item questionnaire was used in the larger study, but for this sub-study, there was one question among those items what was relevant to respond to the research question. The questions also included 11 demographic items (e.g. gender, race/ethnicity, district, school level, etc.). The question used to gather the data was “what role (if any) did the Virtual Mentoring and Coaching) play in being able to complete the program?”. In order to ensure the unbiased, the participants received the online questionnaire right after they graduate from the program in December 2020. The questionnaire was sent out in January given a month to the participants to complete it. Three reminder emails were sent out on January 11, January 25, and January 31. By February 2nd, the questionnaire was closed. The total number of participants are twenty-two participants who participated in PAL principal preparation master’s program at Texas A&M University, and who received virtual mentoring and coaching sessions biweekly.

Data Analysis

The data of the open-ended online survey question were coded and analyzed. Themes emerged based on the codes that were developed. The researchers revised the codes in order to ensure the

validity of the data. Themes emerged deductively based on the comparison of the codes. For confidentiality purposes, we replaced the names of the participants by numbers.

Credibility of the Study

The first thing that helped in increasing the credibility and trustworthiness of the study was that we have built rapport with participants for more than one year. This is because the research team included professors and graduate students in Project PAL who either taught or worked directly with participants. Such rapport was necessary as it increased the trust in the perceptions participants shared (Cope, 2014). In addition to building rapport, we utilized two main strategies to increase the credibility and trustworthiness of the study that were low inference descriptors and investigator triangulation (Johnson, 1997). In the low inference descriptors, we extracted and used direct quotes from the interviews with the participants. Additionally, for the investigator triangulation, three members of our research team participated in identifying and developing the themes and the sub-themes (Krefting, 1991).

Results

Demographic Results

In the demographic data section, we asked questions related to gender, race and ethnicity, school type, years of experience in teaching English Learners (Els.), years of experience in teaching in general, and the reasons for pursuing a principal preparation program. The treatment group included 22 female participants and one male. We only analyzed the responses of the female participants (n=22) for the purpose of this study. The majority of the female treatment group participants were Latina (11 participants), then White (7 participants), and African American (4 participants). Thirteen female treatment participants served in elementary schools, 4 female participants in middle schools, two in high schools, one in charter schools, and two in the district level (See Table 1).

Table 1

The Demographic Description of the Participants

Gender			
	Female	22	100%
Race/ethnicity			
	African American	4	18%
	Hispanic	11	50%
	White	7	32%
	Others	0	0%

School Type

Elementary	13	59%
Middle School	4	18%
High School	2	9%
Charter School	1	5%
District Level	2	9%

Years of Experience

3-5 years of experience	2	9%
5-10 year of experience	6	27%
10+ years of experience	14	64%

Years of Experience Teaching English Learners

1-3 years of experience	0	0%
3-5 years of experience	2	9%
5-10 years of experience	6	27%
10+ years of experience	14	64%

Thematic Results

Treatment group participants completed an open-ended question asking about the role, if any, that VMC played in being able to complete the program. The analysis of the reported comments (n= 22) revealed the following emergent themes: (a) virtual mentors as a comfort, (b) VMC as a tool for accountability, and (c) VMC as a source for feedback and intellectual depth:

The Virtual Mentors Can Be A Comfort

One of the primary functions of mentoring and coaching is providing psychological support. Participants who participated in the PAL program highlighted that the VMC experience was effective to address their needs of emotional comfort and encouragement. Specifically, connecting with virtual mentors or coaches who are encouraging and are able to check in with their comfort level is beneficial for mentees when they are facing challenges and concerns caused by a school crisis (they mentioned the pandemic), personal/family issues, and course/career pressure. We include two comments that represent what the participants stated. A participant noted:

There was one week in the program where my husband lost his job, and the school year was starting, and my job was overwhelming, and everything seemed like too much. The mentor really helped get me through that time. I think most of the people in the program had some kind of moment like that.

The participants indicated that the availability of the mentor to provide the support helped sooth the stress they had. Another participant stated,

Yes, very supportive. Dr. Peterson is always there when I need to speak with somebody. This year was very challenging because of covid, personal issues, and professional ones. I needed to talk to somebody to give me some support and strength. Dr. Peterson did this perfectly.

Participants also found that mentors played a valuable role to help identify the career goals and career choices. A participants shared,

Having the virtual mentoring and coaching sessions was extremely beneficial. It was nice to have an experienced professional to consult with on not only school assignments but life and career choices. It was also nice to have someone to check in with, express ideas and concerns throughout the program.

VMC is a Tool for Accountability in the Program

Building and maintaining accountability is of significance in mentoring and coaching relationships. The significance of VMC in creating a supportive mentor-mentee relationship was addressed by participants in the PAL program. Mentees consistently reported that their virtual mentor/coach was responsible for accountability to provide support, track progress, and keep them accountable with regular care and attention. Representative comments follow. One of the participants shared:

My mentoring coach was essential in supporting me to complete the program. She supported me and was able to answer any questions that I had. She also makes sure that I was on track and completing my assignments and getting anything that was due turned in on time. I just reported at all times and can use that if I had any questions or you go to her and she could help me figure out what the answer would be or what steps I need to take.

Another participant noted:

It was nice to have someone to be accountable to who checked in with your progress and comfort level. There was one week in the program where my husband lost his job and the school year was starting and my job was overwhelming and everything seemed like too much. The mentor really helped get me through that time. I think most of the people in the program had some kind of moment like that.

The participants also highlighted that the mentor played a role to keep them focused on the planned goals. One of the participants said “My mentor kept me on task and discussing my assignments really helped in getting started on them rather than leaving them to complete at the last minute, it helped in keeping me accountable”.

VMC is A Resource for Feedback and Intellectual Depth

One of the major mentoring and coaching responsibilities is to provide feedback for personal and professional development. In the PAL program, the VMC created a platform in which virtual mentors not only provided feedback on mentees’ performance and progress, but also promoted deep reflections with brainstormings, discussions and questions. Mentees benefited from the informative feedback and in-depth discussions and developed their understanding regarding the instructional leadership. Representative comments from all participants are shared with the following comments. One of the participants reported:

My mentor coached me as I organized and planned meetings for my ESL teachers. Her mentoring helped me focus and see things thoroughly since this is my second year outside of the classroom. She listened and questioned me in a way that I had to think and come up with ideas to present my information instead of giving me the answers. I am grateful and will continue reaching out.

The participants explored the role of the mentor as a person who gives instructive feedback with which the participants become able to complete their leadership program. Another participant noted that “...she supported me on my coursework, certification, and preparedness to hold a leadership role. My mentor was extremely motivating and provided constructive feedback”.

Discussion and Conclusion

Mentoring and coaching are key factors in achieving leadership growth, particularly for the female teacher leaders in this study. These actions can be understood as the process of sharing the experience from an experienced leader to less-experienced one to achieve the goal of increasing the leadership skills of the latter. A qualitative case study was performed to explore virtual mentoring and coaching on the leadership growth as perceived by principal candidates who pursue a master of educational administration in one of the university principal preparation programs. Based on the analysis of the data collected by the open-ended survey, three main themes emerged: (a) the virtual mentors can be a comfort, (b) VMC is a tool for accountability in the leadership program, and (c) VMC is a resource for feedback and intellectual depth.

In this study, we found three new items related to VMC support of female teacher leaders by female mentor/coaches who are in training to become principals during the time they are enrolled in a principal preparation program. In general, mentoring has been found to be effective when there are same-sex mentors and mentees (O’Brien, Biga, Kessler, & Allen, 2010); however, we were unable to find any information on same-sex mentors or coaches as related to VMC.

Therefore, three major findings in this study add to the literature on female teacher leaders as principal candidates and VMC. First, there has been no information reported for virtual mentoring and coaching related to being psychological or emotional support for the mentees and to keep them focused on their career goals. Second, for teacher leaders to be successful in the targeted lessons within a principal preparation program, we found that the virtual mentors/coaches were important in keeping them focused on the tasks and goals in the courses, and they helped them to be accountable for their actions as a student. Third, it was critical to the

female leadership students for the virtual mentors/coaches to have deep conversations, discussions, and constructive feedback in which reflective questioning was used so that the students could develop a deeper understanding of the leadership concepts being discussed in the classes.

To conclude, virtual mentoring and coaching (VMC) was important to help female principal candidates complete their program. VMC typically is not provided by principal preparation programs, however, we would recommend it for online educational leadership programs or for face-to-face ones as well. We determined that for this group of female principal candidates that VMC is a significant tool to help them complete their program and to strengthen their leadership skills. Adding VMC sessions as part of the educational leadership students' learning and growth is our recommendation to the decision makers of principal preparation programs.

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As I embark on the adventure of 2021 and beyond, I am strengthened by the experiences of 2020 and am empowered to tackle the new challenges knowing that I have a team, new skills and perspective that will help me conquer whatever the new year brings!!! Remember: “Its not what happens to you, but how you react that matters.” May you find happiness and abundance in 2021.

Life Lessons from 2020

Dr. Lindsey Pollock
Principal, Garden Oaks Montessori School, Houston ISD

To say that the year 2020 was filled with unprecedented events is an understatement! At a recent gathering of colleagues (virtually), the group agreed that 2020 was going to go down in history as a year we would never, ever forget for so many reasons. As we conversed, most of the stories we shared about were about the pain and agony of the negative or unhappy situations and news stories that we all agreed we would have happily forgone. After I hung up with my friends I reflected on our shared perceptions of the year and wondered how we could reframe our conversation the next time we met to focus on the hope of a new year. While there is a time and place to share our struggles, it is also important to balance our world view with hope, gratitude and the promise that tomorrow brings to us. With that new perspective in mind, I decided to write down the lessons or strategies learned over the year. Ideas and perceptions that I will carry with me from the opportunities 2020 presented. I turned to my journal of notes and the reflections of the year when I found a quote attributed to Greek philosopher Epictetus that I had written on the page and circled back in May. “It is not what happens to you, but how you react that matters.”

Lesson one: When everyone comes together for a common purpose we all “win”.

When the schools closed and we had to quarantine, everyone came together for our children. Our common purpose was to do what whatever it takes, really anything to keep our children stay safe and keep them engaged with school. When we received word the evening of March 12th that schools would be closed the next day, we thought would be a brief interlude in the school year. While our Spring Break was to have started the next week, everyone switched gears, cancelled plans and went to work. Teachers and staff collaborated and created online lessons, packets and scheduled technology pick-ups every day during the break to ensure that we were ready to roll out virtual school the next week. Our staff at Garden Oaks worked non-stop to gather devices from our recently abandoned classrooms to gather and distribute what we had on hand to children who did not have computers at home. Some of our families donated extra laptops and iPads that they had at home so that everyone would have access to virtual lessons. Teachers worked to help each other to develop lessons to keep the learning going. We cleared out desks (and refrigerators), bagged up belongings and found homes for class pets and plants! In the end, we finished out the school year online and were an even stronger and more capable team when we returned to school virtually in the fall. Again, coming together for a common purpose, working together and winning - achieving our common goal brought us closer together.

Lesson two: Embrace change (especially the use of technology)!

Technology has been a tool for years in our elementary classrooms. A tool that many of us reluctantly used to supplement our lessons and to explore the programs that we were introduced to each year with mediocre interest. During the pandemic, however, technology became our best friend, a portal to new opportunities and a literal lifesaver for so many! Virtual school, whether 100% virtual or hybrid, has created an entirely new format of lesson delivery and a whole new way to connect with people! While many of us learned to use many new apps, platforms and functions in our existing programs, we’ve also made connections with one another in new ways!

Virtual conferences with parents became a regular format of communication. We had exponentially more conferences with parents who we could see online and partner with more effectively when we moved to the virtual format. Parents who would otherwise have to take time away from work and even lose pay were eager and available to meet with us in the virtual environment. MicroSoft Teams became our platform for faculty meetings, parent meetings including PTO and we saw our attendance numbers skyrocket! On both personal and professional levels, virtual meetings meant I could jump from one meeting to another without losing time that I would have otherwise had to use driving in traffic across Houston! My family connections have also improved (we are scattered across the country in New Jersey, Minnesota, South Carolina, Nevada, Texas and Pennsylvania) as we now meet every week to connect online. This is truly a gift as pre-pandemic we rarely set aside time to connect since we were all running in separate directions! By embracing technology and learning these new applications, we have overcome the changing landscape and created new realities in both professional and personal settings.

Lesson three: Take time to relish daily miracles!

Every moment is a miracle. When the news of the pandemic hit and we hunkered down in quarantine, emotions at my house were running high. Over time, the trepidation and uncertainty began to wane and we fell into a daily rhythm that started to feel “normal”. It was at this point, as the days of quarantine stretched on, I noticed many things around me. Familiar everyday things that I had taken for granted. Much like driving to school each day on auto-pilot, not noticing my surroundings or even the sunrise, I felt my eyes opening, my senses becoming fully engaged and an awakening to my home, my friend and my family. An awareness that had been numbed by the frantic pace of my pre-pandemic daily schedule. As silly as it may sound, I appreciated the automatic coffee maker that had my favorite beverage ready for me each morning. While it was doing what it had always done, I had become oblivious to my husband’s evening ritual of preparing the coffee pot each night. In my rush out of the house each morning, I would grab my cup and head to work without thinking about the care it had taken to make this happen every day. My increased awareness, resulted in an increased gratitude for the contribution my husband made every day to be sure that I had what I needed every morning. I learned to savor my favorite foods during these slower times, to eat scheduled meals seated at the table, to eat more slowly and reflect with gratitude the efforts of the many people at work to keep our supply chain running. As I walked through the empty aisles at the grocery stores at the beginning of the pandemic I was confronted with my assumptions about our food staples and supplies. Like so many, I had assumed they would always be available (barring natural disaster) and had never imagined a health crisis of this magnitude. Now, every day I marvel at the interconnectedness of our systems from the farm to the store to my home. So many every day miracles that I used to take for granted! Now I keep a gratitude journal and cherish each day. My husband and I end every day with a moment of thanks not only to the universe but also to one another for the gift of each miraculous day!

2020 has not only brought challenges but also opportunities for growth and a shift in awareness that has benefited me and my family. Reflecting on these three simple life lessons are gifts for me and my family. What gifts did 2020 bring you and yours? Will 2020 have a lasting impact on your lifestyle and/or habits? I encourage you to keep a calendar or journal to reflect on your year, to write down your thoughts of the past momentous year but continue to journal as we re-emerge in 2021. What is a quote that would sum up 2020? If 2020 were a song what song would you choose?

What is your these for 2021? Is it based on what you've learned in 2020? For me, I decided to focus on the word "thrive". As I embark on the adventure of 2021 and beyond, I am strengthened by the experiences of 2020 and am empowered to tackle the new challenges knowing that I have a team, new skills and perspective that will help me conquer whatever the new year brings!!! Remember: "Its not what happens to you, but how you react that matters." May you find happiness and abundance in 2021.

In the world of acting and theatre, resilience is a critical skill that actors develop for the ever-changing roles they must play. Educators must possess that critical skill of resilience and perseverance in a uniquely challenging environment where pathways are muddy, crooked, untraveled, and uncharted. This author shares the love that teachers have for each other and how one campus pulled together to share the load.

Leading with Love

Dr. Doreen Martinez

Principal, Memorial Parkway Elementary, Katy ISD

As school leaders, we are constantly facing challenges that impact our school. These times have been especially challenging with the COVID-19 pandemic, winter storms, and the pressure of continuing to move the school forward. Many of us are used to having some sort of control over our circumstances, however, the control is no longer in our hands. It is important to stay focused on our goals while navigating through our uncertain world.

I have found myself at many crossroads during the past year and have sometimes felt the weight of the world on my shoulders. With all the challenges we have faced, we are still responsible for the success of our students. Our state still requires us to show progress in spite of the times in which we live. They look to us as the leaders to make sure our teachers, staff, and children are growing and showing progress. We find our time being used to make sure safety is the top priority. We know that safety is the number one concern, and we must do all we can to ensure our schools are a safe place where everyone has what they need. We know that safety is one of the most basic needs for all.

These times have really caused us to understand we must remain focused on the things we can control, and deal with the understanding of the things we cannot. It is in this paradox where we must dig deep down and find the strength and courage to lead those we lead with love. This is where we all must live to get through this time. We must constantly weigh each and every decision to make sure we keep our children and staff at the center. We know everyone is depending on us to make sure we do everything possible to help everyone make it through these unprecedented times. I believe that in spite of all the shifting mandates and actions we have to take, it is important to step away and reflect on what is going right. What have we learned since March of 2020? What has been successful, and what hasn't? It is there where love grows.

I have worked especially hard at staying focused on how we can continue to move forward. How can we reinvent our work and yet still achieve the progress we need to show growth? The answer lies in our interactions with others. We must put on our brave faces and help those we serve know that we are here for them. We must celebrate our progress at every step. We have to show everyone that we are in the trenches with them and help them all along the way. Ultimately, we are all human, and need to put our hands out and show them with our actions that we love them. We must do all we can to encourage, inspire, and support them in this journey. We have to show patience and let others know we are right beside them in the struggle. I believe that by fostering relationships with those we serve is how we will make it through. I believe that at the end of the day, it is our teachers who make the most impact on the lives of our children. As the leader, we are their coaches not their managers. We are here to make sure they have all they need to help our children, and that we are all in this together.

At my campus, we have some of the most loving and dedicated teachers who come to school every day to ensure our children are learning and growing. They know our times are constantly changing, and demands are high, however, they remain steadfast in doing whatever it takes to help our children. In March of 2020, we were faced with changing the way we delivered instruction. In our lifetime, instruction has been delivered in a face-to-face format and COVID-19 forced us all to utilize virtual tools. Even our teachers of the youngest children had to retool

their teaching skills virtually overnight. They had to learn how to use technology to teach the basics of reading, writing and math. Teachers took on the challenge head on and with training and support they made it happen. The relationships our teachers had with our children and parents were the key to the success. We made sure they were provided with direct instruction on how to utilize electronic means to instruct and gave them permission to make mistakes along the way. We supported them through the challenges and celebrated them for the successes. During our journey we constantly referred to the analogy of building the airplane in the sky. We recognized that we did not have all the answers we just needed to keep working and building. We made it through the spring of 2020 with lots to celebrate. Our campus was one of the most connected schools in our district for about five weeks in a row. Our children, with the help of their parents, made lots of gains in our district level assessments. Our teachers were relentless no matter what was going on in the world. Relentless. Giving. Front line generals. Our teachers kept going and they never gave up on our children.

In August of 2020, we all were hopeful our lives would go back to some sort of normal; however, the challenges only increased. We had hoped for a vaccine and an end to the pandemic; unfortunately, COVID-19 infections only increased. We now were faced with teaching students at school and at home. This presented even more challenges with figuring out how to teach our children while keeping the classes small enough to ensure safety for all.

At my campus, I was constantly reviewing class sizes of face-to-face and virtual students. We started with about 60% face-to-face and 40% virtual and we did what we could to balance out classes. Every grading quarter, more and more students returned to face-to-face instruction. We were dealing with shrinking virtual classes and growing face-to-face classes. How could we keep everyone safe with the variance in class sizes? The teachers had the answers. They collaborated with each other and provided the solutions. Some of them volunteered to teach two grade levels at the same time. We had two third grade teachers who took on one second grade class to help their second grade peers reduce class sizes. We had face-to-face teachers volunteer to help their team by taking on a virtual class in a rotation. We even had teachers request new classes made up of virtual and face-to-face students. We are now at about 85% face to face and 15% virtual. Our teachers are creative, resilient, and have not only built the airplane, but they have landed and taken off many times over. Our parents have continued to support us as we navigate the uncharted waters and love our teachers. They support us at every step and support us as we shift teachers and students, they know we remain fixed on our goal. We will do whatever it takes to help our children and most importantly keep them all safe.

I wanted to share our story because if you create the right setting, give enough support, work together, and do all you can not to put too much on teachers' plates they will amaze you. I like to believe that we are all truly in this together and that is why we made the choice to enter education. As a leader we have to be willing to be vulnerable and understand we don't have to have all the answers, we are not alone in this struggle and by leading with the love in our hearts, we all will make it through these challenges and be able to face whatever comes next.

*Our leadership is defined by the example we set and our actions and words. It is about purpose and living life for others, selflessness. How we treat others and make others feel, when given a position of power, matters. Are we being intentional in our words, thoughts, actions, and daily relationships? To love, serve, lead and find our joy, **we** must move forward selflessly, and take the position we have been given and use it to promote others. **We** must also have balance in our lives; for me, it starts with taking care of myself spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and physically so that I am my best. **WE**, are Women Executives, here to serve and grow one another, and, to help develop leadership skills in ourselves and others.*

In that charge is the place where we can find complete joy!

~ Shelly Slaughter



**Shelly Slaughter, TCWSE President-Elect
Superintendent Cumby ISD**

**LOVE, SERVE, LEAD...#FindYourJoy
“Thoughts from Shelly”**

Following are my thoughts on what of “Love, Serve, Lead...#FindYourJoy” is all about. It starts with asking ourselves if we approach all situations with heart, with others in mind first. As real servant leaders, we should wholeheartedly love others, forget about our own stuff, and focus on other’s needs. Our leadership is defined by the example we set and our actions and words. We must be the example, and inspire and motivate.

2020 has definitely taught us many lessons. For some, we have “relearned” how to cherish our time and our relationships. For others, priorities have changed. Families seem to be spending more time together; in very unique ways, and strangers are showing compassion to one another. We have also learned the importance of being the positive, acting from our moral compasses, living for others not self, and leading with understanding, compassion, and empathy; no matter how tired, stressed, or numb we have become. We realize that this world does not define us, and that we cannot let fear paralyze us. We are all leaders in some capacity, and we have a time to shine and gifts to share.

LOVE – Love starts with loving ourselves and loving what we do and why we do it, and who we do it with. We must move past ourselves, and know that caring about people is a decision, it can transform our lives, and a life of love allows us to live beyond amazing. Love hugs the lonely, feeds the hungry, and is never self-centered. We should teach others how to love, show love, do not save it! We are here to love all; even those who are unkind, not receptive, those who despise and try to tear down, LOVE people unconditionally and without expectation.

SERVE – Our purpose is to serve others through the role we have been given. Serving is not about what we get from it, but what others gain. The greatest leaders are servant leaders. We can conquer loneliness and sadness by forgetting ourselves and focusing on others. If we learn to elevate our thinking, we will elevate our lives and our hearts, this effects our doing. We should do things for the greater good. Be a good listener, authentic, vulnerable, and flexible. We can only lead others if we serve them with loving, understanding, patient hearts. We should serve without pride, boasting, feelings of resentment, or expecting anything in return.

LEAD – Leadership is self-discipline, confidence, diligence, persistence, and determination. For us to change, we must have the proper inspiration, the right leader/example. As leaders, we should be trustworthy and create unity, and support, appreciate, and encourage; while holding each other accountable without blaming others for limitations. Our leadership should also give direction, and focus with clear expectations, no guessing. To be leaders, we cannot just do one thing well, we do life well. Make Life Happen!

#FindYourJoy – If we are not content, we are in contention. Contention is a struggle, when we are not happy, we are always competing. We cannot be grateful and negative at the same time. Life is all about the journey, we must stop looking and really SEE, and must stop just hearing and really LISTEN. When we really see and listen, we can then truly see people for who they are and discover what is in their hearts and thoughts; thus allowing us to connect on a much deeper level. We find the bright spots, whether that be people or the qualities they have, and we learn to appreciate those. We are willing to do the work and follow up; knowledge is not enough, action is what makes the difference. Instilling confidence and pride in one another, and showing this through actions not just words, because we cannot hide our true selves for long. If there is something others will see that we are not proud of, we can change! Remember peace and grace daily, and that life is only 10% of what happens to us, and 90% ATTITUDE. Life and Joy are not about titles or notoriety, life and joy are about living our purpose daily, finding our gifts, and growing, cultivating, and sharing those gifts with the world.

To love, serve, lead and find our joy, we must move forward selflessly, and take the position we have been given and use it to promote others. We must also have balance in our lives; for me, it starts with taking care of myself spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and physically so that I am my best. When I am my best, I can take care of others. The world is full of brokenness, we can rise above by counting our blessings and helping others do the same. Also, we should strive to be intentional in our words, thoughts, actions, and relationships. Joy does not mean being happy all the time and that bad things will not happen, it is how we view it and rise above it and use it to better ourselves and the world around us. We are here to serve and grow one another, through using our gifts and by respecting each other's expertise and experiences. What a reward to see others find true joy and love living, because of one small thing we may have said or done. My daily prayer is that I always lead with grace, give to others, serve them daily, show genuine care, be the hope, spread joy and live my best life. If I can do this daily, I know that I am loving, serving, leading, and have very much found my joy!