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School Leaders' Perspectives of The UVA Model for Instructional Leadership Competency

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Abstract

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MA, Western Governor's University, 2008

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Project Study Submitted in Fulfillment

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Abstract

Research shows supportive partnerships between school districts and universities can enhance school district performance. Such a relationship was used to address the problem of lacking quality instructional leadership capacity of school leaders placed in target turnaround school settings to improve teacher efficacy and student achievement. The purpose of this study was to create deep understanding of the perceptions of target turnaround school leaders that participated in the target district's partnership with the University of Virginia Partnership for Leadership in Education (UVA-PLE), to improve their instructional leadership competency. Guided by a leadership competency framework developed by McClelland and applied by UVA-PLE, this basic qualitative study elicited the perceptions of school leaders in three areas: the effects of participation in the UVA-PLE program on their instructional leadership competency, teacher effectiveness, and student achievement. Of the school leaders who participated in the UVA-PLE, 8 completed an open-ended questionnaire and 4 of those completed an additional semi structured interview for in-depth follow-up. Data were analyzed using in vivo and pattern coding to identify themes. Findings indicate that participants perceived increased development of their instructional leadership competency through improved strategies for more effectively customizing application of various leadership tools and skills in their schools, following involvement in the UVA-PLE program. A position paper with recommendations aimed at heightening instructional leadership competency was developed. With enhanced instructional leadership competency, positive social change is possible as increased teacher efficacy and student achievement is fostered in schools.

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Section 1: The Problem

The Local Problem

Instructional leadership in schools took center stage in an era of school accountability supported by legislation intended to improve student achievement such as the current Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) before it. School leaders were accountable for and instrumental in ensuring effective teaching and student achievement (Reedy et al., 2017). The competencies required of school leaders to be effective instructional leaders were different than those once needed when school leaders served in a more managerial capacity (Hitt & Meyers, 2017). Nowhere was this more apparent and relevant than in a school that has been identified as failing and in need of turnaround (Branch et al., 2014). High levels of effective instructional leadership competency stimulated school improvement (Cucchiara et al., 2015; Joachim & Opalka, 2017).

A school district in Utah, referred to here as the target district, required improvement in instructional leadership practice when six elementary schools were identified for turnaround. They were identified for turnaround based on the requirements of NCLB. They had not made annual yearly progress (AYP) in the three-year period 2009-2012 and were in the bottom 5% of schools in the state (Connolly et al., 2017; superintendent, personal communication, 2014). Turnaround status, as outlined by NCLB, required replacing the school leader and up to 50% of the school faculty. The problem faced by the target school district was a lack of quality instructional leadership capacity of school leaders placed in target turnaround school settings to improve teacher

efficacy and student achievement (Lynch et al., 2016; Reedy et al., 2017). The district turned to the state office of education for support (Childs & Russell, 2017). The state had engaged in the request for proposal or RFP process and named the University of Virginia Partnership for Leaders in Education (UVA-PLE) as the state turnaround partner. The target district began working with the UVA-PLE under NCLB.

Several years into the program, a new superintendent was hired. The target district's work with the UVA-PLE continued for one more year. After a year without the UVA-PLE, the superintendent announced a new turnaround partner for the target district. Towards the end of this timeline, NCLB was reauthorized as ESSA. Turnaround schools were renamed focus schools. For the purposes of this paper, I identified the schools in this study as target turnaround schools, linking them to NCLB, the law at the time of implementation.

The UVA-PLE provided school districts with supports in implementing a rigorous leader selection process, extensive professional learning for selected leaders, and on-site mentoring for leaders as they planned and implemented plans to turnaround schools. The claim of the UVA-PLE and other programs like it across the nation was supported by research indicating that strengthening the instructional leadership competency of school leaders should lead to improvement in teacher effectiveness and student achievement (Cucchiara et al., 2015; Dunlap et al., 2015; Lynch et al., 2016). In the target school district, there has been no investigation as to whether the work of the UVA-PLE has affected the improvement of instructional leadership competency of the leaders in participating schools or the teacher effectiveness and student achievement in those

schools. This lack of understanding of how the program affected the improvement of instructional leadership competency of participating leaders was the gap in practice identified for this study.

The national conversation regarding the critical nature of effective instructional leadership evolved over time. In the early 1990s, the literature reflected the beginning definitions of instructional leadership and how instructional leadership differed from the general supervisory role of a school leader (Bush & Glover, 2014; Wright, 1991). The instructional leadership movement was a shift for educational leaders, and much was written regarding the difficulty of finding the time to fit instructional leadership into managerial practice (Connolly et al., 2017; Wright, 1991). The early part of the millennium brought about educational reform and the rise of accountability legislation such as NCLB. The accountability movement pushed instructional leadership center stage as the focus moved from the need for high quality instruction to how the principal ensures that high-quality instruction happens (Leithwood, 2001; Sun & Young, 2009). It also required a shift in focus from transformational leadership theory (Leithwood, 2001).

In the latter portion of the first decade of the NCLB era, the educational leadership research shifted again to focus on change leadership for improved student learning (Akey et al., 2015; Bishop & Gray, 2009; Connolly et al., 2017; Katz & Player, 2013). The research literature described, albeit generally, the characteristics that an instructional leader would need to improve teaching and learning. The tone around instructional leadership became more urgent. Instructional leadership became the main

role of a school leader with other responsibilities becoming ancillary (Castellano & Dathow, 2001; Chesnut & Lochmiller, 2017).

The current national landscape of instructional leadership shifted as failing schools, identified under ESSA, and called focus schools, as performing in the bottom 5% of schools in the state, attempted turnaround with low rates of sustainable success (Ableideinger & Kowal, 2011; Deming et al., 2017; Peck & Reitzug, 2014). With the reauthorization of NCLB as ESSA, states were given more flexibility on how to intervene with focus schools, formerly known as turnaround schools. Included in this language of flexibility was the provision to support the instructional leadership competency of school leaders in focus schools. (NAESP Summary, n.d.). After many districts failed to successfully "turnaround" failing schools under NBLC, researchers looked into why. Research focused on the turnaround leader began to increase. There was research to support the need for leaders to have specific skills and competencies to impact student achievement (Bradley et al., 2019; Dunlap et al., 2015; Lynch et al., 2016). Various agencies, such as the UVA-PLE, developed structures for creating target turnaround school leaders (Duke, 2015). The claim of the UVA-PLE and other programs like it across the nation was supported by research indicating that strengthening the instructional leadership competency of school leaders should lead to improvement in teacher effectiveness and student achievement (Cucchiara et al., 2015, 2015; Dunlap et al., 2015; Lynch et al., 2016). Some states, including Virginia, created additional certifications for school leaders for professional learning in target turnaround schools. In this national climate, it was imperative for the field of educational leadership to define instructional

leadership, what it looks like, the competencies it requires, and how to teach and evaluate those competencies. Through that process, entities like the UVA-PLE were born (Belcher et al., 2005).

Rationale

Locally, the lack of quality instructional leadership competency affected the leadership of six schools, identified as target turnaround schools, that educate 2,413 students who are from historically marginalized groups as described in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Information of Elementary Schools Identified as Target Turnaround Schools

Elementary school	Percent low SES	Percent ethnic minority	Percent English learners
Elementary 1	95	87	66
Elementary 2	94	90	60
Elementary 3	96	73	52
Elementary 4	95	81	69
Elementary 5	90	83	60
Elementary 6	93	85	61

(USBE 2018).

The UVA partnership required an intense investment of both fiscal and human resources across these six schools. Such an investment of time, human resources, and effort should have affected the instructional leadership competencies of these six leadership teams, the teacher efficacy, and the student achievement within their schools (Cucchiara et al., 2015; Dunlap et al., 2015; Lynch et al., 2016). However, school board members, the teacher association leadership, and the administrator's association questioned the selection and implementation of the UVA-PLE model in the target district.

The purpose of the study was to create a deep understanding of how leaders in six target turnaround schools perceived the possible impact that participating in the UVA-PLE had on their instructional leadership competency, teacher efficacy, and student achievement.

Definition of Terms

The Behavioral Event Interview (BEI): The BEI used by UVA in the selection process of target turnaround school leaders. McClelland (1973) designed the BEI based on the premise that the best predictor of future actions taken by a leader is actions taken in the past. The format included candidates telling the story of a time that they acted to improve a school. The interviewer asked probing questions to tease out all the different actions taken by the target turnaround school leader. Afterward, the transcribed interview was coded for specific actions that align with the competencies that UVA-PLE had outlined as necessary for instructional leadership in a target turnaround school to be successful. Candidates were given a report of strengths and weaknesses that they had regarding target turnaround school leadership competency (Crittenden et al., 2008; McClelland, 1998).

Competency: The UVA-PLE model was a competency-based model delineated through the work of psychologist David McClelland. McClelland defined competency as the ability to perform the actual requirements of a specific assignment, job or career. The UVA-PLE further defines competency as consistent patterns of thinking, feeling, acting, and speaking (Crittenden et al., 2008). McClelland's definition came as a response to what he declared an inappropriate use of intelligence testing to determine whether an individual would be effective in their chosen profession (McClelland, 1973).

School turnaround: Turnaround was an effort in schools across the country in response to required actions for habitually failing schools as outlined in NCLB. When a school fails to make AYP, districts were forced to make changes to improve student learning. School turnaround projects were based on the requirements of the transformational model which included, replacing the school leader and providing additional professional development for teachers and leaders (National Center for Educational Evaluation and Regional Assistance, 2012, 2013, 2014). Schools in this model were often referred to as "turnaround schools".

Focus schools: When NCLB was reauthorized as ESSA, school turnaround did not disappear but was rebranded, with schools performing in the bottom 5% in the state as identified by state required assessments called focus schools. The schools in this project began as "turnaround schools" under NCLB but are called "focus schools".

Target turnaround schools: The term that identifies the target schools participating in this study throughout the paper. These schools were identified as needing turnaround under NCLB. The descriptor "turnaround" more accurately described the target schools in this district than the use of the ESSA term "focus".

The University of Virginia Model (UVA-PLE): UVA-PLE was designed by and promoted through a partnership between the Darden School of Business and the Curry School of Education in 2003. This partnership came into existence at a critical time in education in Virginia when the state superintendent was looking for outside entities, with whom to partner, to provide advanced professional learning for principals selected and tasked with turning around schools (Boast & Doyle, 2011).

Significance of the Study

The study was significant in the local context, as it was intended to create a deep understanding of how participation in the UVA-PLE affected instructional leadership competency, teacher effectiveness, and student achievement in the target school district. This understanding may guide district leadership in beginning to understand if the UVA-PLE addressed the problem regarding the need to improve the instructional leadership competency of school leaders placed in turn around settings. Potentially, it could be the impetus of a full program evaluation of the target district's implementation of the UVA-PLE model and inform practice in the target turnaround schools.

This basic understanding could guide district leadership in making decisions around the UVA-PLE model. These decisions are significant as additional schools are identified as target turnaround schools. Another elementary school in the target district was recently identified under ESSA guidelines as requiring comprehensive support and improvement (director of school improvement, personal communication, 2015). The study improved the understanding of how the target district could approach improving instructional leadership competency in target turnaround schools to affect teacher effectiveness and student achievement.

District leaders also needed this understanding to support and shepherd the target turnaround school effort, should there be a change in leadership at a school after turnaround has begun. Each time a new leader is selected in any school, there is a cost that is both financial and human resource based. In a target turnaround school, there is also the possible loss of momentum and time for students if the focus of the effort shifts.

The study serves as an original contribution to the data used to make these key decisions to support the improvement of instructional leadership competency, teacher effectiveness, and student achievement in target turnaround schools. This project ensures that the lack of quality instructional leadership in the target district is the problem being addressed.

In the current national research, indications of sustainable change are found in individual schools or within certain grade levels, but are not widespread (Joachim & Opalka, 2017). Some researchers have indicated that the leader's skill in instructional leadership is imperative to target turnaround school success (May & Sanders, 2012; Meyers & Vangronigen, 2020). The target school district has not monitored their implementation of the UVA-PLE model for possible improvement in instructional leadership competency, teacher efficacy, and student achievement. While improvement in instructional leadership competency is not being monitored, it is impossible for the target district to understand how to adjust the implementation of the model. Therefore, increasing understanding of how school leaders perceive the model has impacted instructional leadership competency, teacher efficacy, and student achievement is significant.

These results of the study supported positive social change. Both locally in the target school district and nationally, the student populations in these schools were from historically marginalized groups. The six schools in the study school district were representative of student groups whose ethnic diversity ranged between 73 and 90% (USBE, 2018). Leaders in target turnaround schools also took on the role of social justice advocate (Berry et al., 2017). Any partnership the district engaged in to improve the

quality of the instructional leadership competency, teacher effectiveness, and student achievement impacted the experience of large groups of marginalized students under its stewardship. When instructional leadership competency was coupled with a school leader's "ally" social justice identity, the target school district would have been able to empower students in accessing an "emancipatory" education that allowing them to "choose to fully participate in the decisions affecting their lives" as described by Berry et al. (2018).

Research Questions

The sources used to support claims in this section were written by the UVA-PLE to describe the structure and focus of their program. They fall outside of the 5-year scope required for this project to be considered recent but were included because they come directly from the UVA-PLE. The UVA-PLE focused their work on finding leaders who exhibit a certain level of instructional leadership competency for target turnaround schoolwork (Crittenden et al., 2008). The claim of the UVA-PLE and other programs like it across the nation was supported by research indicating that strengthening the instructional leadership competency of school leaders should lead to improvement in teacher effectiveness and student achievement (Cucchiara et al., 2015; Dunlap et al., 2015; Lynch et al., 2016). Once selected, leaders were supported, through professional learning and mentoring activities, to affect their capacity in the competencies they did not exhibit as strengths during the selection process (Hassel & Steiner, 2011). Understanding the impact of professional learning and mentoring for instructional leadership competency was imperative because it was the backbone of the school turnaround

process in the target school district. Improved instructional leadership competency improved teacher efficacy and therefore student achievement (Dunlap et al., 2015). The lack of understanding of how participation in the UVA-PLE model affects the improvement of instructional leadership competency, teacher efficacy, and student achievement was the gap in practice in the study. In this project, I focused on discovering how the leaders involved in the UVA-PLE turnaround work perceive changes in their own strengths and weaknesses in their instructional leadership competencies. The research questions I investigated are as follows.

RQ 1. What were school leaders' perceptions of the possible effect of participating in the UVA-PLE model with regard to instructional leadership competency in the target turnaround schools?

RQ 2. What were school leaders' perceptions of changes, if any, in instructional leadership competency and its possible influence on the efficacy of teachers in the target turnaround schools?

RQ 3. What were school leaders' perceptions of changes, if any, in instructional leadership competency and its possible influence on student achievement in the target turnaround schools?

The problem of the study was the target district's need for high quality instructional leadership competency. The claim of the UVA-PLE and other programs like it across the nation was supported by research indicating that strengthening the instructional leadership competency of school leaders should lead to improvement in teacher effectiveness and student achievement (Cucchiara et al., 2015; Dunlap et al.,

2015; Lynch et al., 2016). The first research question allowed me to probe for a deeper understanding of school leaders' perceptions of how participation in the UVA-PLE possibly impacted their instructional leadership competency. Follow up questions to the first research question asked for descriptions of how those perceived improvements took place. They asked participants to describe specific instructional leadership behaviors they have been trained to engage in.

In the second research question, I sought to discover whether they perceived changes in their instructional leadership competency and whether they perceived that teacher efficacy was impacted. This was essential to understand how possible improvement in instructional leadership competency could impact student achievement. Follow up questions to the second research question addressed how the leader perceived they impacted teacher effectiveness and the evidence of how they knew.

Through the third research question, I sought to understand how school leaders perceived that possibly improved instructional leadership competency potentially impacted student achievement. Scores on state assessments of student achievement were compiled over time. Follow up questions to the third research question revealed sources of formative data and information on student achievement in relation to UVA-PLE participation. The answers to these research questions provided the data required to glean rich descriptions, themes, and patterns of how the UVA-PLE was perceived in general and its perceived impact on the possible improvement of instructional leadership capacity, teacher effectiveness, and student achievement.

The nature of the research questions designed to address the problem in this study required a basic qualitative research design. Perceptions are not observable and necessitate rich, deep descriptions from the participant pool. The use of a basic qualitative research methodology, open-ended questionnaires, and interviews allowed me to obtain these rich descriptions and compile data to answer the research questions as outlined.

Review of the Literature

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study consisted of both works published by the UVA-PLE and McClelland's framework (1973, 1998). The literature reviewed in this first section included literature that was outside of the 5-year recommendation required to be considered current. Some of the reviewed material is seminal in nature and provided the conceptual framework for the study. The UVA-PLE leadership competencies and other processes were grounded in the work of psychologist David McClelland (McClelland 1973; McClelland, 1998; see also Hassel & Steiner, 2011). In 1973 McClelland argued that testing for job competence through criterion sampling would yield better indicators of aptitude than the traditional use of I.Q. tests. He described the process in the context of screening applicants to become police officers. In lieu of giving a standardized I.Q. test to determine the most qualified applicant, he suggested observing actual police work to delineate the required competencies demonstrated by successful police officers. A screening tool for applicants could then be developed that would align to the competencies needed for successful police work (McClelland, 1973).

In later research, McClelland (1998) would introduce the use of the Behavioral Event Interview (BEI) to determine competency for a specific occupation. The BEI manifests the candidate's thinking, beliefs, and processes and then compares them to the outlined competencies. For example, in determining the competency of an applicant to become a police officer, individuals would be asked to share a specific type of event and outline the actions they took to resolve a specific type of issue. These actions were then rated under the broader categories of competencies and the individual would receive a score of their level of competency in the areas required to be a good police officer. McClelland championed the idea that competency for a position could be delineated, articulated, and taught.

The UVA-PLE delineated its instructional leadership competencies by following McClelland's framework and replicating the BEI experience for both successful and unsuccessful leaders (Hassel & Steiner, 2011). Leaders were invited to participate in a BEI experience, delineating actions taken to resolve an issue around instruction at their school. Transcripts from those interviews were then coded to be able to fully describe the actions that successful turnaround leaders take, and the competencies required to take those actions (Hassel & Steiner, 2011). The replication of McClelland's BEI interview structure allowed the phenomenon of leadership competency to become observable and therefore duplicable. UVA utilized the coded data from the BEI interview process to articulate its instructional leadership competencies (Hassel & Steiner, 2011; Hitt 2015). These instructional leadership competencies are what the UVA-PLE used to drive its

work. With the UVA-PLE rooted in McClelland's work, there was a clear picture of leadership competencies as indicators of success.

The connections between the McClelland's work around competency and the UVA-PLE were tight as UVA fully integrated McClelland's work into its practice (Hassel & Steiner, 2011). Thus, this study was similarly organized. The use of interviews to glean the perspectives of school leaders of their own instructional leadership competency tightly aligned with how the UVA-PLE created their competencies. The use of the open-ended questionnaire and semi structured interview to understand program outcomes also aligned with much of the literature the UVA-PLE published to describe the program's outcomes (Brinson et al., 2008; Hitt, 2015; Katz & Player, 2016). Much of this literature was qualitative in nature, utilizing rich descriptions of actions taken by individual school leaders and the leaders' own perceptions of their efficacy. These stories were told from their individual vantage point. These studies used small pools of participants. The study of the UVA-PLE framework, as implemented in the target school district, was aligned in structure and process. Once open-ended questionnaires were completed, the transcripts were coded for patterns of how the UVA-PLE possibly impacted instructional leadership competency, teacher efficacy, and student achievement and answered the overall research questions of this study.

McClelland's BEI framework provided the structure for the study. Like his work using the BEI interview process, open-ended questionnaires and interviews were used to gather data to answer the research questions delineated earlier. Research question one was answered using both and open-ended questionnaire and interview process to discern

school leaders' perceptions of how participation in the UVA-PLE possibly improved their instructional leadership competency. The second piece of McClelland's framework that grounded the study is the use of competencies to describe successful instructional leadership. The UVA-PLE used the McClelland model to delineate, articulate, and teach the instructional leadership competencies required for school turnaround. Participants had a common vocabulary when talking about their instructional leadership competency. This common vocabulary for instructional leadership competency scaffolded participants in answering research questions two and three and allowed for a deep understanding of individual school leaders' perceptions of their own level of instructional leadership competency and whether that competency level changed based on participation in UVA-PLE. Data were analyzed using coding strategies like McClelland (1973) described would be used after observing police officers in the field. The results were visible descriptions of the school leaders' perceptions of possibly improved instructional leadership competency and the perceived impact on teacher efficacy and student achievement.

Review of the Broader Problem

The peer-reviewed literature in this section is pertinent to the historical development of instructional leadership as a major responsibility of the school principal. In the early 1990s the literature reflected the beginning definitions of instructional leadership and how it differed from the general supervisory role in the traditional sense of a school leader (Bush & Glover, 2014; Wright, 1991). The instructional leadership movement was a shift for educational leaders. The focus of early instructional leadership

literature was on issues of time management that arose when adding instructional leadership to the principal role. (Adilman et al., 2019; Schwan 2020; Wright, 1991).

The early part of the millennium brought about educational reform and the rise of accountability legislation such as NCLB. The accountability movement pushed instructional leadership center stage. The nation refocused its efforts on the school principal. The principal was now accountable for ensuring that students received high quality instruction (Bush & Glover, 2014; Connolly et al., 2017; Leahy & Shore, 2019; Sun & Young, 2009). As the NCLB era matured and more schools were identified as not making AYP the role of instructional leader expanded again to include the need for change leadership (Akey et al., 2015; Bishop & Gray, 2009; Bush & Glover, 2014). Urgency increased around the importance of instructional leadership. Instructional leadership became the main role of a school leader with other responsibilities becoming ancillary (Castellano & Dathow, 2001; Nguyen & Redding, 2020). One researcher argued that this hyper focus on school leadership and the pressure on school leaders to be the change agent in schools detracted from the larger conversation of the structures of modern public schools and the need to allocate additional resources for school improvement to be successful (Ehrensal, 2015). Another researcher indicated that for the necessary paradigm shift around the principal role to take place to allow for school change, school leadership frameworks would need to depart from the more transformational leadership models of the past (Berkovich, 2016).

As some schools continued to fail to meet the AYP requirements of NCLB over time, they began being identified as needing turnaround. Federal NCLB requirements

articulated four models' schools and districts could choose from. These models included turnaround, restart, school closure, and transformational (Peck & Reitzug, 2014). The target school district selected turnaround which included replacing the principal, at least 50% of the staff and implementing a new instructional program. As more and more schools and districts across the country have attempted turnaround, research has demonstrated low rates of sustainable success (Ableideinger & Kowal, 2011; Birman et al. 2014; Deming et al. 2017; Mason & Reckhow, 2017).

Currently, under ESSA, schools are identified in need if they are performing in the bottom 5% of schools in the state. One of the main focuses of ESSA is support for high levels of instructional leadership competency for increased teacher effectiveness and student achievement (Reedy et al., 2017). Research supports the need for leaders to have specific skills and competencies to impact student achievement (Brown, 2015; Dunlap et al. 2015; Henry et al., 2020; Lynch et al., 2016; Mitchell & Sackney, 2016, Rorrer & Young, 2012). Various agencies, such as the UVA-PLE developed structures for identifying and supporting turnaround leaders. The claim of the UVA-PLE and other programs like it across the nation is supported by research, indicating that strengthening the instructional leadership competency of school leaders should lead to improvement in teacher effectiveness and student achievement (Cucchiara et al., 2015; Dunlap et al., 2015; Lynch et al., 2016). Some states, including Virginia and Florida, have created additional certifications for school leaders with professional learning in turnaround leadership (Brown, 2015; Duke 2011; Duke 2015). Conducting a thorough review of the literature related to instructional leadership competency and school turnaround was

challenging (Henry et al., 2020). There was beginning to be a richer cadre of literature around instructional leadership competency in past years, however, it has been only recently that research specific to turnaround has been available. This lack of available research on school turnaround and instructional leadership competency was another indication of a gap in research and need for this study. To demonstrate saturation in the field it was necessary to review literature regarding leadership theory in schools, instructional leadership, school improvement, principal training, and school turnaround. These terms were the terms used for the search that was conducted in ERIC, SAGE, and Business Source Complete. The addition of a search in Business Source Complete was necessary to understand the transfer of leadership principals gleaned from the business sector into the educational leadership sector. The literature represented here included the required 25-40 sources completed within the last five years, sources regarding the historical context of school improvement and instructional leadership, school turnaround literature, and research and literature published by the UVA-PLE.

The literature published by the UVA-PLE is outside the 5-year window required to be considered recent. However, it is included throughout the review and project as it is relevant to developing a rich understanding of the UVA-PLE and the possible effect of participation in the UVA-PLA on instructional leadership capacity, teacher effectiveness, and student achievement. The historical context of instructional leadership was important to understand as it clarified the more recent research and the significance of this study.

Leadership Shift

In a study regarding the unintended impact of NCLB, researchers found that the role of both teachers and leaders had changed due to the emphasis on accountability measures for student performance (Shirrell, 2016). Studying the time allocation of principals in schools before they met the standard for making AYP and after, they found that their priorities for their time changed and centered on student achievement, test scores, and compliance to state standards (Lamb et al., 2007). Principals needed to be leaders and not simply managers. Schools were responding to the requirements of NCLB which put the ownership of turning schools around on the states themselves. ESSA specifically articulates the importance of instructional leadership competency as pivotal in impacting teacher effectiveness and student achievement (Reedy et al., 2017).

Much of the literature on school leadership up to this point centered on transformational leadership practices brought over from the business sector (Liethwood & Sun, 2012). While these researchers described that the efforts of the leader are key in impacting teacher efficacy and student achievement, they did not articulate specific actions the leader would take linked to instructional leadership (Berkovich, 2016; Liethwood & Sun, 2012). These studies entailed the use of meta-analysis or the analysis of other studies of leadership. These researchers asserted that because transformational leadership improves morale in a business resulting in an increase in profit, the same would hold true in a school (Jain & Lather, 2015). The principal, applying the same theory of leadership, would improve morale and therefore student achievement would improve. A small section of these studies explored instructional leadership as the next

step beyond the use of just transformational leadership theory (Berkovich, 2016). Hitt and Tucker (2016) described a new term, “integrated leadership”, which was described as a combination of transformational leadership theory and instructional leadership. The bulk of these studies centered on leadership theory and not specific instructional leadership actions or competencies. These studies were important as they demonstrated the lack of understanding of specific instructional leadership actions, beliefs, and competencies required to make significant changes in the turnaround context that led to improved teacher efficacy and student achievement.

Turnaround Specific Leadership

There was a significant portion of the literature in which researchers spoke to the differences between school improvement and school turnaround. School improvement was defined as incremental change over time while turnaround was defined as rapid improvement with early indicators and student achievement within two years (Crittenden et al., 2008; Hitt & Meyers, 2017; Katz & Player, 2013). Outside the literature published by the UVA-PLE, there was an understanding that turnaround requires new ways of leading (Mukherjee, 2012; Bradley et al., 2019). In a qualitative case study involving a university-based preparation program for assistant principals, Chesnut and Lochmiller (2017) argued the importance of understanding that instructional leadership practices will differ in different contexts. Context as a determinate for instructional leadership practice is an important concept as school turnaround is a specific context. Many of the schools in the target district that required turnaround, also have very specific cultural contexts that

typically include high levels of poverty, English language learners and students from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds (Bennett et al., 2014; USBE, 2018).

The UVA-PLE published multiple studies and articles regarding the distinct context of school turnaround. They are included here. The potential bias of their literature is strong as they need turnaround to require a different kind of leadership to justify their partnerships with schools and districts. In one study, it was called a "distinct professional discipline" (Belfiore et al., 2007). Another article delineated the importance of specific leadership skills for turnaround utilizing statistics gleaned from business turnaround success rates, stating that only 30% of turnaround efforts succeed (Hassel & Steiner, 2011).

The five UVA-PLE studies reviewed for this section of the literature review had multiple common threads. All five discussed turnaround leadership as a specific type of leadership that required specific instructional leadership competencies. One study looked at school readiness for turnaround (Belfiore et al., 2007). One looked at the evaluation systems for school leaders. Researchers described leading indicators for successful school turnaround and holding leaders accountable for those results in the first two years of turnaround (Rhim, 2012). Researchers in the last three all proposed various reasoning for the use of the instructional leadership competencies put forth by the UVA-PLE. They also argued for a new and improved selection process for leaders if we are to find leaders with these competencies. This improved selection process includes the BEI (Crittenden et al., 2008; Hassel & Steiner, 2011; Hitt, 2015). All five articles make connections to the work of McClelland (1973, 1998) and ground the study in his framework. They also all

assert that turnaround cannot be accomplished without an effective school leader. The literature is all qualitative in nature, using almost entirely interviews and case studies to describe and delineate effective instructional leadership competencies. The participant pools in these studies were small, ranging from one to 18. The inclusion of this literature was imperative as it lays the groundwork for the research questions and methodology of this study. Without understanding of the purposes and framework of the UVA-PLE, understanding the perceptions of the school leaders involved in it would be difficult. The claim of the UVA-PLE and other programs like it across the nation is supported by research indicating that strengthening the instructional leadership competency of school leaders should lead to improvement in teacher effectiveness and student achievement (Cucchiara et al., 2015; Dunlap et al., 2015; Lynch et al., 2016).

Leadership Competency

The next theme evident in the literature was specific instructional leadership competencies or leadership practices that influence teacher effectiveness and student achievement. This section analyzed first, the non-UVA-PLE literature, and then discussed the literature on this theme provided by the UVA-PLE. Researchers that have studied leadership in business organizations have found that specific leadership competencies improve outcomes for organizations. In a study regarding the level of quality of training in agricultural contexts, authors found that the leader was necessary for improving training quality. Training quality improved organizational climate and culture (Dominguez & Rivilla, 2014; Peck & Reitzug, 2014).

The importance of a leader, using specific competency to improve outcomes was evident over and over in the literature. From critical thinking and communication, to shared leadership and inquiry cycle data use, certain leadership competencies were shown to increase student achievement (Branch et al., 2015; Hitt & Meyers, 2017; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Jenkins, 2012; Lange, et al., 2012). The context for these studies varied. Curriculum change, Professional Learning Communities (PLC) implementation, and schools enduring rapid change all led to opportunities for leaders to impact teacher effectiveness and student achievement.

Researchers demonstrated impact on student achievement based on how the leader influenced teacher efficacy (Branch et. al, 2015). There were also case studies of individual leaders and the actions taken during a time of school change. The researchers conducting these studies uncovered similar themes. The leaders being studied all saw change and difficult issues in a school as an opportunity or an asset (Dodman, 2014; Kaniuka, 2012; Myers, 2014). These leaders also used many of the competencies described above including shared leadership, clear communications, and the ability to build trust. One common finding of these researchers was that all leaders impacted either the teachers' levels of efficacy, or their perception of their level of efficacy.

The claim of the UVA-PLE, and other programs like it across the nation, is supported by research indicating that strengthening the instructional leadership competency of school leaders should lead to improvement in teacher effectiveness and student achievement (Cucchiara et al., 2015; Dunlap et al., 2015; Lynch et al., 2016).While the competencies described here can be found written in different ways in

the UVA-PLE instructional leadership competencies, they are not articulated the same way and not as specific actions. For example, shared leadership, as discussed above, is not fully defined or delineated in the literature, and therefore, would be difficult to replicate. The UVA-PLE would argue that shared leadership would need to be drilled down to the specific actions a leader takes to create a structure of distributed leadership and could then be considered an instructional leadership competency (Hitt, 2015).

As described earlier, the UVA PLE delineated its instructional leadership competencies by following McClelland's framework and replicating the BEI experience for both successful and unsuccessful leaders (Hassel & Steiner, 2011). Research around specific instructional leadership competencies is limited. There is much that UVA-PLE published regarding the instructional leadership competencies themselves and the use of the BEI to find leaders who possess them. In an article by Kight, Player, and Robinson (2014), the turnaround effort was compared to an Intensive Care Unit (ICU). The authors articulated the need for continuous monitoring using data to adjust instruction and insure progress. Two other articles reviewed case studies and literature on school turnaround principals to describe keys to successful turnaround and which areas of school leadership are the most important in school turnaround (Duke, 2015; Hitt & Meyers, 2017). These studies could both be considered meta-analysis and do not bring new data or findings for school turnaround efforts.

Teaching Instructional Leadership Competency

It was important to discover through the literature, whether leadership competency can be taught (Chesnut & Lochmiller, 2017; Cyprus & Jacobson, 2012). It

was key to the foundation of this study. In the review of the historical context, a study regarding “Tipping Point Leadership” was reviewed. The authors looked at the specific leadership competencies used in a case study of a police chief. They argued that because his specific actions could be articulated, his success could be replicated or taught (Kim & Maugborgne, 2003).

The researchers in the reviewed literature that aligned with this theme did not report on successful training programs for leaders in the turnaround context. Participants in leadership based advanced degree programs were surveyed to describe their perceptions of what instructional leadership competencies are required in schools. While their programs aligned with national ISSLC standards, the relevancy of their programs was not aligned with what schools report they need from their leaders (Dunlap et al., 2015). This finding is in line with the earlier assertion that school turnaround is a distinct practice that requires specific instructional leadership competencies (Bradley et al., 2019). If it did not require a different level of competency then the traditional preparation of advanced degree programs would be sufficient to produce turnaround leaders.

Two additional turnaround partner programs also make the assertion that instructional leadership competency can be taught. The programs described earlier from Florida and North Carolina are both designed to teach instructional leadership competency. However, when surveyed and interviewed, completers of Florida’s program indicated that they were ready for turnaround while their principal supervisors felt they were not ready. Both parties reported not feeling like candidates were prepared for the rigors of instructional leadership (Pelletier et al., 2014). North Carolina’s program

stresses the importance of quality leadership, but evaluation efforts have not demonstrated whether it has turned schools around (Brown, 2015). These two programs have data to show that competency can be taught and learned, which is also crucial to the success of the UVA-PLE. However, neither one demonstrated consistent improvement in teacher efficacy and student achievement.

Outside of literature describing how turnaround partners teach instructional leadership competency, other studies revealed similar, more general results. Agic (2012) found that improving leadership competency improved teaching and therefore should increase student achievement. Kelsen and Warren (2013) looked at whether coaching can build the capacity or instructional leadership competency of urban principals. They estimated that 25% of school level impact on student achievement is the result of actions taken by the principal. This literature demonstrated that instructional leadership competency can be taught and linked to improved teacher efficacy and student achievement. These studies articulated the trickledown effect. More effective principals create more effective teachers and more effective teachers will mean higher student achievement. This was also the premise of the UVA-PLE (Crittenden et al., 2008).

Leadership, Teacher Efficacy, and Student Achievement

The pattern found in the literature reviewed for this section mirrors the shift described previously. As accountability increased for schools, the focus in the research on leadership as the lynchpin for school improvement also increased (Day et al., 2016; Nguyen & Reedy, 2020). Most recently, in ESSA, legislators included a focus on school

leadership. This included the option for states to set aside 3% of Title II funds to be used for leadership development activities (Reedy et al., 2017).

Throughout this research, the theme of strong instructional leadership competency as a vehicle that school leaders used to increase teacher efficacy and student achievement was put forth (Branch et al., 2014; Hitt, 2015; Hitt & Meyers, 2017; Katz & Player, 2013; Shirrell, 2016). There was some early literature reviewed for this study that looked at how leadership could improve student achievement (Branch et al., 2014; Ryan & Soehne, 2011, Branch et al., 2015). These studies concluded that effective leaders improve outcomes for students and ineffective ones do not. For example, one study indicated that a good leader was important because an exemplary school seldom was run by an ineffective leader (Nguyen & Reedy, 2020). Other researchers estimated the percentage of a principal's contribution to increased student growth at 25% (Branch et al., 2014; Schwan, 2020). The target school district determined the need to partner with UVA-PLE which focused almost entirely on leadership as its vehicle for school turnaround (Duke, 2011; Henry et al., 2020). The claim of the UVA-PLE and other programs like it across the nation was supported by research indicating that strengthening the instructional leadership competency of school leaders should lead to improvement in teacher effectiveness and student achievement (Cucchiara et al., 2015; Dunlap et al., 2015; Lynch et al., 2016).

Turnaround Partners

The partnering of school districts with an outside entity for turnaround was another theme found in the literature (Beard & Marrapodi, 2013; Jones, et al., 2019).

Duke (2015) found increased levels of student achievement when a turnaround partner was involved with a school district. They also found that these results are better when the turnaround partner focused on strengthening leadership, data use, and a positive school culture. There were many similarities to be drawn between the programs described in the literature regarding turnaround partners and the UVA-PLE. Many of these programs are designed specifically for school turnaround (Akey et al., 2015, Duke, 2015).

The Institute for Learning (IFL) at the University of Pittsburgh supported schools in strategic planning, coaching and professional development for administrators. This mirrors the professional learning structure of the UVA-PLE. In a study of the IFL, researchers described the link between the professional development given to principals, the level of professional development given to teachers, and the level of fidelity in implementation of the strategies from the professional development. The higher each of these levels, the higher the improvement in student achievement. In two additional studies, researchers presented case studies of the instructional leadership required to implement Success For All (SFA) as the vehicle for turnaround. One case study followed six schools in California and another, one school. In both studies researchers articulated the importance of the school leader being a proponent of the turnaround effort. The findings in one study articulated of the need for continuous monitoring for fidelity for turnaround success (Castellano & Datnow, 2001). The other looked at how the characteristics of SFA provided a successful turnaround infrastructure for the school (Neumerski & Peurach, 2015). One author from the UVA-PLE describes the Florida Turnaround Leadership Program which also has similarities to the UVA-PLE (Duke,

2015). One difference between the UVA-PLE and the Florida program is that the Florida program used an internship system to support the school district in knowing which leaders were ready for turnaround. The UVA-PLE was working with leaders who were already been selected for turnaround work. These turnaround partners, including the UVA-PLE, were designed to support schools and districts in implementing school turnaround structures to improve instructional leadership competency, teacher efficacy, and student achievement (Brown, 2015).

District Support of Turnaround

The literature on the role of states and districts in supporting turnaround spanned studies on whether higher education prepared leaders for turnaround to the state use of turnaround partners. These studies had relevance to this study as the UVA-PLE has two main foci in their program. The first was to develop the instructional leadership competency of individual school leaders and the second was to support district and state leadership in those contexts to enable the environment to support turnaround work.

In two different studies of states with schools in turnaround or receiving School Improvement Grant (SIG) monies, the National Center for Education Evaluation (NCEE) found that the states that were having the highest rates of turnaround success were using a turnaround partner (Boyle et al., 2015). This was typically done because of the lack of personnel in state level education authorities and the lack of skill or experience in turnaround work. The other studies conducted by the NCEE looked at the operational authority, support, and monitoring of schools in turnaround (Graczewski et al., 2013). Both studies found specific actions that states could take to support the turnaround effort

and have more success than the states who did not take those actions. Again, however, neither of these studies could demonstrate fully successful turnaround efforts nor link these actions to successful turnaround.

Another study, that supported the view that the UVA-PLE takes on district involvement in turnaround, looked at the involvement of the superintendent in school improvement and the actions a superintendent could take to increase engagement in school improvement (Bird et al., 2013). UVA-PLE would support this studies argument that the superintendent is critical to the turnaround effort as it is the only title with the authority to require collaborative involvement from everyone. In the UVA-PLE literature, a case study of Cincinnati Public schools echoed this same sentiment and recounted the actions this district took to support the turnaround effort beyond just supporting the UVA-PLE within their district (Rhim, 2011).

Evaluation of Turnaround Programs

The literature reviewed that evaluated school turnaround programs had several main themes. There was no delineated definition of when a school is considered fully turned around (Katz & Player, 2016). When looking for success, especially at the beginning of the turnaround effort, evaluators looked for early indicators of success that are not necessarily indicators of increased student achievement (Ableideinger & Kowal, 2011). These indicators included perceptions of school climate, reduction of discipline referrals, leadership improvement and increases in reading levels on formative assessment (Katz & Player, 2016; May & Sanders, 2012).

One of these evaluations was of the UVA-PLE and was conducted through internal research done by the UVA-PLE. This evaluation was one of the only studies reviewed with a qualitative element. The schools in the study that demonstrated success statistically were clustered within the same district while other districts involved in the UVA-PLE demonstrated some back slide in student achievement results (Boast & Doyle, 2011). All the evaluations reviewed were conducted while schools were either involved in a turnaround process or within two years after the turnaround process was completed. None of the studies followed the schools over time to discover whether the results for these schools either began to improve or continued to improve. No research was found regarding the sustainability of effort or results in turnaround schools.

While the body of literature not published by UVA supports the need for, structure of, and significance of this study, it does not address several issues. In the literature, researchers described evidence of the critical need of high levels of leadership competency to realize successful school turnaround; however, it did not describe what those competencies should be. Some also indicated that competency can be taught and described programs that are designed to do so, but outside of conclusions drawn by Mukherjee (2012), there was no indication of the best way to do that. There was also minimal research to support which specific actions a leader can take will have the biggest impact on teacher efficacy and therefore student achievement.

The UVA-PLE had some internal systems for writing, evaluating, and studying the program. This internal system published the literature reviewed for the study. Not only were the competencies and materials used by the UVA-PLE reviewed for this

project, but any articles, qualitative or quantitative studies, published for or by the UVA-PLE were reviewed. The limitation of the UVA-PLE material is the possible bias of the reports written by members of the UVA-PLE and which reports have been selected for public consumption. The UVA-PLE literature consisted of brochures, technical briefs, manuals, guides, research articles, and some evaluation materials. Not all school districts or states participating in the UVA-PLE were included in these materials. The target school district is one of the omitted districts. The literature did not describe a process of continual follow-up or evaluation of the program in the participating districts. Most of the data collected only spoke to the first few years of implementation in any of the participating districts and therefore only addresses early indicators of successful school turnaround. There was no evidence to indicate monitoring of systematic improvement overtime.

More recent evaluations of districts beyond the first few years of implementation were not available from the UVA-PLE. There were multiple articles provided by the UVA-PLE, as previously discussed, that tell of individual case studies of leaders' journeys to improve instructional leadership competency (Belcher, et al., 2005; Belfiore et al., 2007; Brinson et al., 2008; Katz & Player, 2013). These articles were self-reports and anecdotal in nature. This highlights the earlier concern mentioned regarding the limitations when reviewing the UVA-PLE literature. There is no way of understanding how much of the full sample of schools involved in the UVA-PLE project was represented. In all the UVA-PLE literature reviewed for this project, the target school

district was not mentioned, and none of its leaders' voices were represented in the case studies. This factor was another indication of the need for this study.

Implications

There were several possible implications for this project study. Because individual school leaders' perceptions that surround the impact of the UVA-PLE partnership were unknown, it was difficult to anticipate what direction the project will take. A presentation of the results will be given to those whom direct the school turnaround effort in the target school district. This could include but is not limited to the school leaders involved in the study, the superintendent and cabinet members, members of the school board, and others who have questioned the selection and implementation of the UVA-PLE model. The intention of this study was to provide space for planning around further implementation of the UVA-PLE model and a plan for future evaluation of the program's effectiveness in the target school district. The implications of the presentation and subsequent planning could be pivotal for the students attending the schools participating in the project. There is also the possibility of providing the findings from this project to those that direct the UVA-PLE. Since there has been no mention of the target school district in any of their materials to date, an invitation to provide them with the information will be extended. Recommendations were also made for future studies, including the possibility of a study that goes beyond perceptions of the impact of the UVA-PLE and includes quantitative as well as qualitative data on the actual impact of the UVA-PLE on the quality of instructional leadership competency.

Tentative directions for the project deliverable stemmed from the problem and purpose of the study, the resulting research questions, and data gathered and analyzed from the identified participants to answer the research questions. The purpose of the study was to create a deep understanding of how leaders perceived the partnership the target district engaged in to address the problem facing the target district to improve the instructional leadership competency of school leaders in target turnaround schools. The data gathered through completion of the study provides district leadership with data surrounding school leaders' perceptions of the UVA-PLE model for school turnaround and the possible impact of that model on their instructional leadership competency, teacher efficacy, and student achievement. Beyond a presentation of the study results, one tentative direction of the project deliverable is a position paper. A position paper would give me an opportunity to present the findings from the research and make recommendations for next steps regarding either further evaluative steps regarding the model, or other possible implementation recommendations that come to the surface through the research. Themes for the position paper would be dependent on the information gathered through the research process. Other deliverables, such as an evaluation report, may also be considered based on the direction of study results.

Summary

In summary, the problem faced by the target school district was a lack of strong instructional leadership competency of school leaders placed in target turnaround school settings. As articulated by school board members, district leadership, and association leadership, the understanding of the effectiveness of the model for improving

instructional leadership competency is limited. This limited or lack of understanding was the gap in practice to be studied. Indicators of turnaround success, including improved instructional leadership competency, teacher effectiveness, and student achievement were not been monitored to measure the impact of the program.

To fully discover school leaders' perceptions of the UVA-PLE model in general, their own instructional leadership competency as it relates to the UVA-PLE model and how the UVA-PLE model affects their instructional leadership competency, teacher effectiveness and student achievement, the following research questions were developed.

RQ 1. What were school leaders' perceptions of the possible effect of participating in the UVA-PLE model with regard to instructional leadership competency in the target turnaround schools?

RQ 2. What were school leaders' perceptions of changes, if any, in instructional leadership competency and its possible influence on the efficacy of teachers in the target turnaround schools?

RQ 3. What were school leaders' perceptions of changes, if any, in instructional leadership competency and its possible influence on student achievement in the target turnaround schools?

The UVA-PLE grounded its model for creating turnaround leaders in the conceptual framework of McClelland and his work with criterion-based assessment of competency (Crittenden et al., 2008). They used McClelland's BEI structure to delineate their list of instructional leadership competencies required for turnaround instructional leadership. McClelland promoted the idea that through the BEI structure, competency can

be delineated, articulated, and taught. The UVA-PLE used that same structure to delineate, articulate, and teach instructional leadership competency. The claim of the UVA-PLE and other programs like it across the nation is supported by research indicating that strengthening the instructional leadership competency of school leaders should lead to improvement in teacher effectiveness and student achievement (Cucchiara et al., 2015; Dunlap et al., 2015; Lynch et al., 2016). The design of their model, structures, and professional development supports, further the development of instructional leadership competencies. This study was organized using the same framework, using the outlined UVA-PLE instructional leadership competency language to describe quality instructional leadership and interview structures to uncover school leaders' perceptions and facilitate rich descriptions to answer the research questions (Hassel & Steiner, 2011). These rich descriptions were gathered using a basic qualitative methodology including an open-ended questionnaire and interviews. The methods of data collection yielded data that will then be analyzed through coding. This methodology reflects McClelland's methodologies and grounded the study in his framework.

Based on the data gathered and analyzed from school leaders regarding their perceptions of the UVA-PLE model, possible implications for the data are varied. Possible directions could be to present the findings to district leadership and other interested parties, recommend a possible full program evaluation of the UVA-PLE, recommend small adjustments to current implementation practices in turnaround schools, or look to gathering more data and information. One tentative deliverable based on data would be a position paper to present findings, research and possible recommendations.

A deeper understanding of school leaders' perceptions of the UVA-PLE model was necessary gap to be studied. Research inside and outside of the UVA PLE indicates that competency can change, be taught, and impact school improvement (Bagheri & Pihie, 2013; Cosby, 2014; Crittenden et al., 2008; Jenkins, 2012). The target school district engaged in the UVA-PLE to possibly improve instructional leadership competency, teacher efficacy, and student achievement without monitoring that improvement happened. This study gave district leadership the preliminary understanding it needs to make decisions regarding next steps in either evaluation or implementation of the UVA-PLE model. In the following section, detailed descriptions regarding the chosen methodology were delineated. This included the chosen qualitative methodology design, data collection, selection of participants, data analysis procedures for coding, study limitations, and possible deliverables.

Section 2: The Methodology

Research Design and Approach

This study was a basic qualitative study. I selected the basic qualitative design because it most appropriately addressed the lack of quality instructional leadership capacity of school leaders placed in target turnaround school settings to improve teacher efficacy and student achievement (Lynch et al., 2016; Reedy et al., 2017). It yielded the most appropriate data to answer the three guiding research questions. The basic qualitative study format allowed me, the researcher, to understand school leaders' perceptions from their descriptions of their experience in the UVA-PLE (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A basic qualitative study was appropriate because of the nature of the participants and the experience I am trying to understand (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Thorne, 2016). I sought the perceptions of school leaders required to participate in the UVA-PLE to improve their instructional leadership competency. Other school leaders within the district were not involved in UVA and therefore their perceptions were not relevant.

The use of a basic qualitative study was grounded in McClelland's (1973) framework, using interviews to delineate, articulate, and teach competency for a specific position. It was the same method McClelland suggested to promote using competency-based measures to determine aptitude for a career. Just as McClelland proposed using multiple police officers in a BEI structured interview process, for the study, I used an open-ended questionnaire, and a semi structured interview process, with multiple school leaders in multiple settings. McClelland delineated the importance of understanding the

required traits of an occupation from multiple individuals to be able to collectively define the required competencies for that occupation. Similarly, this study gathered the perceptions of school leaders of the possible impact of the UVA-PLE's intent to delineate, articulate, and teach the instructional leadership competencies required of turnaround leadership. This basic qualitative study followed that same framework. As the data collection instrument, I collected perceptions from multiple school leaders, before delineating collective themes derived from individual descriptions. The breadth of multiple cases provided descriptions of themes and allowed me to provide detailed information to answer the three research questions from the study (Galindo et al., 2016; Saldaña, 2016).

Other possible qualitative methodological choices included a narrative study, phenomenological study, or a case study. Although both narrative and phenomenological methodologies also result in rich descriptions, they focus more on the topic or phenomenon to be studied and not the descriptions derived from a specific unit of analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This study did not focus on the story or narrative of one school leader's participation in UVA, but rather on the common themes that emerged from multiple descriptions of their perceptions. The purpose of the study was to create a deep understanding of how focus school leaders perceived the impact that participating in the UVA-PLE had on improving their instructional leadership competency and therefore teacher efficacy and student achievement.

Participants

The criteria for selecting participants were linked to the unit of analysis required for this basic qualitative study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Thorne, 2016). The unit of analysis consisted of school leaders who were required to participate in the UVA-PLE because their schools were identified for turnaround. School leaders included the principal and assistant principal, two leaders per school. Six schools were identified for UVA-PLE which allowed for 12 possible study participants. These 12 participants were invited, in email, to participate in the study. The eight who gave consent were initially given an open-ended questionnaire, before being selected for interviews. This allowed for data to be collected from a broader group of school leaders and then narrowed, based on set criteria, to a semi structured interview process.

The study focused on instructional leadership competency; therefore, only those currently serving in an instructional leadership role, and participating in the UVA-PLE, were included in the participant pool. Each school involved in the UVA-PLE sent two administrators, the principal and assistant principal, to the professional learning provided. Gathering perspectives from teachers within the target turnaround schools that did not attend the UVA-PLE professional learning would not add depth to the understanding of the professional learning and structures of UVA. Therefore, the identified eight participants were the most appropriate participants to invite to gather their perspectives relevant to the guiding research questions of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Thorne, 2016). School leaders in other schools had not participated in the UVA-PLE and therefore did not have anything to add to the data needed to answer the research

questions. Interviewing additional teachers in the identified six schools would not increase depth of inquiry either for the same reason. Inviting the identified participants allowed for increased depth of inquiry of their perceptions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Thorne, 2016). The research questions focused on gathering information from the turnaround effort across the target district. Inviting participants from all the participating target turnaround schools allowed for developing comprehensive understanding for district leaders regarding themes in participant perceptions. Although the necessary depth of inquiry decreases with fewer participants, the eight participants afforded the scope of data required to gain a richer understanding to answer the research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In similar basic qualitative studies of other schools and districts engaging in turnaround work, small groups of participants were used (Galindo et al., 2016; Mason & Reckhow, 2017). The characteristics of both the school and school leaders not involved in the study are not represented in the findings which presents a limitation in the results.

I invited participants through email, to review the consent form, and decide whether they were willing to participate in the study. Statements protecting all participants from any negative influence on their employment with the district, should their responses in the interview regarding UVA-PLE be negative in nature, were integrated into the consent form, with support from the superintendent (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). No individual participant names were used in any written materials produced from the study or in the body of the study itself. I de-identified the data to protect the confidentiality required for the full disclosure needed to fully understand

perceptions. Only broader themes that emerged from the study were articulated in any results or presented document. These measures, included in the consent form, were taken to protect participant's rights including confidentiality, informed consent, and protection from harm (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data Collection

Data collection for this basic qualitative study involved two opportunities to understand school leaders' perceptions. The first entailed an open-ended questionnaire. After the open-ended questionnaire was completed by each participant, face to face, semi structured interviews with participants were conducted to clarify and strengthen the data. Participants were selected for interview using the criteria as outlined in Table 2.

Table 2

Interview Inclusion Criteria

Participants invited to interview that met three of these criteria
School leaders involved in the UVA-PLE for at least 1 year
Improvements in student achievement, as measured by state required, end of level assessments, at the leader's school has been significant.
Decreases in student achievement, as measured by state required, end of level assessments, at the leader's school has been significant.
Reponses on the open-ended questionnaire that may indicate a divergent case from the others.
Responses regarding the impact of the UVA-PLE that don't give a clear indication as to whether it impacted the school leader or not.

Interviews are used often in the basic qualitative discipline, specifically when the phenomenon of study is not observable (Thorne, 2016). This study centered around understanding school leaders' perceptions of the effect of the UVA-PLE on instructional leadership competency, teacher efficacy, and student achievement in their schools.

School leaders' perceptions are not observable; therefore, the open-ended questionnaire and semi structured interviews were the preferred method to uncover, describe, and understand those perceptions (Thorne, 2016). The purpose of the semi structured interview, the second data source for the study, was to ask further questions that were related to the research questions and more fully understand the answers given on the open-ended questionnaire. The use of the interview also increased the validity of the data as it allowed for a deeper description of the participants perceptions of their UVA-PLE experiences and the impact on their instructional leadership capacity (Miriam & Tisdell, 2016; Thorne, 2016). The questions for the open-ended questionnaire, and interviews, were developed by me.

The use of the basic qualitative study was to yield descriptions through which analysis and coding produced themes and patterns of understanding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The three research questions were designed to elicit this level of description. The data collection instruments described above produced the necessary data to analyze and fully answer the research questions. They are appropriate for the basic qualitative nature of the study. The claim of the UVA-PLE and other programs like it across the nation was supported by research indicating that strengthening the instructional leadership competency of school leaders should lead to improvement in teacher effectiveness, and student achievement (Cucchiara et al., 2015; Dunlap et al., 2015; Lynch et al., 2016). I included student achievement data for the participating schools to support the data gathered in response to research question three. Data was generated, gathered and recorded utilizing the following process. I used an Excel spreadsheet to organize the data

gathering portion of the study. The completion of each stage of data collection for each participant was also tracked on the spread sheet. After the initial email inviting participants to participate in the study and gain their consent, I provided participants with the open-ended questionnaire. After each questionnaire was collected from each participant, responses were compared to the pre-determined criteria to determine which participants should be invited to participate in the semi structured interview portion of the study. I contacted participants through email to set up individual appointments. At the appointed time, I arrived at the agreed upon location. A copy of the interview questions was provided to the participant. I also had a copy of the interview questions on which to be able to make notes regarding possible follow up questions for each participant and to notate my own thoughts for analytic memoing purposes (Saldaña, 2016). I made an audio recording of the interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Audio recording was utilized to allow fluidity of asking initial and follow up questions of the participant

To track the data and emerging understandings I used the following process during the study. I used an Excel spreadsheet to monitor which data had been gathered from which participant. During each interview, I had a copy of the interview questions, formatted to the left margin with the right margin available for notes regarding the responses of the participants as well as my own thoughts, questions, and impressions throughout the interview (Saldaña, 2016). These notes became content for an analytic memo written directly following each interview. Analytic memos were written in a journal specifically for that purpose and cataloged to align with the piece of data they are referencing on the Excel spreadsheet. Once an interview was completed, I transcribed it

from the audio recording and returned a copy of the transcription to the participant, through email, for the first member check (Creswell, 2009). I asked members to check for accuracy of the transcription and gave participants an opportunity to clarify their responses. This initial check allowed the participant the chance to add any additional insights and works to increase the validity of the data. As I collect and code, an analytic memo entry was made to capture reflections, emerging themes and leads to follow in the journal maintained by myself (Saldaña, 2016). I journaled each time a new piece of data was collected and coded to support cycles of collecting and analyzing data. This resulted in a minimum of 30-45 journal entries, cataloged on the Excel spreadsheet. This journaling practice is a hallmark of basic qualitative research (Merriam, 2009).

I have been employed with the target district since the year 2002. I first served as a teacher, and then, beginning in 2010, as a building level administrator. In 2015, I began my current assignment as a district level administrator. I never supervised nor currently supervise any of the participants. I never participated in the UVA-PLE and have not worked in a school that has been identified for turnaround status. The program I currently supervise at the district level is in all the schools in the target school district, including those in turnaround. I have been in the position of assistant principal and principal concurrently with five of the participants. I have positive relationships with these school leaders. These positive relationships facilitated ease with gaining access to participants and facilitate the depth of conversations required to produce robust data.

While I have not personally been involved with the UVA-PLE, the district has for seven years. Throughout that time, I have worked as a colleague with many involved as

principals and as principal to teachers who have left identified turnaround schools. There have been many opinions shared overtime regarding the UVA-PLE. Until recently, most of these opinions have been negative which may predispose me to look for themes that indicate negative perceptions of the UVA-PLE model and structures. Many of these negative opinions, however, can be linked to two participating principals who also had negative reputations among teachers.

My personal bias toward the UVA-PLE changed over time. Initially, it was frustrating that similar professional learning that the turnaround principals were getting was not afforded to all school leaders as I was a new administrator and seeking to improve my own instructional leadership competency. Compounding the issue was the lack of perceived support for the UVA-PLE from the highest levels of district leadership. There was no clear communication regarding the model, why it was selected, or expected outcomes from the model. This lack of communication led to multiple, ongoing rumors regarding the model and how it was being implemented. As a result, I had a negative perception of the model, the professional learning, and the implementation. As I have read more regarding the model in the preparation of the study, I have realized that this lack of communication has not represented the program fully and that there are many positive aspects to the program of which I was not aware. I see that the program has potential to improve instructional leadership competency, teacher efficacy, and student achievement. This sparked the interest in discovering the perceptions of those who have been directly involved in the UVA-PLE and whether it has affected their own instructional leadership competency.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a protocol that utilized various first and second cycle coding procedures, analytic memo writing, and member checks (Saldaña, 2016). The first cycle of analysis described here applied to the open-ended questionnaire and interviews conducted of the participants to ascertain their perceptions of their instructional leadership competency and the UVA-PLE model. The purpose of including the open-ended questionnaire, was first, to identify which participants should be interviewed, and second, to provide the initial, basic understanding of school leaders' perceptions of the possible impact that participating in the UVA-PLE had on improving their instructional leadership competency, teacher efficacy, and student achievement.

Once those participants were identified and each interview was completed, it was transcribed and formatted toward the left of the page with the right margin available for coding. The first member check was completed as the transcript was returned to the participant, via email, to be checked for accuracy of responses (Creswell, 2009). Further member checking took place after the first cycle of coding when participants clarified if their perceptions were being accurately reflected in the analysis process. This second member check increased the validity of the data analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Coding in this study took place manually, due to it being the researchers' initial experience with coding, and due to the smaller nature of this basic qualitative study (Saldaña, 2016). The first coding cycle utilized the initial coding method, which calls for the separating and chunking the data to fully describe it. Coding line by line may be necessary initially (Saldaña, 2016). I used the transcribed copy of the interview to

underline, highlight, and make notes in the margin to begin the initial coding process.

Throughout the coding process analytic memos were written. These were written in a separate journal, cataloged, and linked to the specific pieces of data to which they pertain. Separate analytic memos that pertain not only to actual codes but to the coding process and, or the participants will be cataloged in the journal as well (Saldaña, 2016).

After an interview transcript was initially coded, another cycle of coding took place. The type of coding utilized at this point in the analysis was determined by the emergent codes and possible categories discovered during the initial coding process. Possible methods of coding could include In Vivo, Evaluation, or Magnitude coding. In Vivo coding involved coding using verbatim words from the participants as the actual codes. This method was appropriate for beginning qualitative researchers and for studies whose main purpose is to honor the experience and voice of the participant, both of which apply to this study. Evaluation coding is appropriate for evaluation studies. The study has an evaluative piece as it asks participants to describe their perceptions on the effectiveness of the UVA model. Magnitude coding could be appropriate as it creates basic statistics from qualitative data, such as percentages or frequency data of specific responses from participants (Saldaña, 2016). It is also possible that more than one method could be applied in the analysis.

Once the first two cycles of coding were complete, code mapping took place to look for emergent patterns. Visual and text options were utilized, including tabletop mapping as well as occurrence data around particular codes or text. After code mapping took place, second cycle coding began. The purpose of this round of coding was to look

for additional themes, categories, and conceptual organization in the data (Saldaña, 2016). Second cycle coding in the study utilized the Pattern Coding method. This method was designed to discover themes in the data, meta categories and bring together codes from multiple types of data sources and analytic memos. Individual codes were listed together, and I looked for what these individual codes have in common and various ways they may be grouped. These groups were then extrapolated up to determine overarching categories and themes for the data (Saldaña, 2016). It is important to note that while the protocol described here was listed in a linear fashion, coding was a cyclical process and pieces of all the various cycles happened simultaneously on various pieces of data.

To assure accuracy and credibility of findings, member checks were used (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Member checks happened more than once throughout the analysis process. After interviews were transcribed, they were reviewed with the participant to verify their validity and whether they reflect the participants' exact experience (Creswell, 2009). This allowed me another level of member check, as I was able to ask follow up questions based on information in the transcript. Additionally, once the initial coding method was applied to the transcript, participants were asked to review the codes given and initial analytic memos written regarding those codes. This allowed participants to provide me feedback to regarding the validity of how they reflect their perceptions of the UVA-PLE (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

There were several limitations for data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2009). First, my inherent bias cannot be eliminated as I was the data collection instrument and the one determining which pieces of data become part of the findings of the study.

Second, when a school leader chose not to participate, the implications of bias in the data based on the characteristics of that school leader and the school they lead not being represented was difficult to control. I diligently watched for those issues throughout the data collection process. The issues not controlled were fully acknowledged in the data analysis. Third, was the difficulty in determining how to make the vast amounts of data and description understandable and consumable for those who may use the findings for decision making or evaluative purposes. The fourth limitation of this study's data collection was scheduling the amount of time required with school leaders to complete questionnaires and interviews. During data analysis, asking school leaders to take more time to fulfill member checks and possibly dialogue further regarding their perceptions was difficult. Their schedules were busy and could have detracted from the hoped-for depth of conversation around their perceptions of the possible impact of the UVA-PLE.

During the analysis process, discrepant cases may have been apparent. These cases were fully analyzed and included using the above-described methods, including analytic memoing to more fully understand and describe their place in the presentation of the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The purpose of the study is to create a deep understanding of the perceptions of target turnaround school leaders that participated in the UVA-PLE. Discrepant cases are an important piece for the full understanding required of district leadership. If found, these cases would be presented in the findings directly after the themes that have been discovered during data analysis. Another limitation of the data could stem from the use of the open-ended questionnaire. It is possible that one of the participants may provide data in either the open-ended

questionnaire or interview that is inconsistent in nature and contradicts the data collected using the other data collection tool. In the event of such an occurrence, the discrepancies would be reported in the findings directly after the themes that have been discovered during the data analysis of the other cases.

Upon completion of data analysis, project deliverables were considered based on the outcome of the results. As described earlier, two possible deliverables for this study included either an evaluation report of the UVA-PLE or a position paper. Both could possibly be considered based on the overall themes extrapolated from participants' perceptions and the number of discrepant cases. An evaluation report could be a valid project deliverable based on the perceptions of participants of the effectiveness of the UVA-PLE. A position paper could also be a valid project deliverable especially if the outcomes of the data are discrepant in anyway. The position paper could present those findings along with recommendations to district leadership regarding the next steps in evaluation.

Data Analysis Results

I generated, gathered, and recorded the data according to the processes already outlined. I sent emails to the participant pool inviting them to join the study. This email included a copy of the informed consent form and the letter of cooperation from the school district. Twelve invitations were extended, eight consented, one declined, one consented and then later withdrew, and two did not respond. I sent the participants that consented the open-ended questionnaire.

As consent and questionnaires were sent and returned, I tracked them in an Excel spreadsheet. The questionnaires were coded to see if participants met the interview criteria. Participants 2, 4, 5, and 7 met criteria to participate in the semi structured interview process. I asked the four participants to answer the three outlined and approved interview questions, as well as various follow up questions based on their responses. An application called Otter was used to record interviews. I sent copies of the transcription of each interview to the participants for member checks. Once participants indicated that the transcription captured what they intended to share, I coded the transcriptions and open-ended questionnaires. I initially used line by line coding. The line-by-line codes were then put through a second cycle of coding to look for initial patterns and relationships. Throughout the coding process, I kept an analytic memo journal in order to detach my personal bias from the participant perceptions I was trying to capture.

The data analyzed from the participants proved useful towards answering the study's research questions. I designed the research questions to capture descriptions and data to address both the problem in the study, the gap in practice, and understand school leaders' perceptions of the impact of participation in the UVA-PLE on their instructional leadership competency. The target school district partnered with the UVA-PLE as an answer to solving the problem of a lack of quality instructional leadership competency. The target school district also lacked understanding of the possible impact of the target district's partnership with the UVA-PLE regarding the improvement of the quality of instructional leadership competency. Through analysis of both the eight open-ended questionnaires and four semi structured interview transcripts, codes, patterns, themes, and

findings emerged from the data. These codes, patterns, and themes presented below answer each of the three research questions.

Research Question 1: What were school leaders' perceptions of the possible effect of participating in the UVA-PLE model with regard to instructional leadership competency in the target turnaround schools?

The first research question asked what school leaders' perceptions were of the possible effect of participating in the UVA-PLE with regard to instructional leadership competency. All eight participants addressed this question by answering the five questions outlined below.

The following questionnaire questions were used to support RQ1:

- Describe the professional learning you received at the UVA-PLE.
- How do you perceive that professional learning as possibly impacting their instructional leadership competency?
- What were your strengths and weaknesses in instructional leadership competency before participating in the UVA-PLE?
- How do you perceive the UVA-PLE possibly supporting those strengths and weaknesses?
- What specific instructional leadership practices do you engage in in your building?

All eight participants reported that the professional learning and mentoring provided by the UVA-PLE was comprehensive and focused on high leverage instructional leadership practices. High leverage instructional leadership practices were

those that have been identified to maximize impact on student learning (Hattie, 2008). Their descriptions of the training distilled into five codes. These codes included *rigorous, expert, relevant, accountability,* and *focused.*

Participant 3 described the professional learning at UVA-PLE as "carefully crafted for rigor, accountability, and relevance." Some participants attributed the rigor of the professional learning at the UVA-PLE to the expertise in leadership of those leading the sessions. While at UVA, participant 7 described: "I received training from professionals in various fields from the UVA-PLE. Some instructors were professors at the Darden School of Business, and others were professors from other universities conducting similar research in organizational structure and education." Participant 3 stated, "UVA sponsored professional learning events were facilitated by experts in the subject area. By expert, I mean a professor, leading researcher, author or highly successful practitioner in the field."

Multiple participants attributed the relevance of the professional learning to having time to use information received to make school specific plans. Participant 6 described: "we were tasked to identify priorities and community-based solutions for those priorities. We examined system level challenges that were barriers to school improvement. We addressed root causes of system challenges and created conditions in which the school could achieve remarkable, scalable and lasting improvements." This level of relevance also contributed to a high level of accountability expected of the participants during the site visits participants received from the UVA-PLE mentors. "They were great mentors to bounce ideas off of or get examples of systems-level

structures to use in our building," described participant 6. The level of accountability for participants was felt, as described by participant 3: "there was a high expectation of accountability to be on track with plans and moving forward with goals." Four out of eight participants described this level of accountability for applying what they learned at the UVA-PLE.

Finally, participants described that the rigor, expertise, relevance, and accountability of the professional learning led to a high level of focus for participants. Participant 8 described that the "site visits with expectations for me to provide evidence on the big wins and my 90 days plans kept me focused." Participants 1,2, and 8 described that professional learning took place at UVA and was followed up with site visits to the target turnaround schools by faculty members of the UVA-PLE that filled the role of coach and mentor to the participants. In addition to professional learning activities, these on-site sessions with UVA-PLE mentors facilitated the rigor, relevance, and focused experience for participants. It was the main avenue for holding them accountable.

Theme 1: Participants Perceived that Participation in the UVA-PLE had a Positive Impact on their Instructional Leadership Competency.

After describing the professional learning received from the UVA-PLE, I asked all eight participants to describe the possible influence their participation in the UVA-PLE may have had on their instructional leadership competency. All participants indicated that they perceived participation in the UVA-PLE as impacting their instructional leadership competency. Participants 2,3,4, and 6 described that impact as "powerful", "great", "changed the path of my career", and "practical". In Table 3 are the

codes for how the participants perceived their participation in UVA-PLE influencing their instructional leadership competency.

Table 3

Codes for Participant Perceptions of UVA-PLE Influence on Instructional Leadership Competency

Codes		
Planning instruction	Building leaders	Confidence
Observation & feedback	Building systems	Strategic planning
Understanding data & assessment	Content knowledge	Managing complex relationships
Questioning	Self-reflective	Challenging the system
Personal drive	Building teams	Problem solving
Analyzing issues	Monitoring for accountability	PLC
Communication skills	Driving for results	

As I analyzed the data, I discovered a pattern in the codes derived from participants' descriptions. The codes began to fall into three groups or categories, with similar characteristics for each group. I labeled the three categories as tools, skills, and strategies. I defined each category in the following way. A *Tool* referred to an instrument or implement for performing operations. *Skill* described the ability, coming from one's own knowledge, practice, or aptitude, to do something well. *Strategies* described plans, methods or series of maneuvers for obtaining a specific goal or result. Table 4 shows the codes from Table 3 in those categories.

Table 4

Codes for Participants' Perceptions of UVA-PLE Influence on Instructional Leadership Competency Categorized as Tools, Skills, and Strategies

Tools	Skills	Strategies
Planning Instruction	Personal drive	Building systems
Questioning	Analyzing issues	Driving for results
Content knowledge	Communication skills	Strategic planning
Understanding data & assessment	Building leaders	Challenging the system
	Self-reflective	Problem solving
PLC	Building teams	
	Confidence	
	Managing complex relationships	
	Monitoring for accountability	

The participants described a variety of tools, skills, and strategies that they learned which made a positive impact on their instructional leadership competency. Many participants identified tools they knew of or had been using prior to their participation in the UVA-PLE. Participant 3 stated, "UVA had a powerful effect on my development as an instructional leader. It gave me tools and a clear commitment to leading instruction rather than building management." Participant 4 described that, "we no longer just talked about getting better. Participating in the training helped me do the practical work of being a principal of a school that needed to improve." Some of the participants focused on specific skills that the UVA-PLE taught them that made a positive impact on their instructional leadership competency. Participant 1 described

having a better understanding of "the purpose of assessment, analysis of assessment data, and the implementation of plans based on the data." Participant 8 felt as though the area of instructional leadership competency that was the most influenced by participation in UVA-PLE was her ability to "build teacher leaders in her building." Finally, some participants focused on strategies that the UVA-PLE taught them that made a positive impact on instructional leadership competency. Participant 2 articulated the following praise for UVA,

> I believe that participating in UVA-PLE changed the path of my career. It gave me the tools and training to lead my school well. I learned how to look at the big picture and set my school on a path for long term success while setting short term goals to ensure we were moving forward in positive and productive ways.

Participant 6 described that the training "shaped how I saw challenges and analyzed root causes to make system changes." Participant 7 echoed the positive influence that the other described when he stated,

> there were many things that had a strong influence on my instructional leadership competency from the UVA-PLE. My perspective on leadership and how to effectively lead change efforts changed significantly. There is a lot more to instructional leadership than observation and feedback cycles.

I asked the four participants in the semi structured interview to describe the specific professional learning, mentoring or structures they participated in at UVA-PLE that have improved their instructional leadership competency. All participants claimed that their instructional leadership was most improved as a result of having the time on

site at UVA-PLE to analyze the root causes of problems their schools faced, creating 90 days plans to move the work forward based on those issues, and demonstrating evidence of implementation of those plans to UVA-PLE mentors. The UVA-PLE mentors sat beside them in classrooms and PLC meetings and provided immediate feedback on ways to improve their instructional leadership competency and implementation of their 90-day plans. Participant 2 described it in this way: "implementing new learning between PD events was supported with feedback, resources, and site visits from the UVA team and the district leadership team. Timelines were tight. Focus, resiliency, and a sense of urgency was a distinctive part of UVA." Participant 7 felt that "doing both the UVA-PLE training and the work in tandem enabled me to build my instructional leadership competency at a more efficient and effective rate." The descriptions and data included here, including participants own words, indicated that school leaders perceived that their participation in the UVA-PLE had a positive impact on their instructional leadership competency.

Theme 2: Participation in the UVA-PLE Supported School Leaders in Developing their Reported Strengths and Mitigating their Reported Weaknesses in Instructional Leadership Competency.

Participants reported their strengths and weaknesses, outlined through the UVA-PLE, BEI process that took place before participating in the UVA-PLE. Their reports included not only what their strengths and weaknesses in instructional leadership competency were, but how their participation in the UVA-PLE supported those strengths and mitigated their weaknesses. All school leaders that participated in

UVA-PLE participated in a BEI interview experience before beginning the program. The strengths and weaknesses the participants reported on the open-ended questionnaire were the strengths and weaknesses in instructional leadership competency that were delineated by the UVA-PLE through the BEI process.

In response to the questions on the open-ended questionnaire regarding how the UVA-PLE supported their strengths and mitigated their weaknesses, participants described growth in their strengths and improvement of their weaknesses over the time they participated in the UVA-PLE. Participant 2 described that "UVA fed my need to learn and grow. It deepened my ability to reflect." The codes presented below in Table 5 were grouped in the categories of tools, skills, and strategies.

Table 5

Codes for Participants' Self-Reported Strengths and Weaknesses in Instructional Leadership Competency

	Tools	Skills	Strategies
Strengths			
	Instructional planning Observation & feedback Content knowledge Understanding data & assessment PLC	Self-reflective Confidence Building teams Managing complex relationships	Strategic planning Problem solving
Weaknesses			
	None	Monitoring for accountability	Driving for change Challenging the system Strategic planning Building systems Problem solving

In table 5, it shows that there were no tools reported as weaknesses by participants. This is unusual. Eight of the eight participants reported that they knew basic tools of instructional leadership competency before their involvement with the UVA-PLE and were already using them. There are also some codes repeated as both strengths and weaknesses in the table. This reflects the different levels of instructional leadership competency the participants had at the beginning of their involvement with the UVA-PLE.

The tools described by participants are all practices of instructional leadership that are widely known across the literature and are not exclusive to the UVA-PLE. The participants were aware of these tools prior to participation in the UVA-PLE. These tools included; planning instruction, observation and feedback, content knowledge, understanding data and assessment, and PLC. When reporting their strengths and weaknesses, it was interesting to note that all eight of that participants listed at least one tool as a strength, while, none of them listed any tools as a weakness. While most participants knew in general what these tools were, they describe that the UVA-PLE professional learning helped them further clarify the use of each tool and how it worked to improve student achievement. Participant 2 described, “UVA taught me to how to be an instructional leader. I learned how to guide teachers in running effective PLCs, how to use data to drive instruction, how to give feedback, and what to look for in observations.”

The next category that codes fell into was skills. The codes categorized as skills included; personal drive, analyzing issues, communication skills, building leaders, self-reflective, building teams, confidence, and managing complex relationships. All eight participants reported some skills as strengths and some as weaknesses. The UVA-PLE trained participants on how to use these skills and how these skills supported implementing the tools they had already learned. Participant 2 stated, "I learned how to have courageous conversations with teachers to support them in becoming more skilled and responsive to student need." School leaders reported that as their skills increased in these areas, their use of the tools they had learned about improved dramatically.

Participants reported strategies as both strengths and weaknesses. Throughout the data, school leaders described that this was their greatest area of weakness in their BEI profile of instructional leadership competency. Four out of the eight participants reported no strategies as a strength at all. The two strategies listed as strengths were from four of the participants. However, all eight participants listed some strategies as an area of weakness. School leaders described that this is where the UVA-PLE had the greatest impact on their instructional leadership competency. The strategies and support for their use provided by the UVA-PLE were instrumental in school leaders being able to implement a cohesive plan for school turnaround in their buildings. They understood the tools and skills required but knowing when and how to use each one was more difficult. The strategies that the UVA-PLE taught them allowed them to plan how and when to leverage the tools and skills they had as instructional leaders to get improvement in teacher efficacy and student achievement. These strategies included

driving for large scale change, challenging the system, innovation, managing complex issues, big picture vision, communicating that vision, and accountability systems. Acquiring knowledge of the strategies and how and when to use them created the changes in instructional leadership competency that the participants described. These strategies allowed school leaders to shift the culture and build systems in their schools. They described the increase in their own confidence and effectiveness which in turn increased the confidence and effectiveness of their teachers. It empowered everyone at the target turnaround schools and brought about a growth mindset for both adults and students.

Several participants, 3,5, and 7, described that participating in UVA-PLE supported their strengths by "enhancing and focusing the good", participant 3, "increasing the scope of strengths, participant 5, and "solidifying strengths", participant 7. Participant 1 articulated that her strengths were further enhanced as the UVA-PLE gave her knowledge and tools. As far as mitigating areas of weakness in instructional leadership competency, the participants addressed that issue in their responses, and described a few ways that the UVA-PLE accomplished that. Participant 2 mentioned receiving direct instruction in how to improve her instructional leadership competency, including guiding teachers in PLCs, how to guide planning for data driven instruction, what to look for in observations and how to have difficult conversations with teachers. Participant 4 described that "I became more influential with my staff, students, and community through our work because of the systems and protocols I was taught in UVA." Participants 7 and 8 echoed that sentiment. Participant 7 reported that the

combination of those protocols and applying professional learning in real time supported his weaknesses becoming strengths. Participant 8 said, “it was a pivotal growth point in my instructional leadership. It broadened my ability to be focused and create space for others to join.” Overall, participants perceived that participation in the UVA-PLE supported their strengths and mitigated their weaknesses in the tools, skills, and strategies of instructional leadership competency.

Research Question 2: What are school leaders’ perceptions of changes, if any, in instructional leadership competency and its possible influence on the efficacy of teachers in the target turnaround schools?

The second research question asked school leaders their perceptions of changes, if any, to their instructional leadership competency and its possible influence on the efficacy of teachers in the target turnaround schools. I gathered perceptions from participants on the open-ended questionnaire, by asking them to report on what UVA-PLE practices they had implemented to ensure high levels of teacher efficacy and how they perceive the possible improvements in their instructional leadership competency impacting teacher efficacy in their buildings. Participant 2 described that teacher efficacy was impacted by, “clearing the path so teachers can do their best work. Creating a positive school environment for students, staff, and families to thrive!”

Theme 3: Perceived Improvements in Instructional Leadership Competency Impacted Teacher Effectiveness by Supporting Teachers in Taking Ownership of the Work.

The codes for instructional leadership practices participants reported, specific to increased teacher effectiveness, were found in Table 6. They were also organized into the categories of tools, skills, and strategies.

Table 6

Participant Reported Instructional Leadership Practices used to Influence Teacher Efficacy

Tools	Skills	Strategies
PLC or Data meetings	Communicating vision Differentiation of teacher supports Collaboration Building teacher leaders	Vision Culture Engaging teachers in the work

As a part of weekly PLC/data meetings, participant 8 described the shift in the role in those meetings to "an instructional leaders rather than a manager of people and resources." Participant 2 described,

> Putting structures in place to support teachers in taking ownership of their work. Using data to understand where we need to go next, not as a punishment tool. Being clear about where we are going and allowing teachers to make it their own. And differentiating for teachers so they get what they need recognizing that everyone is in a different place.

Participants 4 and 8 reported focusing on building teachers as leaders. Participant 5 referred to a case study that was read as part of professional learning in the UVA-PLE. "We read an article about Johnsonville Brauts. This had a huge impact on me to ensure I am leading from the perspective and input of those in the 'factory'. This has

influenced my leadership style and helped me enact high levels of teacher efficacy." Participant 7 also listed "building strong teams" and "managing the talent in those teams" as important practices. He stated, "getting others to roll up their sleeves and be truly engaged in this work has been more effective than anything else I could have possibly done." All eight participants described that they perceived that their improvements in instructional leadership competency impacted teacher effectiveness in a positive way. As the codes specific to teacher efficacy were found in Table 6, Table 7 outlines how improved instructional leadership competency appeared to influence teacher effectiveness. Table 7 demonstrates how each participant described that impact.

Table 7

Participant Phrases Describing How Improved Instructional Leadership Competency Appeared to Impact Teacher Effectiveness

Provided increased access to targeted professional development
Increased teachers' growth mindset
Teachers experienced cycles of success
Teachers empowered by purpose and planning
Teachers gained confidence
Teachers appreciated accountability
Teachers appreciated a responsive and reliable leader
Teachers became solution oriented
Teachers experienced collective efficacy
Teachers experienced leadership opportunities

Two participants had robust descriptions of their perceptions of how their improved instructional leadership competency was connected to teacher effectiveness. Participant 7 stated this,

> Rather than teacher efficacy, I think I'll use the term collective efficacy, which is similar but with a slight variation. This type of efficacy is more than just making people feel good (although that's important too) This is about helping teachers engage in fundamental principles based on working together to help students achieve a year's worth of growth. The support I received from the UVA-PLE helped me establish fundamental skills to build collective efficacy within a whole school for the benefit of students and staff.

Participant 2 begins by quoting Richard Goldstone, "Healthy institutions bring out the best in people, sick institutions bring out the worst. We all bear the responsibility to make the institutions, with which we are affiliated, be just and humane." She went on to interpret the quote,

> UVA taught me how to create a healthy institution within the walls of my school and with the help of my people. Teacher efficacy is high in healthy institutions when they feel like they are a part of making and keeping it healthy.

Participants 2,4,5, and 7 participated in the semi structured interview. They answered the question, how did the UVA-PLE train you to use instructional leadership competency to improve teacher effectiveness. All four of these participants cited the onsite mentorship provided by the UVA-PLE as the most influential support to them in improving their instructional leadership competency to improve teacher efficacy. When viewed all together, participants described the tools, skills, and strategies they utilized as part of their instructional leadership competency that engaged teachers in the work of school improvement and ensured teacher efficacy.

Research Question 3: What are school leaders' perceptions of changes, if any in instructional leadership competency and its possible influence on student achievement in the target turnaround schools?

I gathered data and descriptions to answer research question three from participants by asking them to report on changes they had seen in student achievement after participating in UVA-PLE, how teachers were asked to demonstrate improvement in student achievement throughout the year, and how their instructional leadership competency impacted student achievement on a daily, weekly, and monthly level.

Theme 4: Improvement in Participants' Instructional Leadership Competency Resulted in Reported Improvement in Student Achievement in Some Areas.

I found four codes in the reported improvements in student achievement. The four codes were; slight overall improvement, inconsistent improvement across grade levels and subjects, sustainability concerns, and other areas to measure. Participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, and 8 described seeing some increases in student achievement happen quickly. Participant 5 took over a target turnaround school that had already been participating in the UVA-PLE for two years. She described that in those two years, they had made dramatic gains in literacy. However, since her arrival, she has only been able to "maintain the growth" the previous administration achieved. She was not able to sustain that pace of growth, a common criticism of turnaround programs like the UVA-PLE. Participants 2 and 4 described seeing improvement in student achievement in some grade levels. Participant 3 stated, "while I worked with UVA, overall student achievement went up slightly. Looking deeper showed me some grade levels of classes

had great growth while others didn't seem to show improvement." Participants 6, 7, and 8 described similar observations to participant 3. School leaders reported that teachers demonstrated improvement in student achievement through; benchmark testing, observation and feedback cycles, end of level testing, success criteria, common formative assessments, instructional cycles, pre/post testing, and during PLC. Finally, data was collected for research question three on how school leaders perceived instructional leadership competency impacted student achievement on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis. The participants reported ten different ways they perceive participation in UVA-PLE has changed their instructional leadership competency impacted student achievement on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis. These ten perceptions are outlined in Table 8.

Table 8

Instructional Leadership Practices that Participants Perceive Influence Student Achievement

Hiring practices
Goal setting
Professional development
Student data use in PLCs
Frequent observation and feedback cycles
Focus teachers on the big picture
Expect evidence of learning from teachers
Increased accountability
Push for systems to change (school and district)
Create culture shift- a new way that a school does business.

Participants 2,4,5, and 7 participated in the semi structure interview process and answered two questions, how student achievement was impacted by your participation in the UVA-PLE and how would you describe the link between your work as an instructional leader and student achievement in your building. Their answers to the first question were very similar to their responses on the open-ended questionnaire. Participant 2 provided specific scores in two grade levels in fourth and fifth grades. In fourth grade, language arts proficiency grew from 13% to 36% and math has improved from 19% to 44%. In fifth grade language arts improved from 11% proficiency to 35% and math has grown from 22% to 36%. Participant 4 shared that proficiency grew from 37% to 79% and language arts from 55% to 80%. Participants 5 and 7 did not share specific scores. Participant 5 rearticulated that while she was able to maintain the proficiency level reached by the previous administration, she had not yet been able to increase it. Participant 7 stated that, "when I was participating in UVA-PLE, the student achievement in my school increased significantly." All 4 participants answered the second interview questions regarding how they describe the link between your work as an instructional leader and student achievement by describing various ways they work to support teacher efficacy as the vehicle for increasing student achievement. Participant 2 described,

> Teachers grow throughout the year from observation and feedback cycles. Last year we did over 500 observations. We have instructional coaches. We meet as a support team each month to target individual teacher need so they get the

> right support. We set goals and support teachers in meeting them and we stay focused on what students need.

Participant 4 said something similar, “as a principal, I engaged in observation and feedback, data discussions, effective PLC work (through backwards design), and staying focused on big rocks.” Principal 5 reported, “the accountability and guidance from the UVA-PLE really helped everyone focus on the goal.” Finally, Participant 7 described it this way,

> Managing the culture of the school is crucial to providing the best teaching and learning environment for adults and kids, which is one of my primary responsibilities. Let me be clear: when I say culture, I’m not talking about how people feel. That’s important too, but what I’m really getting at is how we do business. The actions we take and the words we use will have a significant impact on teacher efficacy and a lasting impression on student success.

Overall, participants reported that the perceived changes that have been made to improve their instructional leadership competency have had an influence on student achievement in the target turnaround schools.

Discussion

Four themes emerged from analysis of the data provided by the eight participants. School leaders’ perceptions of how participation in UVA-PLE impacted their instructional leadership competency can be described in these four themes:

1. Participants perceived that participation in the UVA-PLE had a positive impact on their instructional leadership competency.

2. Participation in the UVA-PLE supported school leaders in developing their reported strengths and mitigating their reported weaknesses in instructional leadership competency.
3. Perceived improvements in instructional leadership competency impacted teacher effectiveness by supporting leaders in engaging teachers in the work of school improvement.
4. Perceived improvement in instructional leadership competency resulted in reported improvement in student achievement.

Throughout the data supporting themes one through three, the pattern of participants building tools, skills, and strategies repeated. The participants gained understanding around the daily and weekly tools at their disposal. These tools, including tools like PLC and observation and feedback cycles, constituted the "what" of instructional leadership competency. The UVA-PLE then built participant's skills, or the "how" of instructional leadership competency by supporting them with skills such as building teacher leaders and having difficult conversations. These skills supported leaders in knowing how to use the tools of instructional leadership competency. Finally, strategy development provided to school leaders, such as creating and communicating vision or driving for change, supported school leaders in understanding the "when" of instructional leadership competency. Better tools and skills led to the participants' ability to employ bigger and more complicated strategies to effect large scale shifts in

the target turnaround schools. I created a visual representation of how tools, skills, and strategies work together that is found below.

Figure 1

Interplay Between Tools, Skills, and Strategies

Another way these categories work together in the data is to think of them as embedded within each other. Tools would be central and embedded with in skills, embedded within strategies.

Figure 2

Interplay Between Tools, Skills, and Strategies (concentric circles)

Tools, skills, and strategies worked outward, having the ripple effect on the larger school community as they emanated from the school leader outward. The perceptions

of the participants in this study answered the three research questions. These answers aligned with the vision and purpose of the UVA-PLE partnership; to provide schools with leaders with high levels of instructional leadership competency in target turnaround school settings (Cucchiara et al., 2015; Dunlap et al., 2015; Lynch et al., 2016). Participant 2 stated that "this training filled my professional cup like no other and I am a better leader because of it."

It is salient that all eight participants perceived that participation in the UVA-PLE had a positive impact on their instructional leadership competency and that impact led to perceived positive changes in both teacher effectiveness and student achievement. I defined a discrepant case as either, responses in which the participant did not answer the question asked, or the answers went in an unexpected direction not relevant to the study. As I analyzed the data, no responses met this description and therefore no discrepant cases were found. Participant 5 was the only school leader whose school continued in turnaround with the target district's new partner. She described that the new turnaround partner was a better fit for her leadership style.

Finally, while the school leaders involved in the UVA-PLE reported positive changes in the instructional leadership competency and in the growth of student achievement, they were not as widespread as the UVA-PLE described that they could be. Seven out of eight participants reported improvement in student achievement in grade level pockets in certain subjects however, widespread increases across the entire student population of a school had not yet taken place. Participant 5, who was tasked with taking over a school two years into turnaround reported, "I have not been able to

see growth yet. I have been able to sustain the turnaround work completed before me, but no new growth." Participant 7 reported that students made significant literacy gains in the first two years of turnaround but had since only been able to maintain that growth.

The UVA-PLE championed the idea that school turnaround can happen in three years. Multiple participants described that the growth required for turnaround could not happen that quickly. Many perceived that taking a longer view of target school turnaround would be more likely to create long term sustainable change. Participant 7 reported it this way, "what I learned was that the success we experienced was not sustainable at the rate we were moving. I promised myself that moving forward we would move at a much slower pace that would allow for greater sustainability over time."

During data collection and analysis, I utilized procedures to maintain accuracy of the data. All eight participants completed their open-ended questionnaire. I tracked the sending and receiving of each questionnaire using an Excel spreadsheet. I kept an analytic memo journal from the first reading of each questionnaire that allowed me to capture my own bias, impressions, and questions of the data separate from the data itself. During the semi structured interview process with participants 2,4,5, and 7, I kept the analytic memo journal to track my own bias, impressions, and questions regarding what participants were reporting separate from what they were saying. After conducting the semi structured interviews, I returned transcripts to the participants. I completed this member check to ensure that participants felt their perceptions had been

captured appropriately. It also gave those participants another opportunity to clarify or elaborate on any of their responses. I used the analytic memo journal throughout all coding processes to help me analyze and summarize what I was seeing throughout the analysis process.

Findings:

The four themes from the data in relation to the pattern of tools, skills, and strategies provided to strengthen instructional leadership competency led to two important findings. A brief overview is presented here and a more detailed discussion of the findings in the context of the project deliverable are presented in section three.

Finding 1: First, Participants Reported that Participation in the UVA-PLE gave them the Tools and Skills to be able to Implement their Instructional Leadership Competency.

The effectiveness of the school leaders' instructional leadership competency was second only to the teachers in importance in the ability to improve student achievement, and it was vital that school leaders feel supported in its development (Hitt et. al., 2019). Participants described over and over the support that they received in developing their instructional leadership competency. The investment made in instructional leadership competency, like the one the target district had with the UVA-PLE, can, according to Meyers and Sadler (2018), fostering school leaders' growth was an investment in ensuring leader quality.

Finding 2: Second, Participants Reported that Participation in the UVA-PLE Gave them the Strategies to Know when to use their Tools and Skills to Support Increased Teacher Efficacy and Increasing Student Achievement at their Individual Schools.

Research showed that traditional principal preparation programs do not prepare school leaders for the rigors of school turnaround (Hitt et. al., 2019). The specificity of the tools, skills, and strategies of instructional leadership competency required of school leaders in turnaround required specialized support, in particular to be able to shift from the initial disruption of school turnaround to a more sustainable model for school improvement (Hitt & Meyers, 2018; Meyers & Sadler, 2018, Woulfin & Weiner, 2019). The participants' descriptions of their growth through participation in the UVA-PLE, after having participated in traditional principal preparation programs, further supported the need for training in the tools, skills, and strategies of instructional leadership competency.

The four themes and two findings answered the three research questions asked in the study:

> RQ 1. What are school leaders' perceptions of the possible effect of participating in the UVA-PLE with regard to instructional leadership competency in the target turnaround schools?
>
> RQ 2. What are school leaders' perceptions of changes, if any, in their instructional leadership competency and its possible influence on the efficacy of teachers in the target turnaround schools?

RQ 3. What are school leaders' perceptions of changes, if any, in their instructional leadership competency and its possible influence on student achievement in the target turnaround schools?

I designed the research questions to discover whether school leaders perceived that the partnership that district had with the UVA-PLE to solve the need for quality instructional leadership competency in the target districts target turnaround schools had worked or not. The problem faced by the target school district was a lack of quality instructional leadership capacity of school leaders placed in target turnaround school settings to improve teacher efficacy and student achievement (Lynch et al., 2016; Reedy et al., 2017). The themes articulated in the results began to address the gap in practice or lack of understanding of the target district of the perceived impact of the partnership with the UVA-PLE on instructional leadership competency. The vision and purpose of the UVA-PLE partnership was to provide schools with leaders with high levels of instructional leadership competency in target turnaround school settings (Cucchiara et al., 2015; Dunlap et al., 2015; Lynch et al., 2016).

The UVA-PLE was designed based on the work of David McClelland. McClelland's (1998) work was also the theoretical framework that grounded the study. McClelland championed the idea that competency for a position could be delineated, articulated, and taught. Participants reported that they took part in a program that delineated and articulated instructional leadership competencies. The competencies identified as weaknesses for each participant were taught within in the program to strengthen instructional leadership competency. Participants reported that they

perceived a positive impact on their instructional leadership competency because of their participation in the UVA-PLE. Participants reported improvement in their strengths and mitigated weaknesses in instructional leadership competency. They reported being able to use their instructional leadership competency to impact teacher efficacy by engaging teachers in the work of school improvement. And finally, they reported improvement in areas of student achievement due to the improvement of their instructional leadership competency. The partnership was perceived to have done what it was expected to do.

Upon completion of data analysis, I considered project deliverables based on the outcome of the results. As described earlier, two possible deliverables for this study included either an evaluation report of the UVA-PLE or a position paper. I considered both based on the overall themes extrapolated from participants' perceptions and the number of discrepant cases. While an evaluation report could have been a valid project deliverable based on the perceptions of participants of the effectiveness of the UVA-PLE, the findings supported the use of a position paper. The position paper could present the findings along with a recommendation to district leadership regarding the next steps in evaluation of implementation.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

Based on the findings of the research conducted, a position paper was the selected genre of project for the study. The target district engaged in the partnership with the UVA-PLE to increase the quality of instructional leadership competency of school leaders in target turnaround schools. The target district's lack of understanding of the impact of the partnership on school leaders' instructional leadership competency was the gap in practice the study addressed. I wrote the position paper to support the leadership in the target school district moving forward the work of school improvement to increase student achievement. It addressed the gap in practice by providing the findings and recommendations to form the basis of district leaders' understanding of the impact of the UVA-PLE partnership.

After a change in leadership, the target district announced the introduction of a new turn around partner to work with the target turnaround schools. The goals of the position paper were primarily focused on being able to disseminate findings to support future planning. The goals of dissemination included sharing the findings with district leadership including the superintendent, cabinet, and the school board. The goal in disseminating these findings was to spur discussion on the best ways to support the turnaround effort, including examining implementation practices and improving district support.

Rationale

This study explored understanding the perceptions of school leaders relating to the possible impact of participating in the UVA-PLE on the quality of their instructional leadership competency. In addition, I asked them to reflect on how the perceived changes to their instructional leadership competency influenced teacher efficacy and student achievement. The understanding of these perceptions was critical to support the target district in beginning to understand whether their partnership with the UVA-PLE addressed the lack of instructional leadership competency in the target turnaround schools. The UVA-PLE was grounded in the literature on school turnaround which repeatedly articulated that strengthening the quality of instructional leadership competency of school leaders should lead to improvement in teacher efficacy and student achievement (Cuchiarra et al., 2015; Dunlap et al., 2015; Lynch et al., 2016).

The participants in this study all participated in a BEI experience as advocated by McClelland (1998). Just as he suggested, these school leaders demonstrated some level of instructional leadership competency before being placed in turnaround leadership positions in the target turnaround schools. Feedback from the BEI articulated their strengths and weaknesses in instructional leadership competency before participating. After participating in the UVA-PLE, these school leaders perceived positive changes in their instructional leadership competency.

Participation in the UVA-PLE supported school leaders in developing their strengths and mitigating their weaknesses in instructional leadership competency. Perceived improvements in instructional leadership competency impacted teachers'

effectiveness reportedly by supporting teachers in taking ownership of the work of school turnaround. Perceived improvement in instructional leadership competency also resulted in reported improvement in some areas of student achievement. The UVA-PLE accomplished this by teaching and mentoring school leaders in the tools, skills, and strategies of instructional leadership competency.

These findings were salient as the target district recently announced the introduction of a new turn around partner to work with the target turnaround schools. As the district makes this transition, a position paper, outlining the outcomes of this project is very timely in order to support new efforts. A position paper is also an appropriate way to report qualitative findings (Cardno, 2018). Additionally, a position paper provides the target district, including the superintendent, cabinet, and the school board, with the results of the study, how the UVA-PLE partnership affected instructional leadership competency in the target turnaround schools, and a foundational knowledge of the relevant literature on school turnaround and instructional leadership competency. The school board especially benefits from this type of a project as they are engaged in how the implementation of policy is constructed within the local context (Field et al., 2018).

A position paper would guide the work of the target district as it shares specific information and recommendations that impacted the improvement of instructional leadership competency of school leaders (Matten, 2013). The themes discovered through data analysis conveyed via a position paper provide the target district with perspectives and understanding that would allow them to support future improvement (Sampson, 2019). Therefore, using a position paper for the project opens the conversation of whether

the partnership filled the need for higher quality instructional leadership competency in the target school district.

Review of the Literature

A position paper was the project selected as the most appropriate for the study. It is based on school leaders' perceptions of how the UVA-PLE impacted their instructional leadership competency, teacher efficiency, and student achievement and the findings discovered in the data. This literature review delved first, into the genre of the project, and second, into the content of the project including how policy affected education in general and specific to instructional leadership, how the literature supports the findings, and how the literature supports the recommendations. The first section discussed the genre of the project.

Position Papers in the Literature

This section involved literature around position papers and their use in this study being appropriate to address the problem. The literature surrounding the use of position papers indicated that almost all leadership activities in education can be connected to a policy initiative at the national level (Cardno, 2018). The problem identified for study came from the target district's efforts to implement federal education legislation, first, NCLB, and now ESSA. Politics and economics are the two major factors that moderate school reform, reform which is mandated through educational policy (Skourdoumbis, 2018). NCLB and ESSA are both federal legislation that mandated school reform to improve student achievement (Casalaspi, 2017).

This study highlighted a specific facet of NCLB and ESSA policy implementation in the target district. A position paper was an appropriate project based on the findings (Adams, 2016; Johnson, 2013). The need for school leaders to possess instructional leadership competency was outlined in both NCLB and ESSA (Mathis & Trujillo, 2017). The target district utilized the UVA-PLE partnership to address their lack of quality instructional leadership competency. The position paper provided the findings and recommendations required to answer the research questions in the study designed to address the problem.

Position papers were designed to use research findings and literature to take a position and provide recommendations as solutions to a problem (Pershing, 2015). Research suggested that educational policy is the text that teachers are implementing in the classroom to create change for students (Ball, 2015). This position paper created the text for the leaders in the target district to create change for students. A position paper allowed for both the dissemination of the findings, alongside a list of recommendations, and gave the target district some options for the improvement of practice (Gauder & Pautz, 2017). It was important that policy and practice in education be evidenced based. Position papers were based in data and findings, providing an evidence base for those that read them (Detrich et al., 2016). Position papers were also widely considered an appropriate way to report qualitative findings (Leeman & Sandelowski, 2012).

Criteria for Project Development

The development of this project came from normative information in the literature regarding best practices in writing a position paper. The purpose of the position paper

was to persuade or argue a position (Matten, 2013). It was both a research and an argumentative piece, arguing a position backed by both literature and data (Gauder & Pautz, 2017).

Different sources listed some variations on the required components of a position paper, however, the basic components across sources included defining the problem, providing evidence of the problem, presenting the solution, and evidence to back the solution (Gauder & Pautz, 2017). Further discussion included the nuances of the presentation of the solution to the problem, also considered recommendations. During the discussion of the findings, the research should not simply be regurgitated, but a new concept should be presented as it has been derived from analysis of the research and it should be demonstrated how that new concept is a basis for either further research or an improvement in practice (Leeman & Sandelowski, 2012). The presentation of the findings and recommendations was important and should have been presented appropriately to the audience of the position paper, including using a writing style and vocabulary that increases accessibility for the reader (Leeman & Sandelowski, 2012). These criteria from the literature supported the development of the position paper designed as the project for this study.

Content of the Project

Policy's Impact on Education and Instructional Leadership in the Literature.

Policy was designed to promote a solution to a problem (Pershing, 2015, Anderson et al., 2018; Britt et al., 2015). As a solution to a problem, policy was intended to impact the behavior of those to whom the policy applies (Detrich et al., 2016).

Educational leaders played a vital role in policy implementation and whether it actually changes behavior as intended (Cardno, 2018). This was especially key where all organizational and leadership activities in education are dictated by policy (Cardno, 2018). The focus of federal education policy, since the signing of ESEA in 1965, was and has continued to be school improvement in schools that serve historically marginalized groups (Paul, 2016). The original intent of ESEA included Title 1, providing funds to under privileged communities to close the gap between their achievement and the achievement of students served in wealthier suburban school districts (Paul, 2016; Skinner, 2019).

The federal government reauthorized ESEA five times and made seven amendments to it since its initial passage (Sharp, 2016). After a consortium, developed by business leaders and lawmakers, released the report, “A Nation at Risk”, federal involvement in education accelerated (Young, 2018). Schools began to be measured by non-educators and those measures were reduced to only those that could be counted, quantified and easily communicated to the public (Knoester & Parkinson, 2017). Schools were portrayed as “failing” students and new educational policy was the answer (Pershing, 2015). The literature defined policy as a tool that translates theory or research into practices to implement (Christie & Lemire, 2019). The reauthorization of ESEA as NCLB in 2001 translated the national climate around school accountability into a mandate for school improvement to increase teacher effectiveness and student achievement (Casalaspi, 2017; Knoester & Parkinson, 2017; Sharp, 2016; Young, 2018).

NCLB was a reactionary measure to the issues surrounding low levels of student achievement in schools (Sharp, 2016). NCLB operated on the premise that setting high standards and expectations of student proficiency and then imposing sanctions on schools for not reaching those high standards and expectations would shift teacher and principal behavior and student achievement would increase (Mitani, 2018). For the first time in educational policy, principals were accountable for whether students reached a certain level of achievement and their role changed. The actions required in this new role as instructional leader were different than those previously expected of school leaders and they needed support (Hitt et al., 2019). NCLB mentioned instructional leadership competency in reference to actions that school leaders were now required to take in order to ensure teacher efficacy. This was particularly true in circumstances of school turnaround, which required districts to replace the school leader and half of the teaching staff as one sanction for a school not making AYP for three consecutive years. Other possible sanctions included school transformation, school closure or state takeover. The target district in the study opted for school turnaround when its schools did not make AYP. NCLB required that the state facilitate technical assistance to school leaders in turnaround to improve their instructional leadership competency. If a state was unable to provide such technical assistance, external support, from a turnaround partner, could be utilized to improve the quality of instructional leadership competency (Mitani, 2018).

The UVA-PLE was one such turnaround partner and enlisted to facilitate the required technical assistance to the target school district to improve instructional leadership competency under NCLB sanctions. The UVA-PLE and school turnaround

focused on providing professional learning and mentorship to school leaders to help them use instructional leadership competency to implement 90-day plans in their school, plan to get quick wins, and disrupt the school's current trajectory (Nguyen & Redding, 2020). As indicated in research, and echoed by the participants in this study, the initial disruption of school turnaround was not sustainable over time and does not yield the promised improvements in student achievement consistently across subjects and grade levels (Hitt & Meyers, 2018).

Researchers began to focus on the impact of NCLB implementation, whether that implementation had the intended effect, and the field of instructional leadership as the principal's main responsibility (Knoester & Parkinson, 2017; Mitani, 2018; Williams, 2015; Young, 2018). NCLB served as the guiding federal education policy for 14 years, from 2001-2015, when the next reauthorization, ESSA was signed into law. ESSA has many similar requirements to NCLB, but there are several shifts away from the punitive and reactionary nature of NCLB (Mathis & Trujillo, 2017).

ESSA was built upon an expectation that states will be accountable for proactive action to create positive change in its lowest performing schools (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). State autonomy was a hallmark of ESSA (Burke & Jeffries, 2018; Martin et al., 2016). States now set their own proficiency targets on high stakes tests, they could include other measures, besides just student proficiency on a test, when determining which schools are in need of support. (Burke & Jeffries, 2018; Ferguson et al., 2014; Mathis & Trujillo, 2017). ESSA aligned efforts and resources focused more on the input into low performing schools than on the outputs (Mathis & Trujillo, 2017). While

instructional leadership competency was mentioned in NCLB as a requirement, in ESSA, it was described as central to school improvement work (Skinner, 2019). ESSA outlined a mechanism, entitled the School Leader Academy, for building the instructional leadership competency of school leaders. ESSA allowed schools and districts to partner with external providers, such as the UVA-PLE, to meet the requirements of the School Leader Academy. The School Leader Academy required professional learning in areas of instructional leadership competency and on-site mentorship for school leaders as they implemented what they have learned. The structure of the UVA-PLE and the target district's new turnaround partner both fulfilled these requirements.

Unlike NCLB's focus on quick, disruptive turnaround, ESSA recognized that sustainability of the school improvement effort was key for success (Mathis & Trujillo, 2017). To achieve sustainability, ESSA advocated for "a dynamic principal with a clear vision for establishing a culture of high expectations and talented teachers who share that vision" (ESSA, 2015). A school culture, transformed by vision, challenging the system and enabling others to act was typically led by school leaders who embedded their instructional leadership competency within transformational leadership practices (Bischoff et al., 2015). Transformational leadership practices were hallmarks of high achieving schools, while low achieving schools typically had leaders engaging in transactional leadership practices (Bischoff et al., 2015). As the target district moved into a more sustainable school improvement model with a new partner, transformational leadership practices became an important addition to the tools, skills and strategies already acquired through the UVA-PLE.

In both NCLB and ESSA there was a greater focus on school leadership, including provisions for providing school leaders mentoring and professional learning opportunities to improve their instructional leadership competency (Mitani, 2018; Sharp, 2016; Weiner, 2016; Williams, 2015). Where some asserted that the pressure created for leaders in attempting to meet the requirements of NCLB was not helpful, ESSA included support for school leaders (Mitani, 2018). The increased prominence of school leaders and their role as instructional leaders in policy and research set the stage for the need for the target school district to improve the instructional leadership capacity in response to the sanctions imposed by NCLB and support required by ESSA. The problem facing the target school district was a lack of quality instructional leadership capacity of school leaders placed in turnaround settings to improve teacher efficacy and student achievement (Lynch, et al., 2016; Reedy, et al., 2017). The UVE-PLE was designed to support school leaders in increasing their instructional leadership competency and therefore improving teacher efficacy and student achievement (Cucchiara et al., 2015; Dunlap et al., 2015; Lynch et al., 2016).

The purpose of this study was to create deep understanding of the perceptions of target turnaround school leaders that participated in the target district's partnership with the UVA-PLE, to improve their instructional leadership competency. Data suggested that these school leaders perceived a change in their instructional leadership competency. Across all three research questions were reported patterns of positive responses, affirming that school leaders perceived that participation in the UVA-PLE improved the quality of their instructional leadership competency and therefore improved teacher efficacy and

student achievement. The findings articulated through analysis of the data provided by participants, contextualized in the broader literature about school turnaround and school improvements, support the content of the position paper.

Study Findings.

The content of the position paper was designed to support the two main findings from the research. The first finding was that participants reported that participation in the UVA-PLE gave them the tools and skills to be able to implement their instructional leadership competency. The second finding was that participants reported their participation in the UVA-PLE gave them the strategies to know when to use their tools and skills to be able to use their instructional leadership competency to support increased teacher efficacy and increasing student achievement at their individual schools. These findings supported the position that the target district's partnership with the UVA-PLE to improve the instructional leadership competency of school leaders in target turnaround school setting was working. The literature reviewed in this section supported the two findings and position that was be the content of the position paper.

Finding 1: Participants reported that participation in the UVA-PLE gave them the tools and skills to implement their instructional leadership competency. Outward behaviors can be an articulation of internal competencies (Hitt et al., 2019). The outward behaviors of school leaders manifested their levels of instructional leadership competency. School leaders with effective instructional leadership competency were second only to an effective teacher in the work of improving student achievement (Hitt et. al., 2019). Investment in instructional leadership competency, through partnerships

like the target district's partnership with the UVA-PLE, was an investment in ensuring leader quality (Meyers & Sadler, 2017). It also contributed to the confidence and optimism of the school leader tasked with the daily effort of school turnaround (Hitt et. al., 2019). Participants perceiving improvement in instructional leadership competency through professional learning was important as school turnaround was described in the research as requiring a specific set of tools and skills and therefore tailored support (Hitt & Meyers, 2018; Meyers and Sadler, 2018, Woulfin & Weiner, 2019). This was seen in the support provided by the UVA-PLE to the target turnaround schools in the present study. Meyers and Vangronigen (2019) stipulated that improved instructional leadership positively influenced not only the type of planning required for school turnaround but the implementation of those plans. Research also showed that without the tools and skills of instructional leadership competency, school turnaround was not be sustainable beyond the initial disruption (Weiner & Woulfin, 2019). Participation in the UVA-PLE had a perceived positive impact on instructional leadership competency of the participants involved.

Finding 2: Participants reported their participation in the UVA-PLE gave them the strategies to know when to use their tools and skills to support increased teacher efficacy and increased student achievement at their individual schools. Research showed the rigors of school turnaround require that principals receive training beyond traditional principal preparation programs (Hitt et. al., 2019). School turnaround required school leaders to acquire the specific tools, skills, and strategies of instructional leadership competency in order to be able to shift from the initial disruption of school

turnaround to a more sustainable model for school improvement (Meyers & Sadler, 2018, Woulfin & Weiner, 2019, Hitt & Meyers, 2018). Before beginning the UVA-PLE, participants took part in the BEI process which delineates their strengths and weaknesses in instructional leadership competency. The research articulated that like the participants in this study, growth in the area of large-scale strategies was the most important area of growth that turnaround leaders require (Bischoff et al., 2015). Weiner and Woulfin articulated how salient principal growth in using large scale strategies becomes with this warning, including a caution regarding the sometimes misuse of "trigger" or "disruptive" methods of school turnaround.

> Although trigger change can be enacted by transformational ways, we found it was frequently wielded in an instrumental manner. While many of the aspiring leaders worked to ensure that teachers had clear understandings of new instructional approaches or school initiatives, they presented this work as one-way and transactional. In these cases, the leader convinced teachers to agree with the leader's vision and plan, rather than forming a culture of shared leadership and engaging in meaningful dialogue with teachers. We caution that, if triggering change is deployed in an instrumental manner, it may result in single loop learning rather than transformation shifts.

Turnaround leaders faced many challenges that included, making sense of the issues facing the school, engaging a variety of groups with large scale change, adapting as things continually change, planning intentional quick wins, and shifting from quick wins to sustainable, long term school improvement (Hitt et. al., 2019). Due to the

nonlinear nature of school turnaround, some researchers suggested that there are other strategies required for turnaround leaders that need further consideration to shift leaders from using more transactional NCLB practices to more transformational ESSA practices (Barton & Yoon, 2019; Bischoff et al., 2015). These strategies went beyond the tools and skills provided by the UVA-PLE and expanded the strategies that principals use to impact turnaround over time. Some suggested that there were multiple logic models that can be applied to school turnaround, the one the instructional leader chose to employ can change the day-to-day work of turnaround (Weiner & Woulfin, 2019). Knowing when and how to select which logic model broadened the strategies used by instructional leaders. Others suggested that only providing school leaders with tools, skills, and strategies would not fully prepare them for sustained achievement in school turnaround. These tools, skills, and strategies should be imbedded within an understanding of transformational leadership practices (Bischoff et. al., 2015). Such a next step would help sustain school improvement over time.

The target school district partnered with the UVA-PLE to improve instructional leadership competency to ensure teacher effectiveness and student achievement in the target turnaround schools. To raise student achievement over time, leaders needed to impact the pedagogical core, the most difficult and most critical task that turnaround leaders face (Cozzens & Ross, 2016; Fullan & Pinchot, 2018; Hitt et al., 2019; Weiner, 2016). One of the challenges articulated throughout the research of school turnaround was the high rates of teacher turnover in target turnaround schools (Heissel & Ladd, 2018; Meyers & Sadler, 2018; Meyers & Vangronigen). Multiple sources supported the

theme of supporting teachers by empowering them to take ownership of the work of school turnaround. Distributed leadership was one indicator of effective leadership in school turnaround (Hitt & Meyers, 2018). One assertion put forth was that typically, school turnaround was conducted through a transactional leadership lens, which can often increase teacher dissatisfaction and burnout (Bischoff et. al, 2015) Contextualizing school turnaround in a transformational leadership lens incrementally led to distributed leadership throughout the school (Bischoff et. al., 2015). Empowering teachers included support in providing quality instruction based on student data (Welsh & Williams, 2018). The school leader's level of instructional leadership competency empowered teachers to take ownership of the work of turnaround by providing them with support for quality instruction, an opportunity to participate in distributed leadership, and by fostering a culture in which teaching and learning can happen (Williams, 2015).

Multiple participants described that after their initial growth in student achievement took place, they were unable to maintain that rate of growth continually. They also described that while the UVA-PLE provided them with tools, skills, and strategies to make quick and drastic changes, they believe that large scale turnaround takes longer (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973).The current research in turnaround mirrored much of what was described by the participants in this study. Nationally similar results for turnaround were reported. Research conducted in both North Carolina and Georgia showed small pockets of improvement, but it was not widespread (Heissel & Ladd, 2017; Welsh & Williams). There have not been statistically significant improvements in schools receiving School Improvement Grants (SIG) either (Mania-Singer, 2018). Tennessee saw

mixed results based on the model implemented (Henry, et al., 2017). In a study of 151 turnaround providers in 13 states, Meyers and Vangronigen (2018) outlined that one of the challenges of school turnaround included a focus on improvement that is quick and dramatic, but difficulty in sustaining that improvement over time and seeing little evidence of impact over time. The literature, some published by those involved with the UVA-PLE, reflected these same sentiments; the initial turnaround disruption cannot be the end, there must be a shift from initial turnaround to sustained improvement. Planning for quick wins and 90-day plans was not sustainable for increased student achievement over time (Hitt & Meyers, 2018; Hitt & Meyers, 2018; Meyers & Smylie, 2017; Meyers & Vangronigen, 2017; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973; Weiner, 2016).

Recommendations.

The recommendations in the position paper included next steps based on reports from participants as presented in section two, and/or recommendations from the literature. The first recommendation was to look at further study surrounding the impact of the UVA-PLE partnership including a program evaluation study or mixed methods study of schools that participated in the UVA-PLE. The target district would be able to consider more quantitative data to support the qualitative perceptions of school leaders already captured here. This recommendation would include data, quantitative or otherwise, from teachers, parents, and students in addition to the school leader. Another area of further study to consider would be replicating the study with school leaders in the target district after working with the new turnaround partner recently announced for a year. Either path of further research supported broadening the literature surrounding

school turnaround considering the minimal research available on the subject (Meyers & Smylie, 2017, Meyers & Vangronigen, 2018).

The second recommendation came out of the reports by participants that district level support for school turnaround was lacking. The importance of district support for the turnaround effort was articulated by multiple participants. The target district saw a leadership change partway through partnership with the UVA-PLE. The participants saw the change in leadership lead to a change in district support of the UVA-PLE work they were conducting in the target turnaround schools. In the literature, it was evident that the support of the superintendent and district office staff was necessary for both the initial push for change to be successful and for the shift into long-term sustainable change to happen (Corrales, 2017; Hitt & Meyers, 2017). Meyers and Sadler (2018) recommended that while the principal is a change leader and second only to teacher in the impact to student achievement, district office leadership should be strategic in its support of the instructional leadership competency of school leaders. This support included consideration of interactive feedback loops between schools and district departments, effective collaboration of district departments and the coordination of resources. According to Hitt and Meyers (2018), there was also evidence that the need for school turnaround in the first place was due to a systems failure. Refusal to examine those systems would lead to continued school failure (Hitt & Meyers, 2018; Meyers & Sadler, 2018; Meyers & Vangronigen, 2019). The target school district should take a close look at the systems and skills of personnel within the district office and examine whether they support instructional leadership competency, teacher efficacy, and student achievement.

The third recommendation, evident from the literature, was the importance of the dissemination of the findings to the key stakeholder groups to provide needed information for the target district to make important decisions. Local school governance was critical to create high performing schools (Field, et al., 2018). The position paper, as the project for this study, provided the target district, including the superintendent, cabinet, and the school board, with the results of the study, how the UVA-PLE partnership affected instructional leadership competency in the target turnaround schools, and a foundational knowledge of the relevant literature on school turnaround and instructional leadership competency. Understanding school leaders' perceptions of the impact of the UVA-PLE on instructional leadership competency was the beginning of understanding the effects of NCLB/ESSA implementation in the target district. This was critical information for the local school board as educational legislation such as NCLB and ESSA, often oversimplified the connection between various initiatives and student achievement (Skourdoumbis, 2017). Sharing the data would support community involvement in the turnaround effort. There was literature to support recommendations on how to involve parents to create more systematic school turnaround (Ishimaru, 2018). Listening to teachers and leaders involved in turnaround allowed for sustainable school improvement plans to be built (Welsh & Williams, 2018). These plans could include a pivot to building school leader's capacity in embedding the instructional leadership competency in transformational leadership practices as the target district takes a proactive approach as outlined in ESSA. Much can be learned regarding the improvement around instructional leadership competency from those who have walked the path before (Mania-

Singer, 2018). These three recommendations, further study, strengthening district support, and disseminating the findings were outlined in the position paper.

How the Search was Conducted.

The search for the relevant literature was conducted for two topics. Literature related to the use of the position paper as a project deliverable was in similar search data bases and Pro Quest with the support of a librarian at Walden. Terms like white paper, policy paper, policy recommendation, and position paper were used to locate other white papers, other Walden projects that utilized the position paper as the project deliverable and articles regarding the use of the position paper. Literature related to school turnaround and the findings described in the study was conducted based on searches conducted in the Walden library. EBSO, Eric, Sage, and Ed Source were data bases used. Search terms included, school turnaround, instructional leadership competency, school principals, school board governance, school turnaround results, school leadership and student achievement, NCLB, and ESSA.

The literature review met the criteria for saturation with 25-30 peer reviewed sources as its base. These sources supported both the outcomes from the data analysis related to school turnaround and the use of the position paper as a project deliverable for the study. All the school turnaround literature was recent, within the last five years. A few of the articles regarding the use of a position paper are seminal in nature and outside the scope of the five years.

Project Description

The project deliverable based on the results of this study was a position paper. The only resource required to create the project was time for conducting the study, analyzing findings, and literature search to develop the position paper. The other resource that it required is opportunity and access. This was also the biggest potential barrier to the success of the project. The usefulness of the project was rooted in the ability to share it with the entities charged with sheparding the school turnaround effort in the target district.

District leadership, the local school board, and participating principals are all audiences in the target school district that would benefit from the findings and recommendations presented in the position paper. I would need permission of the superintendent to present the findings to key stakeholders. One potential solution to that barrier could be to provide the superintendent with a copy of the position paper for him review and meet with him personally before requesting him permission to present it to the various stakeholder groups. Another stakeholder that would benefit from having access to the position paper would be the UVA-PLE and the newly named turnaround partner in the target school district. The findings and recommendations could strengthen the work of both partners. Obtaining permission to share with the UVA-PLE and the other turnaround partner could prove to be a barrier. A potential solution would be to begin with the UVA-PLE group first, open that pathway and then explore sharing with the new turnaround partner.

Once the study, project, and write up have received final approval, a timeline for the position paper dissemination will be established. First, a copy of the position paper will be sent to the superintendent of the target school district with a request to meet with him personally. Within two weeks, I would hope to be on his schedule for a meeting. The purpose of the meeting would to be clarify any questions and concerns that the superintendent has and then make plans for providing the information to relevant stakeholders. If permission is granted, a date within two weeks would need to be set to present the position paper first to the superintendent's cabinet and a second, within a month, for presentation to the school board. Presentation to the school board may take place in a study session or a public meeting. If the presentation were to take place in a public meeting, the findings and recommendations would then be available to the public, including teachers, staff, and parents. This would necessitate the creation of a power point, approved by the superintendent, in order to make sure the information is approved for such an audience. Simultaneously with the presentation to the school board, contact would be made with the UVA-PLE to begin dialogue regarding their interest in the position paper. Depending on the results and the district personnel's approval, I would also begin dialogue with the new turnaround partner entity to determine their level of interest.

My roles and responsibilities would include all communications and presentations of the position paper. This includes, first and foremost, protecting the anonymity of my participants. It also includes abiding all requirements involved with all stakeholder groups. The superintendent and school board have guidelines regarding presentations

during their meetings. All materials must be approved in advance. I will be required to communicate professionally via phone, email, and in person. No others will be involved in the dissemination stage of the position paper. Future plans may involve presentation to national conferences and journal publications.

Project Evaluation Plan

To evaluate the project, I used a goals-based evaluation plan. The central goal for this project was dissemination of the position paper. The four goals for the project included both internal and external facing goals of dissemination.

1. Present the position paper, with findings and recommendations to the superintendent and gain approval to present to the superintendent's cabinet.
2. Present the position paper, with findings and recommendations, to the executive directors that sit on the superintendent's cabinet, get feedback, and approval to present to the school board. Refine presentation based on feedback and present to the school board.
3. Share findings, outcomes, and lesson learned with the new turnaround partner to support them in not "reinventing the wheel" to increase success with target turnaround schools.
4. Look to presenting local, state, national, and international conferences where possible, including virtually.

As the goals of dissemination are met, it will support the target district in moving closer to a full understanding of where they have been on their journey to improve instructional leadership competency to increase teacher efficacy and student achievement. The key

stakeholders in the target district include, the superintendent, the superintendent's cabinet, the school board, and the district's new turnaround partner. In the superintendent's cabinet, four members are of importance, the Executive Director of Teaching and Learning, the Executive Director of Educational Equity and Student Support, the Executive Director of School Leadership and Performance and the Business Administrator. These four members of the cabinet facilitate how the district runs in reference to ensuring student achievement and the configuration of resources. The school board is vital as they are ultimately responsible for the direction of the school district and how it uses its resources. The current turnaround partner is an important stake holder as they are working daily to set a new trajectory of student achievement for their students. The information in the position paper is important to how they approach that work.

Project Implications

Students that attend the target turnaround schools in this study are from historically marginalized groups. These six schools serve school populations that represent a range of 73-90% ethnic and cultural diversity. These six schools also have high populations of low socioeconomic students and English Language Learners. These local statistics mirror the student populations of schools identified as target turnaround schools across the country. In the context of the approach of assessment-based accountability, Mathis and Trujillo (2017) warn, "the greatest conceptual and most damaging mistake of the test-based accountability systems has been the pretense that poorly supported schools could systemically overcome the effects of concentrated poverty and racial segregation by rigorous instruction and testing". School leaders in

turnaround must also take the role of social justice advocate for their students and families (Berry, et al., 2018). Any partnership the district engages in to improve the quality of the instructional leadership competency, teacher effectiveness, and student achievement impacts the experience of large groups of marginalized students under its stewardship. When instructional leadership competency is coupled with a school leader's "ally" social justice identity, the target school district would empower students in accessing an "emancipatory" education that allowing them to "choose to fully participate in the decisions affecting their lives" as described by Berry, et al. (2018)

Nationally, the literature is beginning to shift from a push for quick turnaround results to long term sustainable improvement (Meyers & Smylie, 2017). This project further confirms the necessity of that shift and provides a voice to school leaders engaging in the work daily. School leaders in the target turnaround schools reported positive changes in instructional leadership competency that led to teacher empowerment, improved relationships with their school communities, improved school climate and culture for students and teachers, and some improvements in student achievement. The target district's leadership has the opportunity now to take the success in these six target turnaround schools and amplify it by using this information in its work with the new turnaround partner. Moving forward, including transformational leadership practices and a social justice lens to school leader's instructional leadership competency will create sustainable school improvement (Bischoff, et. al., 2015; Mathis & Trujillo, 2017).

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Project Strengths and Limitations

The problem faced by the target school district and central in this study, was a lack of quality instructional leadership capacity of school leaders placed in target turnaround school settings to improve teacher efficacy and student achievement (Lynch et al., 2016; Reedy et al., 2017). I designed this study to summarize and share the perceptions of school leaders in six target turnaround schools that participated in the UVA-PLE partnership to strengthen and build their instructional leadership competency. The perceptions described by these school leaders were overwhelmingly positive. The dissemination of those perceptions will be important to provide information to support district leadership in taking its next step. Using a position paper to do this has many strengths.

The target district's implementation of federal education policies, NCLB and ESSA, uncovered improvements they needed to make in the quality of instructional leadership competency. Using a position paper or policy recommendation to support the district understanding of the impact of federal legislation is appropriate (Deytrich et al., 2016). One strength of a position paper is that it was designed to educate and persuade (Matten, 2013). This position paper provides the target district leadership with specific information about how their own school leaders perceived the impact of the UVA-PLE partnership on their instructional leadership competency. It was also a practical and consumable format for non-educators, such as the school board, to have access to salient data (Leeman & Sandelowski, 2012). The position paper was designed to be based in

evidence and persuasive. The evidence and focus of the position paper were derived after careful consideration of the findings and then contextualized them within the current literature. (Gauder & Pautz, 2018).

Finally, the position paper also strengthens the transferability of the study, allowing it to possibly be recreated with the target district's current turnaround partner (Leeman & Sandelowski, 2012). The limitations of the position paper were also important to consider. The findings in the project were entirely qualitative in nature, relying on school leaders self-report of their own perceptions of their instructional leadership competency. A position paper is an appropriate way to report qualitative results, however, the target district may want to consider seeking additional quantitative data to further strengthen the way it supports target turnaround schools (Cardno, 2018). The largest limitation of the position paper is the reliance on someone else to allow dissemination of the information. The lack of control an author has in relation to how the findings are used or applied can sometimes result in an oversimplification of those findings (Adams, 2016).

The target school district sought to improve instructional leadership capacity of school leaders placed in target turnaround school settings to improve teacher efficacy and student achievement (Lynch et al., 2016; Reedy et al., 2017). The options for failing schools centered on the improvement of the quality of school leaders' instructional leadership competency. Research supported NCLB, ESSA, and the UVA-PLE in their assertion that strong instructional leadership competency must be in place for school turnaround to be successful (Cucchiara et al., 2015; Dunlap et al., 2015; Lynch et al.,

2016). Being identified for turnaround through NCLB, at the time, brought to light the lack of quality instructional leadership competency in the six target turnaround schools in the target district. In addition to the lack of quality instructional leadership competency, research demonstrated that broken district systems of support are what have led target turnaround schools to need turnaround (Hitt & Meyers, 2018; Meyers & Sadler, 2018; Meyers & Vangronigen, 2019). As the target district seeks to continually improve instructional leadership competency in target turnaround schools, utilizing the positions paper to support the target district leadership in implementing proactive efforts, despite its limitations, supports school improvement moving forward.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

Alternative approaches to the problem in the target district could include both further study of the problem as defined in this study, or alternate definitions of the problem. First the approach of further study could go beyond just the perceptions of the school leaders to collecting data on how often and when school leaders use the tools, skills, and strategies of instructional leadership competency learned through the UVA-PLE partnership. Additionally, further study could extend to teachers, collecting their perceptions and collecting data around the use of agreed upon instructional strategies occurring daily in classrooms. Another approach would be to go deeper in one of the six target schools for a more comprehensive case study approach on the impact of the leader's instructional leadership competency on faculty, staff, families, and students. This could include using formative data on the trajectory of student achievement within that building.

In addition to further study, there are several alternate definitions of the problem that could be considered. The original definition of the problem faced by the target school district was a lack of quality instructional leadership capacity of school leaders placed in target turnaround school settings to improve teacher efficacy and student achievement (Lynch et al., 2016; Reedy et al., 2017). One alternate definition of the problem to be explored by the target school district would be to define the lack of quality instructional leadership competency as a district systems failure. An investigation into how the district systems failed to strengthen and support quality instructional leadership competency and therefore teacher efficacy and student achievement in these six schools would provide the target district with information that could be used to prevent such failure in the future. A second alternate definition of the problem could be to investigate district systems that could identify a lack of quality instructional leadership before turnaround becomes necessary. The target district could then plan and provide proactive supports to identified school leaders as outlined in ESSA (Mathis & Trujillo, 2017). A third alternate definition of the problem could be to investigate district systems for identifying schools early and systems of response when a school first begins to fail or demonstrate a downward trend in student achievement. Like the second alternative definition, this would allow a proactive approach to presenting school failure in the first place, also outlined in ESSA (Hitt & Meyers, 2018).

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership, and Change

I learned much regarding the processes surrounding the research and development of the project. Not surprisingly, much of that learning was acquired by going through

these processes myself. I had read studies and scholarly articles in prior post graduate work but was unaware of the level of detail and precision required in the design of the research portion of the study. I knew that my qualitative research would require plans to protect the confidentiality of my participants. It also required permission from the superintendent in order to conduct the study. I was not fully prepared, however, for the specificity required in the Internal Review Board (IRB) process. The benefit I found in that specificity is that it made conducting the research very simple and without any procedural questions. I was only required to enact what I had said I would do.

In developing the project, I learned over and over, the importance of removing as much of my personal views and feelings about the topic as possible. This allowed me to create as much objectivity around the UVA-PLE partnership as I possibly could. This was made easier using analytic memoing. I was able to leave my views and feelings in the memos and look at what the data was saying. It also helped that my participants had stronger perceptions than I anticipated. The strong voice of my participants streamlined project development.

The process of the second literature review facilitated the thinking behind the recommendations in the position paper as the current research reflected what my findings were articulating as possible next steps. The process was affirming in my understanding of how my study fits into the larger context and body of work. The project development process also allowed my further understanding of how research must be consumable in education in order to facilitate change. How the research is communicated and

disseminated is of vital importance to how it is adopted and the ramifications that adoption may have for students.

This process for me has been longer than I foresaw. I have experienced much growth in multiple areas of my life due to my scholarly work in this field. I have experienced great growth in areas that would be expected such as time management, prioritizing tasks and setting small goals in order to reach larger ones. As a scholar, practitioner and project developer, I have learned two major things. The first being the importance of fully immersing yourself in the process outlined for doctoral research. There were times early on, when I would attempt to either circumvent to shorten a process to fit my own timeline or agenda. However, with guidance from my committee, I have learned the value of leaning into those processes. My best work has come from taking advantage of the process and fully engaging with it. This also protects my work as a scholar, as it guarantees a certain level of quality and integrity.

Upon further reflection, I have also learned much about my own meta-cognitive processes and how my brain makes sense of the information I am presented with. For example, I tend to climb the “ladder of inference” (Argyris, 1970). This involves the mental process of selecting pieces of data, and interpreting it quickly, through my lens and then drawing conclusions from it. It happens quickly for me and typically involves only pieces of the data and not the full picture. The coding process of my research and analyzing those findings required that I not climb the “ladder of influence”, but slowly and methodically look at all pieces of data from a variety of vantage points. The same process served me well during project development. It supported me in distilling the data

into salient findings in such a way to be consumable to educators and non-educators alike.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

The importance of this work cannot be understated. The importance of a student's education cannot be understated. A system that necessitates target school turnaround is a system that has failed our most vulnerable students (Hitt & Meyers, 2018; Meyers & Sadler, 2018; Meyers & Vangronigen, 2019). Conducting research that can help unlock the gateway to high levels of student achievement for all students is necessary and vital. Furthering the understanding of school turnaround can lead to better outcomes for students. This could include more proactive practices that prevent target turnaround schools from requiring turnaround. It could, potentially, lead to more cohesive support to schools from the district office, including, creative allocations of resources.

This work brought to light the importance of asking questions of those involved in the day-to-day work. It also illustrated the necessity of a willingness to respond to what we hear. This work has taught that full scale target school turnaround has not yet been obtained but supporting the instructional leadership competency of school leaders has led to positive gains in teacher efficacy and student achievement that the target district can grow.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Mathis and Trujillo (2017) state, "the greatest conceptual and most damaging mistake of the test-based accountability systems has been the pretense that poorly supported schools could systematically overcome the effects of concentrated poverty and

racial segregation by rigorous instruction and testing". These test-based accountability systems are part of the current federal education legislation. NCLB and ESSA, the most recent iteration of federal education policy, requires that states determine metrics for measuring school success (Burke and Jeffries, 2018). The intent of federal education legislation, from ESSA all the way back to ESEA in 1965 is to support marginalized students. Lyndon Johnsons saw ESEA as an outgrowth of the Civil Right Movement (Paul, 2016).

If the intent of federal education legislation is to support marginalized students, but the test-cased accountability systems of NCLB and ESSA have neglected the importance of equity for students of color, the potential impact for positive social change of this study becomes important. This study was designed to better understand how school leaders in six target turnaround schools, perceive the impact of their participation in the UVA-PLE on their instructional leadership competency. The target district's need to improve instructional leadership competency was brought to light when the six target turnaround schools were identified as requiring turnaround under first NCLB and now ESSA.

Research showed that the school leader ranks only second to the classroom teacher in leveraging impact to student achievement (Meyers & Sadler, 2018). School leaders with stronger instructional leadership competency improve teacher effectiveness and student achievement. The results from this study provide the target school district with information about where these six school leaders perceive that test-based accountability measures have taken them. District leadership, along with these six school

leaders could then begin a conversation regarding the limitations of test-based accountability systems without a strong equity lens to support students, especially those students experiencing systemic racism and concentrated poverty. The larger conversation regarding equity in the target school district, alongside it's work with a new turnaround partner, has the potential for positive social change at the organizational level in these six schools and the target district at large. Moving forward in ESSA implementation, the target district is seeking a shift into more sustainable, long term, school improvement. The study and resulting project provide the target district with findings and recommendations to support continuous reflection and growth as an organization.

There are other methodological approaches and conceptual frameworks that I would recommend take place to develop even further understanding into the impact of the UVA-PLE partnership on the instructional leadership competency of school leaders and how it influences teacher efficacy and student achievement. My first recommendation would be a full program evaluation of UVA-PLE. A program evaluation would verify the extent to which the UVA-PLE partnership has met its intended outcomes. This would involve gathering more empirical data, such as surveys of teachers, parents, and students. Gathering multiple data points aligning with the instructional leadership competencies outlined by the UVA-PLE and their implementation in schools would be beneficial. Additionally, it would require formative and summative data on student achievement. A full program evaluation would provide information that could confirm the perceptions of school leaders articulated in this study.

The UVA-PLE and this study are grounded in the conceptual framework around competency outlined by David McClelland. His framework outlines the importance of using competency both to measure suitability for a job as well as then be able to provide growth in areas of competency to employees after being hired. He championed that competency can be delineated, articulated, and taught. The UVA-PLE is based on McClelland's framework, their selection process, professional learning, and mentoring process are designed to find leaders with competencies that are suitable for turnaround. Weiner and Woulfin (2019) warn that the current leadership practices in turnaround are often used in a transactional way, with the leader bringing teachers around to the leader's vision for turnaround in lieu of spending the time to engage in more shared leadership practices. This becomes problematic as it may results in "single loop" communication and prohibit the shift into more transformational leadership practices, which support more sustainable school improvement. Thus, another important conceptual framework to consider is the transformational leadership framework outlined by James Burns to look at the interplay between school leadership for school turnaround and the transformational leadership framework. This has also been suggested by Bischoff et al. (2015).

As target school turnaround moves forward, now under ESSA, this project described recommendations for future research. Much of the research surrounding school leaders' instructional leadership competency and school turnaround practices was limited to self-report. The main source of quantitative data in the field looked at state mandated assessment scores for groups of students. Collecting quantitative data on day-to-day actions of target turnaround school leaders would be very valuable. This data would

measure the actual implementation of their instructional leadership competency in real time.

Another recommendation would be to begin looking at schools who have completed the disruption phase of target school turnaround and begin to develop understandings of how to transition them into a sustainable system of school improvement, including their use of transactional leadership practices versus transformational leadership practices. Finally, the third recommendation would be to look at district systems and what practices have taken place that led to target turnaround schools requiring turnaround. If districts knew early indicators in schools, preventative systems could be designed that include plans for steps to be taken before a school required turnaround.

Conclusion

This study demonstrated that the instructional leadership competency of school leaders can be improved and improved in a way that impacts teacher efficacy and student achievement positively. The target district's partnership with the UVA-PLE was successful. Participants perceptions delineated the success of the UVA-PLE partnership in four themes that were gleaned from their descriptions. First, school leaders perceived that participation in the UVA-PLE had a positive impact on their instructional leadership competency. Second, school leaders perceived that participation in the UVA-PLE supported them in developing their strengths and mitigating their weaknesses in instructional leadership competency. Third, school leaders perceived that the improvements in their instructional leadership competency impacted teacher efficacy by

supporting leaders in engaging teachers in the work of school improvement. Fourth, school leaders perceived that the improvement in their instructional leadership competency resulted in improvement in student achievement. The UVA-PLE provided school leaders with the tools and skills to be able to implement their knowledge, or what, of instructional leadership competency. The UVA-PLE also provided them with strategies to know when to use their tools and skills of instructional leadership competency to support increase teacher efficacy and student achievement. The use of instructional leadership competency to improve teacher efficacy and student achievement was the backbone of school improvement (Cucchiara et al., 2015; Dunlap et al., 2015; Lynch et al., 2016). School improvement, as a matter of federal education legislation, has always been the intent behind legislation like the ESEA in 1965, NCLB in 2001, and the ESSA in 2015. Federal educational legislation is designed to support students from historically marginalized groups (Paul, 2016). The findings from this study support the work of school improvement. They told the story of the school leaders from the six target turnaround schools and in their journey toward school improvement. It is a story that will be vital in planning how to build and continue the school improvement and the achievement of marginalized students. moving forward. It is difficult to measure the many factors that contribute to school improvement, but there is no doubt that school leaders are central instrumental to moving it forward. Participant 6 said it best,

> The actions we take and the words we use will have a significant impact on teacher efficacy and a lasting impression on student success. How do we measure something like that? They just don’t make sticks big enough- just saying.

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Appendix A: The Project

Introduction

Background

Instructional leadership in schools has taken center stage in an era of school accountability. Implementation of federal education legislation, including the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and its predecessor, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) required improvement in instructional leadership competency. ESSA and NCLB were designed to foster school improvement in order to increase the student achievement of historically marginalized groups. School leaders became responsible for ensuring student achievement. Six schools in the target district were identified for school turnaround under the requirements of NCLB. At that time, the University of Virginia Partnership for Leaders in Education (UVA-PLE) was brought in to support the improvement of the instructional leadership competency of the school leaders in these six schools. This partnership, that began under NCLB and continued after the reauthorization of NCLB as the ESSA in 2015. The demographics of the students attending the six target turnaround schools mirrored the demographics of students across the country that were likely to be served in low performing schools (Mathis & Trujillo, 2017). Table 1 shows student demographics in the six target turnaround schools.

Table 1

Demographic Information of Elementary Schools Identified as Target Turnaround Schools.

Elementary school	Percent low SES	Percent ethnic minority	Percent English learners
Elementary 1	95	87	66
Elementary 2	94	90	60
Elementary 3	96	73	52
Elementary 4	95	81	69
Elementary 5	90	83	60
Elementary 6	93	85	61

Both ESSA, and NCLB before it, focused on instructional leadership competency as the backbone of school improvement. NCLB required it as a reactionary measure to school failure, while ESSA outlined measures for cultivating improvement in instructional leadership competency as a proactive approach to prevent school failure (Mathis & Trujillo, 2017). A school leader with quality instructional leadership competency was critical in an identified target turnaround school. Meyers and Sadler (2018) articulated that school leaders were vital to student achievement,

> Although principals seldom directly influence student achievement, they set the vision for the school, align goals, make structural and organizational decisions, develop teacher instructional capacity, and engaged stakeholders, including students, teachers, parents, and others in the community.

The quality of instructional leadership competency required for school turnaround was highly specialized (Hitt & Meyers, 2017; Meyers and Sadler, 2018, Woulfin & Weiner, 2019, Hitt & Meyers, 2018). The target district was identified needing improvement in

instructional leadership competency because of failure to meet requirements for student proficiency outlined by NCLB and ESSA. Turnaround status required replacing the school leader and up to 50 % of the faculty. The problem faced by the target school district was the lack of quality instructional leadership competency of school leaders placed in target turnaround schools to improve teacher efficacy and student achievement (Lynch et al., 2016; Reedy et al., 2017).

Both ESSA and NCLB, outlined that it is the responsibility of the state to support districts in the improvement of instructional leadership competency for school leaders (Skinner, 2019). If the state did not have the capacity to support the target district in improving the instructional leadership competency, both federal laws allowed them to use an external provider as the partner for the school district. The UVA-PLE was the external provider chosen by the state to support the target district in improving instructional leadership competency. The UVA-PLE provided school districts with supports in implementing a rigorous leader selection process, extensive professional learning for the selected school leaders in specific areas of instructional leadership competency, and onsite mentoring for those leaders as they planned and implemented plans to turnaround schools. The claim of the UVA-PLE and other programs like it across the nation was supported by research indicating that strengthening the instructional leadership competency of school leaders should lead to improvement in teacher effectiveness and student achievement (Cucchiara et al., 2015; Dunlap et al., 2015; Lynch et al., 2016).

The target district began working with the UVA-PLE under NCLB. Several years into the program, a new superintendent was hired. The target district's work with the

UVA-PLE continued for one more year. After a year without the UVA-PLE, once the contract was terminated, the superintendent announced a new turnaround partner for the target district. Towards the end of this timeline, NCLB was reauthorized as ESSA. Turnaround schools were renamed focus schools. For the purposes of this paper, I identified the schools in this study as target turnaround schools, linking them to NCLB, the law at the time of implementation.

In the target school district, there was no investigation and thus no understanding of whether the partnership with the UVA-PLE affected the improvement of instructional leadership competency, teacher efficacy, and student achievement. The purpose of this study was to provide a deep understanding of school leaders' perceptions of the impact of the UVA-PLE on instructional leadership competency. The study was designed to elicit participants' descriptions of whether they perceived participating in the UVA-PLE had an impact on their instructional leadership competency, whether they perceived that impact influencing teacher efficacy, and whether they perceived that impact influencing student achievement. Understanding school leaders' perceptions of the impact of the UVA-PLE on instructional leadership competency was the beginning of understanding the impact of the effects of NCLB/ESSA implementation in the target district.

The study was designed as a basic qualitative study. Eight participants completed open-ended questionnaires for the study and four of the eight participants, after meeting criteria, participated in a semi structured interview process. Data collected from both the open-ended questionnaire and semi structed interview process was robust and provided rich descriptions of the perceptions of participants.

Summary and Analysis of Findings

Themes and Patterns

The collected data were analyzed through multiple rounds of coding. The data from descriptions of participants' perceptions of how participation in the UVA-PLE impacted their instructional leadership competency yielded four themes to answer the research questions. The four themes yielded though data analysis were as follows:

1. Participants perceived that participation in the UVA-PLE had a positive impact on their instructional leadership competency.
2. Participation in the UVA-PLE supported school leaders in developing both their strengths and weaknesses in instructional leadership competency.
3. Perceived improvements in instructional leadership competency impacted teacher effectiveness by supporting leaders in engaging teachers in the work of school improvement.
4. Perceived improvement in instructional leadership competency resulted in reported improvement in student achievement.

As I analyzed the data, I discovered a pattern in the codes derived from participants' descriptions. The codes began to fall into three groups or categories, with similar characteristics for each group. I labeled the three categories as tools, skills, and strategies. I defined each category in the following way. A tool referred to an instrument or implement for performing operations. Skill described the ability, coming from one's own

knowledge, practice, or aptitude to do something well. Strategies described plans, methods, or series of maneuvers for obtaining a specific goal or result. The participants described a variety of tools, skills, and strategies that they learned which made a positive impact on their instructional leadership competency. All the participants provided descriptions that followed the pattern of tools, skills, and strategies. Some of the tools, skills, and strategies described included improved understanding of assessment, building teachers as leaders, analyzing root causes, and approaching challenges. Participant 2 articulated praise for UVA, describing that she was given the tools and skills to lead her school well, including being able to look at the big picture and create a path for her school to attain long term success. She stated, "I believe that participating in UVA-PLE changed the path of my career." Overall, the tools, skills, and strategies pattern repeated in the responses across all of the data collected.

Findings

The culmination of the four themes found in the data and the pattern of the tools, skills, and strategies school leaders developed to strengthen their instructional leadership competency, teacher efficacy, and student achievement pointed to two main findings. The two findings articulated here were garnered from evidence in the literature and the results of the study. First, participants reported that participation in the UVA-PLE professional learning gave them tools and skills to be able to implement their instructional leadership competency. Second, participants reported that participation in the UVA-PLE gave them the strategies to know when to use their tools and skills to be able to use their instructional leadership competency to support increased teacher efficacy and student

achievement at their individual schools. Understanding how the UVA-PLE partnership was successful supported sustainable school improvement and continued ESSA implementation in the target district.

Finding 1: Participants Reported that Participation in the UVA-PLE Professional Learning Gave Them Tools and Skills to be able to Implement Instructional Leadership Competency.

The literature clearly supported that improvement in instructional leadership competency was vital because leadership in school turnaround requires a very specific set of skills (Meyers & Sadler, 2018; Weiner & Woulfin, 2019; Hitt & Meyers, 2018). Eight out of eight participants endorsed the UVA-PLE partnership as improving the tools, skills, and strategies of instructional leadership competency. One participant went as far as to describe the impact the UVA-PLE partnership on her instructional leadership competency as "powerful". This type of improvement in instructional leadership competency positively influenced, not just the planning required for school turn around, but the implementation of those plans (Meyers & Vangronigen, 2019).

All eight participants indicated that the UVA-PLE partnership also supported their strengths and mitigated their weaknesses in instructional leadership competency. Multiple participants described that the UVA-PLE's combined approach of professional learning and on-site mentorship produced the results evidenced in the study. While all participants named both tools and skills as strengths at the onset of the participation in the UVA-PLE, only four of them listed a strategy as a strength. In their descriptions of the areas where they made the most growth during their time in the UVA-PLE, eight out of eight

described growth in improving their use of strategies. The participants first gained understanding around the daily and weekly tools at their disposal. These tools, including tools like PLC and observation and feedback cycles, constituted the "what" of instructional leadership competency. The UVA-PLE then built participant's skills, or the "how" of instructional leadership competency, by supporting them with skills such as building teacher leaders and having difficult conversations. These skills supported leaders in knowing how to use the tools of instructional leadership competency. Finally, strategy development provided to school leaders, such as creating and communicating vision or driving for change, supported school leaders in understanding the "when" of instructional leadership competency. Better tools and skills led to participant's ability to employ bigger and more complicated strategies to impact teacher efficacy and student achievement in the target turnaround schools. One visual representation, I developed, of how tools, skills, and strategies work together is found below.

Figure 1

Interplay of Tools, Skills, and Strategies

Another way these categories worked together in the data is to think of them as embedded within each other. Tools were central and embedded within skills, embedded within strategies.

Figure 2

Interplay of Tools, Skills, and Strategies (concentric circles)

Tools, skills, and strategies worked outward, having the ripple effect on the larger school community as they emanate from the school leader outward. Participant 4 stated, "I became more influential with my staff, students, and community through our work because of the systems and protocols I was taught in UVA." Weiner and Woulfin (2019) explained that without the skills of quality instructional leadership competency, school turnaround will not be sustainable beyond the initial disruption. The UVA-PLE partnership was effective in supporting the target school district in "fostering school leaders' growth as an investment in ensuring leaders quality" (Meyers & Sadler, 2018).

Finding 2: Participants Reported that Participation in the UVA-PLE Gave Them the Strategies to Know When to use their Tools and Skills to be Able to use their

Instructional Leadership Competency to Support Increased Teacher Efficacy and Student Achievement at their Individual Schools.

To raise student achievement over time, leaders must impact the pedagogical core, the most difficult and most critical task that turnaround leaders face (Cozzens & Ross, 2016; Fullan & Pinchot, 2018; Hitt et al., 2019; Weiner, 2016). Participants described that the UVA-PLE taught them to be instructional leaders. Some of the tools and skills used in they learned in instructional leadership competency to support teacher efficacy included running effective PLC, data driven instruction, and observation and feedback cycles. Using instructional leadership competency to support teachers providing quality instruction based on student data empowers teachers in the school improvement process (Welsh & Williams, 2018). Distributed leadership was also one of the indicators of effective leadership in school turnaround (Hitt & Meyers, 2018). Contextualizing school turnaround in a transformational leadership lens incrementally led to distributed leadership throughout the school (Bischoff et. al., 2015). Participant 2 described that the UVA-PLE supported tools, skills, and strategies that allowed her to "put structures in place to support teachers in taking ownership of their work." The UVA-PLE also supported school leaders in creating the context or culture in which improvement in teacher efficacy could happen. Five out of eight participants outlined specific improvement in the context or culture they created to support teacher efficacy. Literature also supported that there had be a culture built in which teaching and learning can happen (Williams, 2015).

Meyers and Vangronigen (2018) outlined that one of the challenges of school turnaround is the pressure for quick and dramatic improvement in student achievement, and then not being able to sustain that rate of improvement over time. Eight out of eight of our participants saw some improvement in areas of student achievement. Multiple participants described that after the initial improvement in student achievement took place, they have not been able to sustain that rate of growth. Nationally, research conducted in both North Carolina and Georgia showed small pockets of improvement, but it was not widespread (Heissel & Ladd, 2017; Welsh & Williams 2018). Participant 3 noted, "while I worked with UVA, overall student achievement went up slightly. Looking deeper showed some grade levels or classes had great growth while others didn't seem to show improvement."

In addition, several participants reported that while they saw student achievement improve in some grade levels and content areas, the success they were experiencing would not be sustainable at the rate they were moving. The literature, some published by those involved with the UVA-PLE, reflects these same sentiments, that the initial turnaround disruption cannot be the end, and there must be a shift from the initial disruption of turnaround to sustained improvement in order to impact student achievement over time (Hitt & Meyers, 2018; Hitt & Meyers, 2018; Meyers & Smylie, 2017; Meyers & Vangronigen, 2017; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973; Weiner, 2016). Due to the nonlinear nature of school turnaround, some researchers suggested that there are other strategies required for turnaround leaders that may need further consideration to

shift leaders from using more transactional NCLB practices to more transformational ESSA practices (Barton & Yoon, 2019; Bischoff et al., 2015).

Positions

Both the results of the study and the literature supported the position that the UVA-PLE's partnership with the target school district to support the need for quality instructional leadership competency was successful. The perceptions reported by all eight participants outlined that participation in the UVA-PLE partnership improved instructional leadership competency, and that improvement led to positive changes in teacher efficacy. Seven out of eight participants reported seeing some improvement in areas of student achievement. These perceptions aligned with the vision and purpose of the UVA-PLE partnership; to provide schools with leaders with high levels of instructional leadership competency in turnaround settings (Cucchiara et al., 2015; Dunlap et al., 2015; Lynch et al., 2016). Participant 2 stated that "this training filled my professional cup like no other and I am a better leader because of it." After reviewing the results and literature that supports the findings and position taken in the paper, the target district is positioned to use this understanding to move forward in supporting a transition from the initial disruption of school turnaround to a more sustainable approach over time. In order to facilitate that transition, the following recommendations are important to consider.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

This section outlines three recommendations based on analysis of the data and/or relevant literature. The first recommendation for the target district is consideration of further study of the impact of the UVA-PLE partnership including a program evaluation or mixed methods study of the participating schools. Additional research could both quantify the effect and elucidate a 360-degree perspective from an organizational viewpoint. This will, in turn, support the qualitative perceptions of school leaders already captured in this study. A mixed method review could include data, quantitative and qualitative, from teachers, parents and students in addition to the school leader for each school. Additionally, a program evaluation of the UVA-PLE can have the added benefit of identifying areas that need attention that could be addressed in terms of revisions to the program implementation. In essence, if the disruptive stage has attained its goals schoolwide, it may be time to proceed to a more transformative approach.

Another possible area of further study could be to replicate this study with school leaders in the target district to see how the short, medium, and long-term effects on school improvement evolve as new changes are put into place. More than elucidating the progress of local change such future research would support broadening the literature base for school turnaround considering that there is currently a limited amount (Meyers & Smylie, 2017, Meyers & Vangronigen, 2018).

Recommendation 2

The second recommendation is based on perceptions of participants indicating they needed more strategic district level support for school turnaround. There were administrative changes during the time of the study which could account for gaps in district support. Additionally, there was some concern that key departments, such as curriculum and special education, were not involved in the support provided to schools. The importance of district support for the turnaround effort was articulated by five out of eight participants. The target district had a change in leadership partway through the partnership with the UVA-PLE. The participants saw the change in leadership lead to a change in district support for the UVA-PLE work they were conducting in the target turnaround schools. According to several researchers in the literature, the superintendent and district office staff is necessary for both the initial disruption for turnaround to be successful and for the shift into long-term sustainable improvement to happen (Corrales, 2017; Hitt & Meyers, 2017). Meyers and Sadler (2018) recommended that while the principal is a change leader and second only to the teacher in the impact to student achievement, district office leadership should be strategic in its support of the instructional leadership competency of school leaders. This support includes consideration of feedback loops between schools and district departments. Support could also include more proactive practices that prevent target turnaround schools from requiring turnaround. It could, potentially, lead to more cohesive support to schools from the district office, including, creative allocations of resources. According to Hitt and Meyers, there is evidence that the need for school turnaround is due to a systems failure

(2018). A refusal by the district to examine those systems will lead to continued school failure for our most vulnerable students (Hitt & Meyers, 2018; Meyers & Sadler, 2018; Meyers and Vangronigen, 2019). An investigation into how the district systems failed to strengthen and support quality instructional leadership competency and therefore teacher efficacy and student achievement in these six schools would provide the target district with information that could be used to prevent such failure in the future. The target district should also evaluate the systems and skills of personnel within the district office to determine whether they support instructional leadership competency, teacher efficacy, and student achievement. Furthering the understanding how to support target turnaround schools leading to better outcomes for students.

Recommendation 3

The third recommendation evident from the literature is the importance of dissemination of the findings to the key stakeholder groups to provide needed information for the target school district to make important decisions. Local school governance is critical to create high performing schools (Field et al., 2018). Understanding school leaders' perceptions of the impact of the UVA-PLE on instructional leadership competency is the beginning of understanding the effects of NCLB/ESSA implementation in the target district. Dissemination of the information contained in this position paper will support leadership in the target school district in future ESSA implementation to continually improve instructional leadership competency, teacher efficacy, and student achievement. This is vital information for the local school board as too often, educational legislation, like ESSA, oversimplifies the connection

between initiatives and student achievement (Skourdoumbis, 2017). Sharing the data would support community involvement in the turnaround effort since there is literature to support recommendations on how to involve parents to create more systematic school turnaround (Ishimaru, 2018). Listening to teachers and leaders involved in turnaround allows for sustainable school improvement plans to be built (Welsh & Williams, 2018). These plans could include a pivot to building school leaders' capacity in embedding the instructional leadership competency in transformational leadership practices as the district takes a proactive approach as outlined in ESSA. Much has been learned regarding the improvement around instructional leadership competency from those who have walked the path before (Mania-Singer, 2018). These three recommendations, further study, strengthening district support, and disseminating the findings are pivotal for the target district to move forward in supporting a transition from the initial disruption of school turnaround to a more sustainable approach over time. The deeper understanding of the impact of the UVA-PLE partnership on instructional leadership competency, teacher efficacy, and student achievement is vital to support sustained school improvement.

Implications for Social Change

The partnership between the UVA-PLE and the target district was successful in improving the quality of instructional leadership competency in the target turnaround schools. The UVA-PLE provided school leaders with tools, skills, and strategies that had a positive impact on teacher efficacy and student achievement. The improvement in these six target turnaround schools may not have been consistent across subjects and grade levels, but it did signal a disruption in the trajectory of these schools. The intent of federal

education policy, all the way back to the ESEA in 1965 has been to support students of color, students living in poverty, students that are refuges from other countries, and students that are multi language learners (Paul, 2016). Lyndon Johnsons saw ESEA as an outgrowth of the Civil Rights Movement (Paul, 2016). Any partnership that the target district engages in will impact the experience of large groups of marginalized students. Mathis and Trujillo (2017) caution, "the greatest conceptual and most damaging mistake of the test-based accountability systems has been the pretense that poorly supported schools could systematically overcome the effects of concentrated poverty and racial segregation by rigorous instruction and testing." If the intent of federal policy is to support marginalized students, but the test-based accountability systems of NCLB and ESSA have neglected the importance of equity for students of color, the potential impact for positive social change of this study becomes critically important. School leaders engaged in turnaround must also take the role of social justice advocate for their students and families. When quality instructional leadership competency is coupled with a school leader's social justice identity as an "ally", the target district empowers students in accessing an "emancipatory" education, giving them a choice to fully participate in decisions effecting their lives" (Berry et al, 2018). As the national literature advocates for a shift from the push for quick results to long term, sustainable school improvement, the target district is poised to make a shift as well. Such a shift regulated by ESSA and enacted via a systemwide transformational leadership approach holds great promise for the impact on student equity and performance.

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