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Integration of Academic and Career and Technical Education Curriculum at Magnet High Schools in the Southwestern United States

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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2024

Abstract

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SA, Walden University, 2018

MA, Utah State University, 1998

BA, Southern Utah University, 1993

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

District and building administrators in the United States are struggling to integrate academic and career and technical education (CTE) as required by Every Student Succeeds Act and Perkins V legislation. One solution school district leaders have developed to address this legislation is the creation of CTE magnet high schools. However, administrators at new magnet CTE schools are still learning how to lead curriculum integration. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore, through the lens of transformational leadership, the experiences of administrators of existing CTE high schools in the southwestern United States who have led the curriculum integration process. Leithwood and Jantzi's six characteristics of transformational leadership were used as a framework for this study. Data were collected through semistructured interviews with nine participants who (a) had experience leading the curriculum integration process and (b) had a minimum of 2 years' experience as a school or district administrator of a CTE magnet high school. Collected data were analyzed and four themes emerged: (a) the presence of all six transformational leadership characteristics in the leadership practices of all study participants, and (b) curriculum integration happened primarily at the whole school level rather than at the individual course level, (c) leaders experienced similar challenges and successes, and (d) leaders used a variety of methods for overcoming challenges and celebrating successes. The findings of this study may have implications for positive social change that include district and building leaders using transformational leadership to guide curriculum integration and to influence the successful integration of CTE and academic curriculum to improve college and career readiness for students in the 21st Century.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to the many people who have assisted me with my education and development as a person throughout my entire life. I am most indebted to my wife Kari and my two sons Walter and William, who have provided the love and inspiration I have needed to be able to complete this challenge and have sacrificed the most for me to be able to do so. Kari, you are the joy of my life. I would be nothing without you. Walter and William, you are my greatest achievements. I am so proud of the young men you have become. I hope this work will be an example to you that you really can achieve anything you set your mind to and an inspiration for you to never stop learning. I love you all more than you will ever know. Next, to my incredible grandparents Walter and Afton Shewmake. You were always the one constant in my life, and your love and guidance were the compass I used to navigate the rough seas of my youth. The lessons you taught me still guide me on my way. I love you and miss you every day.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

With the passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015, and the additional requirements of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act reauthorization in 2018 (Perkins V), the challenge for K–12 educators in the United States has become preparing students for 21st century college and career readiness (CCR; Malin et al., 2017). ESSA required that states include career and technical education (CTE) as part of a well-rounded education and align challenging state academic standards with state CTE standards to receive grant funding (Advance CTE, 2017). In addition, Perkins V states that local education agencies must a provide "a description of how the eligible recipient will improve the academic and technical skills of students participating in CTE programs by strengthening the academic and CTE components of such programs through integration" (Association for Career and Technical Education, 2018, p. 11). This expanded CCR requirement in ESSA has led to school districts needing to increase academic rigor and prepare students for a wide variety of careers. This has increased the pressure for district and building level leaders to ensure students are graduating high school with the skills they need to be college and career ready. To accomplish these goals, many school districts in the United States have created CTE high schools (Schwartz, 2014). In fact, Neild et al. (2015) estimated there are more than 1,400 CTE high schools in the United States.

However, many of these schools have struggled to meet the promise of graduating students who are both college and career ready and little data are available regarding the

experiences of administrators at such schools (Frazier, 2018). To create effective schools that meet the CCR requirements, district and building level administrators must lead the integration of academic and CTE curriculum. The demand for more widespread high-quality curriculum integration has created an environment in which school and district leaders at CTE magnet high schools in the United States would benefit from increased knowledge regarding the ways that CTE magnet high school administrators are leading curriculum integration. However, definitive information regarding administrative leadership practices for leading the curriculum integration process at such schools is hard to come by.

In one school district located in southern Utah, which is in the process of creating a CTE magnet high school, district-level administrators are unsure about the best way to lead high quality curriculum integration they can be confident will result in increased academic performance, while at the same time developing CTE certification designed to deliver on the promise of CCR for all students (CTE director, personal communication, January 2023). According to the CTE director in that district, the available research about practice does not seem to offer a clear picture of the ways district and building level CTE magnet high school administrators are leading the integration of core academic and CTE curriculum that accomplishes the dual goal of ensuring high levels of academic learning and providing high quality CTE programming.

The problems with leading the integration of core academic and CTE curriculum in many different K–12 school environments in many regions of the United States have been well documented (see Breier, 2020; Bryk et al., 2010; Clark et al., 2010; Frazier,

2018: Gordon & Schultz 2020; Long, 2008; Reed et al., 2018). Researchers have highlighted many problems with leading curriculum integration such as lack of awareness regarding current curriculum integration policies, low-quality professional development, lack of knowledge of curriculum integration models, insufficient time to prepare, insufficient resources, and inconsistent messaging from different administrative levels. Furthermore, although the literature on curriculum integration has demonstrated some positive benefits, the level of implementation may vary from state to state and district to district, making it difficult to measure impact (Fletcher & Cox, 2012; Fletcher et al., 2018; Stone & Lewis, 2012). Many reasons exist for the widely differing levels of implementation: historical separation between technical education and core academic subjects, long held traditional beliefs about teaching and learning, and the limited ability of many CTE teachers to teach core academic content (Pierce & Hernandez-Gantes, 2015; Stone & Lewis, 2012).

Even though some evidence of the positive impacts of curriculum integration does exist, there is little empirical evidence to support the widespread notion that CTE can contribute to improved academic outcomes (Pierce & Hernandez, 2015). “Research linking integration practices to student achievement as measured by high stakes testing remains scarce and, for the most part, inconclusive—which has contributed to limited implementation,” (Pierce & Hernandez, 2015, p. 217). In addition, administrators must confront many other challenges regarding leading curriculum integration. Some widely held beliefs administrators have to overcome are that basic academic skills cannot be covered in integrative programs, the idea that content is the most important aspect of

education, teachers may not be prepared to teach an integrated curriculum, the notion that knowledge belongs in isolated disciplines, content is being force fitted into CTE classes and vice versa in integrated environments, and a conviction that integration is superficial or lacking scope and sequence (Pierce & Hernandez, 2015). In addition, many teachers remain unwilling to experiment with new teaching and learning strategies because they believe that most students are passive learners and that only gifted students are willing to go the extra mile to perform well in integrated curriculum environments (Pierce & Hernandez, 2015).

Finally, most researchers agree that integration has not been well defined and, in some cases, has been accepted as any linking of previously isolated content areas (Pierce & Hernandez, 2015). “Consequently, the use of locally developed integrated curriculum is typically limited and there is virtually no empirical evidence of the related impact on academic achievement at the district level” (Pierce & Hernandez, 2015, p. 218). Because of these many challenges, researchers also agree that “developing, implementing, and sustaining successful curriculum integration efforts require strong leadership, commitment, and planning at both the district and school,” (Pierce & Hernandez, 2015, p. 218).

The problem addressed in this study is that K–12 administrators in the United States are struggling to integrate academic and CTE as required by ESSA and Perkins V legislation. A review of the literature in this area shows there have been few studies examining the experiences of school and district level administrators in leading the integration of core academics into CTE curriculum at CTE high schools designed to

deliver on 21st century CCR standards (Breier, 2020; Frazier, 2018). Researchers agree that gaining this information is crucial to the future of K–12 education because of federal legislation requirements (Breier, 2020; Frazier, 2018; Malin et al., 2017). In fact, Malin et al. (2017) stated,

> ESSA now presents an opportunity for school district educators to develop a shared vision of a "well-rounded education" for their graduates, incorporating school leaders' and faculty members' understanding of essential components involved in students' preparation for college and careers, as well as a commitment to ensuring that each student graduates from high school college-and-career ready. School leaders will need to guide their faculties in critical conversations centered on the essential, integrated role of both core academic and CTE courses in supporting students' academic development. (p. 829)

This suggests that if CTE high school administrators want to continue to achieve the high bar of CCR required to meet or exceed 21st century K–12 educational expectations, knowledge regarding existing practices at CTE magnet high schools would be helpful.

One method for examining educational leadership is through the lens of transformational leadership. The transformational leadership framework has been the most prominent leadership theory in education for the last 30 years (Hoch et al., 2018; Mendez-Keegan, 2019). According to Anderson, (2017):

> A sizeable portion of the literature reviewed analyzed, synthesized, and integrated research findings on transformational leadership's applicability to elementary, secondary, college and university settings. These different school settings should

> be examined alone and the results specific to these settings presented allowing a clear picture of the efficacy of transformational leadership style to each individual setting (p. 10).

Burns (1979) is considered the primary source of the transformational leadership conceptual framework (Stewart, 2006). The following six characteristics of transformational leadership, based on Burns' original work and further developed by Leithwood and Jantzi (1997), were used as the framework for this study: (a) fostering development of vision and goals, (b) developing a collaborative decision-making structure, (c) symbolizing good profession practice, (d) providing individualized support, (e) providing intellectual stimulation, and (f) holding high performance expectations. Positive social change may occur when administrators at CTE magnet high schools implement strategies for leading the integration of academic and CTE curriculum using transformational leadership.

In Chapter 1, I discuss the background information related to the study, the problem and purpose, the research questions, conceptual framework, and nature of the study. Then I proceed with defining terms, presenting assumptions, and outlining the scope and delimitations, the limitations, and the significance of the study. A brief summary concludes the chapter.

Background

The current policy toward CTE and CCR in the United States is a result of an over 100-year-long debate about the purpose of public education and how best to educate students. On February 23, 1917, the Smith-Hughes Act was signed into law. This

legislation was created to fill a need for skilled workers during the industrial revolution (Lynch, 2000). The Smith-Hughes Act was the first law to provide the public school system with federal funding for vocational teachers and programs (Hornbeck, 2017). As a result, schools started developing different tracks of education programs and a long divide between traditional academic education and vocational education began that has ramifications and stigmatizations for CTE today.

The conflict started as a debate between two well-known educational philosophers Charles Prosser and John Dewey (Aliaga, Kotamraju, & Stone III, 2014). Prosser was the first executive director of the Federal Board for Vocational Education from 1917 to 1919 and stated vocational education should be provided to students who others judged were most likely to do better in non-academic careers. However, Dewey stated that all students should receive both academic and vocational education. Dewey stated that integrating academic and vocational curriculum would help all people appreciate the importance of vocational work and help better prepare them for any type of work they might enter (Martinez, 2007). Nonetheless, the practice and philosophy of separate tracking became the norm for the next 64 years and vocational education was often seen as second class until the Carl Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act of 1984 (Perkins I), which sought to integrate vocational and academic goals. That policy shift continued to trend more toward integration (and the reducing of stigmas against vocational education) over the next 33 years and most recently resulted in major reauthorization of both the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, now known as ESSA, and the 2018 reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006,

now known as Perkins V. These laws were redesigned to provide funding to states that could demonstrate increased integration of academic and CTE programs that resulted in measurable CCR progress (Malin et al., 2017).

During the presidential administration of Donald Trump, changes were made to the accountability measures attached to ESSA, and according to the advocacy group Advance CTE (2017), only 15 states described specific state-level activities designed to support career readiness. Although the mandate of current legislation in the United States is for school systems to develop standards and produce graduates who are college and career ready, the methods by which those systems can determine and measure CCR are unclear (Malin et al., 2017). With no way to make solid comparisons among the 50 states, national data regarding the current effects of CCR, policies, standards, curriculum, and programming are lacking.

States have largely created their own definitions of CCR preparedness. The current available research suggests that administrators have still not developed effective ways to achieve the requirements of ESSA and Perkins legislation (Malin et al., 2017). For example, California's Department of Education website outlines the state's method of determining CCR preparedness. However, data for the last 5 years show that, on average, over 50% of K–12 completers are leaving the school system unprepared for college and career. In Indiana and many other states, the CCR measures are more focused on comparing students who enroll in college and measuring how they perform. Indiana state-level reports claim that CCR preparedness is improving because the percentage of students requiring remedial coursework at postsecondary institutions is declining.

However, at the same time, the number of Indiana students enrolling in college continues to be in a steep decline, which begs the question whether preparedness is improving or whether more unprepared students are just not attempting college.

Reviewing CCR data in state after state suggests that meeting CCR preparedness is a major challenge for school systems in all regions of the United States. In a study of Illinois approach to CRR in state ESSA plans, Malin and Hackmann (2017) stated,

> State CCR policy holds the potential to assist educators to develop programs and practices that prepare students for a well-rounded education that integrates postsecondary education and workforce success, but curricular differentiation between college and career preparation may contribute to local educators becoming entangled in historic tensions between academic and CTE instruction. (p. 830)

Data from the Georgia Department of Education website show that CRR is declining rather than improving. Using a tool called the College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI), educational leaders in Georgia are attempting to provide stakeholders with a way to understand how they are approaching CCR. Educational leaders state, "CCRPI is a comprehensive school improvement, accountability, and communication platform for all educational stakeholders that will promote CCR for all Georgia public school students" (Georgia Department of Education, 2023, p.1). The CCRPI uses a wide variety of data including literacy, student attendance, accelerated enrollment, pathway completion, and CCR to derive a score out of 100 for every school individually. Scores

for the state overall are found by averaging five categories of data: (a) content mastery, (b) progress, (c) closing gaps, (d) readiness, and (e) graduation rate.

While Georgia was rated 75.3 on the CCRPI in 2018, certain measures demonstrate a need for more focus on the integration of academic content into career courses. For example, within the readiness metric, in the specific category of CCR, the state rated 57.13 in 2018 and went down to 56.84 in 2019. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, data for 2020 and 2021 were not provided, and the state received a waiver from the U.S. Department of Education on score reporting. However, the CCR component for 2019 was broken down into four areas: (a) entering the state's college and university system without needing remediation (30.40%), (b) readiness scores on various standardized tests (27.82%), (c) an End-of-Pathway Assessment (25.64%), and (d) work-based learning (8.87%). If only 30% of high school students entering Georgia colleges did not require remediation, then 70% did. Furthermore, only 27.82% of students leaving high school achieved what the top college assessment programs determined to be college readiness. As another example, according to the California Department of Education (2016b), only 43.4% of graduates during the 2014–2015 school year completed all coursework required for University of California and/or California State University admission. These findings demonstrate that many state education agencies (SEAs) have not found best practices for leading the integration of academic and CTE curriculum.

Recent studies have shown that one of the possible answers to these struggles has been the further integration of CTE and academic curriculum as an effective way for students to meet the 21st century standards of CCR in a variety of types CTE focused

high schools (Park et al., 2017). Many U.S. school districts have attempted to meet these standards more specifically by creating CTE magnet high schools where the integration of CTE and academic curricula may happen more seamlessly (Rosen et al., 2018). These are schools within local districts where students enroll to study specific CTE certification programs and take their academic coursework instead of attending their neighborhood school. A review of the literature shows there have been only three studies related to the experiences of district and school administrators leading the curriculum integration process at such CTE magnet high schools. These were doctoral studies completed by Breier (2020), Frazier (2018) and Jürgen (2019). Prior research has not been conducted to examine the leadership experiences of district and building administrators leading the curriculum integration process using transformational leadership at these specific types of CTE magnet high schools in the southwestern United States, creating a gap in the knowledge in this area.

One method for examining educational leadership is through the lens of transformational leadership. The transformational leadership framework has been the most prominent leadership theory in education for the last 30 years (Hoch et al., 2018; Mendez-Keegan, 2019). Burns (1979) is considered the primary source of the transformational leadership conceptual framework (Stewart, 2006). Leithwood and Jantzi (1997) have expanded Burns' original framework to the following six characteristics of transformational leadership: (a) fostering development of vision and goals, (b) developing a collaborative decision-making structure, (c) symbolizing good profession practice, (d) providing individualized support, (e) providing intellectual

stimulation, and (f) holding high performance expectations. These characteristics were used as a framework for this study. Gaining a better understanding of leading curriculum integration at CTE magnet high schools can assist district and building level administrators at all CTE magnet high schools in becoming better prepared to lead the integration of academic and CTE curriculum in the future.

Problem Statement

The problem addressed in this study is that K–12 administrators in the United States are struggling to integrate academic and CTE as required by ESSA and Perkins V legislation. As stated in the above section, SEAs are not achieving the desired CCR student outcomes outlined in ESSA and Perkins legislation (California Department of Education, 2023; Georgia Department of Education, 2023; Malin et al., 2017). Research in the last 5 years has shown that the integration of academic and CTE curriculum may be a viable way to improve CCR outcomes (Park et al., 2017). Additional research has shown that it is important for district and school leaders to lead that curriculum integration process (Malin et al., 2017). Also, the literature shows that one primary way that SEAs are trying to improve CCR results is through the creation of CTE magnet high schools (Rosen et al., 2018). I identified four doctoral studies conducted by Breier (2020), Frazier (2018), Helguera et al. (2018), and Jürgen (2019) in which they examined district and/or building level administrative leadership at several types of CTE focused high schools in the United States and U.S. territories. However, only Frazier (2018) studied leading the integration process, and the study was conducted in the state of Massachusetts. This gap in the literature demonstrates a need to further study how district

and building level administrators are specifically leading the curriculum integration process at CTE magnet high schools in different settings.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore, through the lens of transformational leadership, the experiences of district and building level administrators at existing CTE magnet high schools in the southwestern United States who have led the integration of academic and CTE curriculum.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: How have district and building level administrators at existing CTE magnet high schools in the southwestern United States led the integration of academic CTE curriculum?

RQ2: What challenges did district and building level administrators at existing CTE magnet high schools in the southwestern United States experience as they led the integration of academic CTE curriculum?

RQ3: What successes did district and building level administrators at existing CTE magnet high schools in the southwestern United States experience as they led the integration of academic CTE curriculum?

Conceptual Framework

Burns (1979) is considered the primary source of the transformational leadership conceptual framework (Stewart, 2006). In time, the theory was extended by Bernard Bass and Bruce Avolio to describe business leaders' behaviors (Berkovich, 2016).

Transformational leadership theory focuses on “inspiring followers to commit to a shared vision and goals for an organization or unit, challenging them to be innovative problem solvers, and developing followers’ leadership capacity via coaching, mentoring, and provision of both challenge and support” (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p. 4). The transformational leadership framework has been the most prominent leadership theory in education for the last 30 years (Hoch et al., 2018; Mendez-Keegan, 2019). Researchers agree that the positive impacts of transformational leadership on individual, group, and organizational level outcomes are well documented (Kroll & Vogel, 2014; Moynihan et al., 2012; Oberfield, 2014; Park & Rainey, 2008; Sun & Henderson, 2016; Trottier et al., 2008). Many researchers have expanded on the original framework develop by Burns (1997). For this study, I used the following six characteristics of transformational leadership, as described by Leithwood and Jantzi (1997), to define the nature of the leadership of the curriculum integration being employed by the district and school leaders being studied:

1. Fostering development of vision and goals: Behavior on the part of the leader aimed at identifying new opportunities for their school; developing, articulating, and inspiring others with their vision of the future; and building consensus on school goals and priorities.
2. Developing a collaborative decision-making structure: Behavior on the part of the leader aimed at promoting staff involvement in decision making and facilitating the distribution of leadership among staff.

3. Symbolizing good professional practice: Behavior on the part of the leader that sets examples for staff to follow in interactions with staff and students and demonstrates openness to change based on new understandings.
4. Providing individualized support: Behavior on the part of the leader that indicates respect for staff and concern about their personal feelings and needs.
5. Providing intellectual stimulation: Behavior on the part of the leader that challenges staff to reexamine some of the assumptions about their work and rethink how it can be performed.
6. Holding high performance expectations: Behavior that demonstrates the leader's expectations for excellence, quality, and high performance on the part of staff.

This framework is implied in the research questions and informed the data analysis and discussion of the findings. These characteristics were used to develop an interview protocol to explore the experiences of district and building level administrators at existing CTE magnet high schools in the southwestern United States who have led the integration of academic and CTE curriculum.

Nature of the Study

A basic qualitative study design as described by Miriam and Tisdell (2016) was employed. Data were collected using semi structured video conferencing interviews as described by Creswell (2013) to explore, through the lens of transformational leadership theory, the experiences of district and building level administrators at existing CTE magnet high schools in the southwestern United States who have led the integration of academic and CTE curriculum. Utilizing the internet and Google search engine, I

identified six CTE magnet high schools in the southwestern United States that have been operating for at least 2 years and contacted building and district level administrators via email to introduce the study and recruit participants. I identified nine participants for semi structured video conference interviews.

Qualitative research interviews allow for detailed descriptions of experiences described through the context in which they occur (Yin, 2011). Interviews provide an understanding of "how participants interpret events and experiences" (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p.147). Semi structured interviews also allow for "holistic descriptions of perspectives, realities, experiences, and phenomena" (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p.147). Furthermore, semi structured interviews provide participants an opportunity to elaborate on their responses to questions, which can lead to a greater depth of data collection and that depth of information can greatly increase the reliability of the answer (Creswell, 2013).

The interview transcripts were coded and examined for themes (see Saldana, 2016). These themes were examined through the lens of transformational leadership (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1997). I chose this approach because it allowed for a thorough examination of the phenomenon of school administrators leading CTE schools to integrate academic and CTE curriculum. This study documents the lived experiences of building and district CTE administrators at CTE magnet high schools in the southwestern United States. I used convenience sampling to select principals at CTE magnet high schools and/or district-level CTE administrators of CTE high schools who volunteered for semi structured interviews (see Creswell, 2013). This approach was appropriate for

addressing the research questions for this study as the I explored the experiences of district and building level administrators at existing CTE magnet high schools in the southwestern United States who have led the integration of academic and CTE curriculum.

Definitions

Building level administrators: Leaders of faculty, curricula, and budget for their school who set the tone and ensure the quality of education for their school.

Career readiness: Having the academic skills, employability skills, and technical skills needed to perform job duties.

Career technical education (CTE): Courses that provide students with challenging academic, technical, and employability/soft skills and knowledge they need to prepare for further education and for careers in emerging and established professions.

College readiness: Students have the skills necessary to succeed in college.

College and career readiness (CCR): High school graduates have the academic, technical, and soft skills necessary to qualify for and succeed in postsecondary education and/or job training.

CTE magnet high schools: There are numerous forms of vocational schools. These schools are now known as CTE schools (Gordon, 2014). Some are dedicated to one municipality or to multiple municipalities; some are secondary level and some are postsecondary; some focus on specific trades, such as auto mechanic, and others are more diversified, providing a range of vocational training and licensure programs. For the purposes of this study, CTE magnet high schools, regional CTE schools or regional

vocational schools (CTE high schools) are secondary-level institutions that educate students from more than one municipality and offer a career specific vocational and academic curriculum for a variety of vocations.

District administrators: Leaders of faculty, curricula, and budget for their school district who set the tone and ensure the quality of education for their district.

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA): Signed into law on December 10, 2015, requires that all students in America be taught to high academic standards that will prepare them to succeed in college and careers. This law combines with Perkins V to require schools that receive federal funds to have programs that integrate academic and CTE curriculum.

Local education agency (LEA): A commonly used synonym for a school district.

Integration: Though the term can denote a variety of concepts and practices, this study focuses on "the organization of the best curricular and pedagogical practices of academic and vocational education into a single 'integrated' experience" (Lake, 1994, p. 189). For this study's purposes, integration is the contextualization of academic and vocational curriculum through each other (Rojewski, 2002).

Perkins V: The Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V) was signed into law by President Trump on July 31, 2018. This bipartisan measure reauthorized the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 (Perkins IV) and continued Congress's commitment in providing nearly $1.3 billion annually for CTE programs for the nation's youth and adults.

Transformational leadership: A leadership approach that causes a change in individuals and social systems and creates valuable and positive change in the followers to develop followers into leaders (Burns, 1978). Transformational leadership aims to align followers' identity, values, and aspirations with the missions and values of the organizations (Bass, 1985).

Assumptions

In qualitative research studies, identifying the underlying assumptions is crucial as it enhances transparency, allowing readers and researchers to critically evaluate the study's credibility and transferability (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Clearly articulating these assumptions fosters a nuanced understanding of the study's context and methodology, promoting a more robust interpretation of findings and reinforcing the overall rigor of qualitative research (Charmaz, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The following assumptions were made about exploring, through the lens of transformational leadership, the experiences of district and building level administrators at existing CTE magnet high schools in the southwestern United States who have led the integration of academic and CTE curriculum: (a) district and building level administrators would be willing to participate in the study, (b) district and building level administrators would have led the integration of academic and curriculum, (c) district and building level administrators were aware of the federal and local requirements 21st century CCR standards, and (d) district and building level administrators would provide sincere responses to the research questions.

Scope and Delimitations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore, through the lens of transformational leadership, the experiences of district and building level administrators at existing CTE magnet high schools in the southwestern United States who have led the integration of academic and CTE curriculum. The scope of this basic qualitative study was to explore the experiences of CTE magnet high school administrators' leadership of curriculum integration in one large urban school district located in the southwestern region of the United States. Data were collected using semistructured interviews with administrators who had at least 2 years of experience as a district or building level administrator of a CTE magnet high school. Other notable members of the school community, such as teachers and counselors, were not included in the sample. The study was focused on CTE magnet high schools in the southwestern United States. Career and technical schools from states and districts outside the southwestern United States were excluded. Thus, the data collected are delimited to those principals and district CTE leaders educating adolescents in schools serving multiple municipalities in the southwestern United States. The sample's size and composition, therefore, is a delimiting factor when generalizing the results to other educational settings. Finally, this study is a preliminary investigation and exploratory and was limited to nine participants.

Limitations

There a several limitations to this study: (a) the researcher is a novice, (b) the study has a strong regional focus, (b) the study was conducted in one large urban school district, (c) the study has a small sample size, and (d) there is limited literature about this

topic. To address these limitations, I limited the proposed basic qualitative study to nine school administrators, allowing for in-depth interviews. I maintained an audit trail, allowing others to understand the decision-making processes. I provided thick and rich description, allowing readers to make informed judgments about the transferability of the research findings to diverse contexts. I used convenience sampling to select principals at CTE magnet high schools and/or district-level CTE administrators of CTE high schools who volunteered for semi structured interviews (see Creswell, 2013).

Significance

This study provides practical applications to the field of educational leadership. The challenge for all K–12 district and building level administrators is to meet the requirements of both ESSA and Perkins V legislation by creating curriculum that meets 21st century standards for CCR (Frazier, 2018). Educational leaders must be able to ensure that all learners are prepared to enter both college and the skilled workforce and be able to perform the high-level technical skills and academic tasks that will be required for entry into higher education and industry. Information regarding the perceptions of district and building level administrators who have led the process of curriculum integration in the southwestern United States may assist K–12 educational leaders in preparing and supporting teachers to be able to meet the needs of 21st century secondary students at other similar schools. This study may increase understanding of the ways in which district and building level administrators influence the implementation of an integrated curriculum. The findings may also be valuable to district level administrators who are considering creating CTE magnet high schools, district level CTE

administrators, CTE principals, and curriculum development leaders. In addition, this study provides information to stakeholders in school settings that may be considering CTE high school development and provides valuable information to educational professionals who may be interested in pursuing leadership positions in district or school level CTE administration. Positive social change may occur when curriculum integration is influenced by a transformational leadership approach.

Summary

In summary, the purpose of this qualitative study was to explore, through the lens of transformational leadership, the experiences of district and building level administrators at existing CTE magnet high schools in the southwestern United States who have led the integration of academic and CTE curriculum. Administrators at new CTE magnet high schools can learn from the lived experiences of other administrators and use that information to lead the curriculum integration in a way that maximizes learning. CTE magnet high school administrators in the southwestern United States are faced with several concerns.

The U.S. Department of Education enacted ESSA and Perkins V, which require schools that receive federal funds to have a local policy to develop and meet 21st century CCR standards. In addition, research into CCR indicates that the integration of academic and CTE curriculum is necessary to meet the requirements of ESSA and Perkins V (Rosen et al., 2018). There have been few studies conducted to examine the experiences of school and district level administrators who led the integration of academic and CTE curriculum at CTE magnet high schools (Breier, 2020; Frazier, 2018). Finally, challenges

include commonly held beliefs by practitioners such as basic academic skills cannot be covered in integrative programs, the idea that content is the most important aspect of education, teachers are not prepared to teach an integrated curriculum, the notion that knowledge belongs in isolated disciplines, content is being force fitted into CTE classes and vice versa integrated environments, a conviction that integration is superficial or lacking scope and sequence, teachers unwilling to experiment with new teaching, and learning poorly defined terminology around curriculum integration (Fletcher et al., 2018). Because of these many challenges, researchers agree that "developing, implementing, and sustaining successful curriculum integration efforts require strong leadership, commitment, and planning at both the district and school" (Pierce & Hernandez, 2015, p 218).

The six characteristics of transformational leadership (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1997) were used to define the nature of the leadership of the curriculum integration being employed by the district and school leaders. The findings of this study regarding leaders of CTE magnet high schools may impact social change through improved curriculum integration. Nine district and building leaders from one large urban school district in the southwestern United States were asked one set of interview questions. The data from these interviews provided information regarding their experiences leading the integration of CTE and academic curriculum.

The literature review section in Chapter 2 reviews the literature search strategy and conceptual framework for the study. Chapter 2 also contains a literature review

related to the key concepts of curriculum integration, CCR standards, transformational leadership, and related elements. The chapter ends with a summary and conclusion.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The passage of ESSA and Perkins V legislation created a need for school districts to improve their ability to help students meet both vocational and academic standards (Malin et al., 2017). Recent studies have shown that the integration of CTE and academic curriculum is an effective way for students to meet 21st century standards of CCR (Park et al., 2017). Many school districts in the United States have attempted to meet these standards by creating CTE magnet high schools (Rosen et al., 2018). However, there have been few studies related to the experiences of district and school administrators as they lead the curriculum integration process at those types of schools (Breier, 2020; Frazier, 2018).

A review of the literature revealed a need to conduct research regarding the experiences of district and school level CTE administrators at CTE magnet high schools in leading the integration of CTE and academic curriculum. Research shows students can benefit from the integration of CTE and academic curriculum (Park et al., 2017). Consequently, there is a trend toward states creating more CTE magnet high schools to meet the ambitious standards required by the federal government for funding (Schwartz, 2014). Neild et al. (2015) estimated that there are more than 1,400 CTE magnet high schools in the United States. Additional research shows that one of the responsibilities of school administrators is to lead the curriculum integration process (Park et al., 2017).

Researchers have been calling for states and districts to integrate CTE and academic curriculum and ensure that high quality integration takes place (Malin et al.,

2017; Park et al., 2017; Rosen et al., 2018). Breier (2020) and Frazier (2018) began to examine the roles of administrators in leading curriculum integration at some of these schools in the United States. Furthermore, researchers have stated that to ensure a lasting impact, schools must take actions simultaneously on the following three levels: systems, curricular, and instructional (Park et al., 2017). Finally, researchers have concluded that, in general, administrators are not effectively prepared for the task and that school leaders need to engage in extensive professional development for themselves and their faculty (Malin et al., 2017). This again underscores the need for administrators to be able to lead the integration process and the need to better understand how that is currently taking place at existing CTE high schools. Chapter 2 discusses the literature search strategies, outlines the conceptual framework that grounded the study, identifies key concepts from the literature review, identifies and discusses each of the key concepts, and summarizes conclusions.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature search for this basic qualitative study included a review of research studies related to the experiences of district and school level CTE administrators at CTE high schools as they led the integration of CTE and academic curriculum using transformational leadership. The following key words and phrases were used to find research: *history of CTE education in the United States, curriculum integration, current educational policy in the United States, effectiveness of CTE high schools, role of administrators at CTE high schools, transformational educational leadership, challenges of meeting college and career readiness standards,* and *career and technical education*

administration preparation. Using the references sections of multiple scholarly articles, primary researchers in educational administration, curriculum integration, and CTE were ascertained: Burns (1979), Imperatore and Hyslop (2017), Castellano et al. (2017), Grubb et al. (1999), Leithwood and Jantzi (1997), Malin et al. (2017), Neild et al., (2015), Park et al. (2017), Rosen et al. (2018), Threeton (2007), and Rojewski and Hill (2017). Also, I utilized the Walden University library and bibliographical databases such as: EBSCO, JSTOR, ERIC and government publications to locate additional research. A search of peer-reviewed journal articles and Google Scholar was also used.

Conceptual Framework/Theoretical Foundation

The following six characteristics of transformational leadership were used to define the nature of the leadership of the curriculum integration being employed by the district and school leaders being studied (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1997)

1. Fostering development of vision and goals: Behavior on the part of the leader aimed at identifying new opportunities for their school; developing, articulating, and inspiring others with their vision of the future; and building consensus on school goals and priorities.
2. Developing a collaborative decision-making structure: Behavior on the part of the leader aimed at promoting staff involvement in decision making and facilitating the distribution of leadership among staff.
3. Symbolizing good professional practice: Behavior on the part of the leader that sets examples for staff to follow in interactions with staff and students and demonstrates openness to change based on new understandings.

4. Providing individualized support: Behavior on the part of the leader that indicates respect for staff and concern about their personal feelings and needs.
5. Providing intellectual stimulation: Behavior on the part of the leader that challenges staff to reexamine some of the assumptions about their work and rethink how it can be performed.
6. Holding high performance expectations: Behavior that demonstrates the leader's expectations for excellence, quality, and high performance on the part of staff. This framework is implied in the research questions and informed the research protocol and data analysis and discussion of the findings.

Transformational leadership theory, as delineated by Leithwood and Jantzi (1997), has been used extensively in the analysis of educational leadership. Using this theory as a conceptual framework allowed for the data to be discussed in a manner that is appropriate and meaningful to the field of educational leadership. This study provides a way for other researchers in the field to understand the practices being used by the leaders of CTE magnet high schools in the southwestern United States.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts

Discussion in the literature regarding leading the integration of CTE and academic curriculum centers around several different themes: understanding the requirements of federal legislation regarding curriculum integration, the impact of integrated curriculum on student learning, the need for school systems to integrate curriculum in order to meet 21st century standards for CCR, the effectiveness of different responses to federal legislation from state and local school systems, the role of

administrators in the curriculum integration process, and the framework of transformational leadership.

Impact of Perkins and ESSA on Curriculum Integration

One of the primary themes in the literature relevant to this study is ongoing discussion about how the passage of ESSA and Perkins V legislation has impacted school systems by requiring that students meet new CCR standards (Malin et al., 2017; Park et al., 2017; Rosen et al., 2018). Nearly all scholars in the field of educational administration and CTE agree that these two pieces of legislation have combined to require LEAs to meet a much higher standard of CCR; however, there is some leeway for them to determine how they will measure students and determine if they are meeting those standards (Malin et al., 2017; Park et al., 2017; Rosen et al., 2018). This has led to a wide variety of interpretations of what it means to be college and career ready and an even greater variety in the systems, programs, and curriculums state LEAs have implemented to attempt to meet these new guidelines. Most scholars agree that this has led to a difficult challenge in determining best practices.

Several studies have been completed in which authors analyze and critique different SEA interpretations of ESSA and Perkins legislation (Malin et al., 2017). Researchers have discussed how different SEAs have approached curriculum integration and have made recommendations for further research. Malin et al. (2017) conducted a "thematic content analysis of ESSA and Illinois policy, employing a CCR accountability paradigm" (p. 816) and concluded "that ESSA introduced but did not fully clarify what constitutes a well-rounded education and did not identify particular reporting and

accountability provisions, whereas two Illinois' CCR bills focused on remedial education and the third evidenced a more comprehensive and integrated CCR approach" (p. 809). Malin et al. (2017) stated that "District officials will also likely have substantial flexibility in their administration, design, and implementation of ESSA-funded CCR programming" (p. 810).

Researchers in the field are still undecided on what it truly means to be college and career ready (Malin et al., 2017; Park et al., 2017; Rosen et al., 2018). However, there does seem to be some consensus that one of the most effective ways of improving both academics and CCR at the same time is to engage in some type of curriculum integration (Malin et al., 2017; Park et al., 2017; Rosen et al., 2018).

Influence of Curriculum Integration

A review of the literature relevant to this study shows that, in general, scholars agree that integrating core academics with CTE courses has a positive effect on student learning (Malin et al., 2017; Park et al., 2017; Rosen et al., 2018). However, there is still much debate as to how much positive impact integration is having and in what types of situations it is having the most effect. (Rosen et al., 2018). Some scholars argue that most of the studies that have shown an impact on student learning have been small in scale and difficult to generalize to large systems and populations (Rosen et al., 2018). Moreover, because so many LEAs have different versions of what CCR means and have so many ways of measuring that metric, the results are at best anecdotal (Rosen et al., 2018).

However, some authors argue that some large-scale studies show the integration of rigorous core academics with CTE curriculum has had a positive effect (Malin et al.,

2017; Park et al., 2017). For example, in 2017, Park et al. reviewed studies conducted by the National Center for Career and Technical Education Research. The researchers examined three separate experimental design studies about the integration of math, literacy, and science in CTE courses. All three scientifically based studies were conducted between 2006 and 2011 (including 6,500 high school students measured in academic and career readiness), followed the same general design, and used group randomized trials (Park et al., 2017). Park et al. found that across the studies, integration of core academics in CTE courses improved students' academic achievement (as measured by standardized assessments) and that students did not lose any ground regarding career readiness.

Standards for College and Career Readiness in the 21st Century

Overall, most scholars in education, educational administration, and CTE agree that some form of curriculum integration is an effective way to assist students in meeting 21st century standards for CCR (Malin et al., 2017; Park et al., 2017; Rosen et al., 2018). Furthermore, most researchers have recommended that schools systems immediately adopt curriculum practices that have shown some level of improving student CCR (Malin et al., 2017; Park et al., 2017; Rosen et al., 2018). In general, scholars cite that the vast majority of CTE teachers are underprepared for this task and that a great deal of sustained professional development and system wide change will be necessary for real long-lasting impact to take place (Malin et al., 2017; Park et al., 2017; Rosen et al., 2018). Scholars often call upon educational leaders to take charge of this process. However, there is little to no guidance regarding the best way for these administrative changes to take place and

little research into the preparedness of academic leaders' readiness to take on the new challenge themselves (Park et al., 2017). Furthermore, other researchers, such as Breier (2020) and Frazier (2018), have shown there is limited research into the ways that district and building level administrators have conducted themselves while leading this change and even less research regarding how effective that process has been at schools where administrators are leading curriculum integration. Finally, there have been so many responses to this need from LEAs and school districts, that no one approach seems to have emerged as a best practices model (Rosen et al., 2018). One of the many responses from LEAs that appears to have shown some promise has been the creation of CTE magnet high schools.

Responses to Federal Legislation from State and Local School Systems

In the literature most relevant to this study, researchers have explored the decision by many LEAs to create CTE magnet high schools to increase career readiness while still maintaining high academic standards. The decision to create such schools has been the result of LEAs attempting to find innovative ways to address the need to address CCR requirements in recent legislation. Some of the other more popular approaches are career pathway programs, career academy programs, dual enrollment programs, apprenticeships, and regional vocational training schools—also called CTE magnet high school (Rosen et al., 2018). One of the most popular responses has been for districts to create a central high school where students from around the region may attend and receive intense CTE coursework coupled with rigorous academic learning (Rosen et al., 2018). In 2015, Neild et al. estimated there are more than 1,400 CTE high schools in the United States. The

effectiveness of these schools in meeting 21st century CCR standards has been limited, even though the concept of these types of schools continues to appeal to school districts looking to innovate (Rosen et al., 2018).

Role of Administrators in the Curriculum Integration Process

In general, most scholars agree that to meet the dual mandate of ESSA and Perkins legislation, CTE high school teachers should integrate core academics into every CTE course (Imperatore & Hyslop, 2017; Malin et al., 2017; Neild et al., 2015; Rosen et al., 2018; Schwartz, 2014; Stubbs & Stubbs; 2017). This means that district and high school administrators at these schools are then obliged to lead the systemic change that must take place for CTE teachers to be able to do this effectively. Unfortunately, peer reviewed research regarding this process is hard to come by (Breier, 2020; Frazier, 2018). Several doctoral studies have been conducted examining the experiences of district and building administrators as they have led the curriculum integration process at such schools and the results have been a steady stream of suggestions for further research to be done so that best practices for guiding this dynamic process can be discovered (Breier, 2020; Frazier, 2018; Jurgen, 2019; Tyner et al., 2018).

For example, in 2018, Frazier, using purposeful sampling, identified, and interviewed eight principals of regional career and technical education high schools in Massachusetts regarding leading the transformation of curriculum at regional career and technical education schools. After interpretation of the interviews, Frazier concluded that principals in career and technical educations schools see the integration of curriculum as valuable, that it promotes the development of soft skills through student-teacher

mentorships, and that it is designed to prepare students for a variety of postsecondary options. Frazier also found that to implement the integration of academic and vocational curriculum, principals in career and technical schools distributed leadership, utilized a variety of whole-school initiatives, worked to build the professional capacity of staff aids, and were required to be responsive to data regarding student and industry needs as well as the needs and desires of stakeholders. Finally, the study found that constraints regarding time and the negative dispositions of teachers and stakeholders often inhibit the capacity of principals to lead the integration of an academic and vocational curriculum in career and technical education schools.

A similar doctoral study conducted by Breier (2020), examined the lived experience of ten New York City Department of Education CTE school principals as they attempted to lead change. Breier (2020) listed six key findings regarding their experiences with the United States policy shifts, the integration of CTE and academics at their schools, and their hopes and fears for the future of CTE. Relevant to this study he found that (a) a vast majority of the principals who participated in this study identified the integration of CTE and academic subjects as an important goal, (b) in general the principals lacked knowledge that one of the primary goals of ESSA reauthorization is that there should be *alignment between CTE and academics*, (c) the statement of the goal of *alignment* is vague enough so that principals could claim to be meeting that goal even though the alignment to which they refer might be entirely different from that of another school making the same claim of alignment, (d) eight of the 10 principals chose to interpret *alignment of CTE and academic standards* to mean the integration of the two

concepts during instruction, and (e) the current status of CTE and academic integration varies widely from school to school.

The study also found that some common obstacles were obtaining and/or easily using finances needed to maintain the structures required for CTE program implementation, staffing schools with CTE teachers, and supporting them through licensure issues, facilities issues, programmatic concerns, and either inconsistent or absent attention to integration by district-level leadership. Breier (2020) had the following relevant recommendations for scholars: (a) create a resource of best practices regarding the integration of CTE and academic programs that could have significant impact for principals who want to lead their schools toward the integration of CTE and academics but lack the resources or staff to devote toward supporting this endeavor, and (b) conduct a similar study in suburban districts with CTE schools to see if their principals share similar concerns.

Additionally, in 2019, Jurgen examined the specific strategies, processes, and behaviors of school principals who led successful CTE programs in the high schools in the United States territories. Using purposeful sampling, fourteen participants (four principals, 10 CTE teachers) were identified. The findings of the study were related to leadership skills, challenges leaders face in implementing CTE, and collaboration with the community and business leaders. Specifically, Jurgen (2019) found that principals used seven strategies “to consistently run the CTE programs in the high schools in the U.S. territories: effective leadership skills, collaboration with stakeholders, experience as effective practitioners, embracing good public relations with all media sources, motivate

staff and students, exercise compassion, and seeking good partnerships with potential vendors and internships" (pg. 102). Jurgen also stated common obstacles were "adequate resources including finances, capable staff, state of the art equipment, supplies and materials to facilitate the successful implementation and running of the CTE programs" (pg. 105). Jurgen concluded that CTE principals "could play a critical role in ensuring that their programs had the necessary resources by identifying and getting funds to acquire up-to-date training equipment, acquire transportation to travel to field work for students, tools, electronics, as well as other technologies to ensure that the skills that are taught to students are up-to-date and kept up with the trends in the marketplace" (pg. 108).

Finally, Jurgen (2019) claimed the study demonstrated that effective principals need to have a customer-focused demeanor to be able to advocate for their individual concerns, the implementation of a CTE program needs to be carried out by a focused and competent leader who understands and knows how to fulfill the needs and concerns of the students and staff and must lead from the heart. One primary recommendation for further research was that "replicating [the] study in other geographical regions would provide additional insight as to how the findings of this study on CTE programs differ in different geographical regions throughout the United States" (Jurgen, 2019, p. 117).

Additionally, a joint doctoral study completed by Tyner et al. (2018) sought to identify the role of district administrators in developing, implementing, and supporting career and technical education programs. Using convenience/purposeful sampling quantitative data were collected from 28 surveys of district administrators and

superintendents and five interviews with superintendents provided the qualitative data for the study. All respondents were from the state of California. The study found that district administrators: (a) understood the importance of CTE programs in regard to preparing students to be college-and-career-ready, (b) saw the importance of knowing CTE standards and making data-driven decisions regarding their CTE programs, (c) understood the importance of resources, both financial and human, (d) placed a great deal of importance on industry partners, articulation agreements, and internship opportunities, and (e) placed a great deal of importance on CTE programs in general (Tyner, 2018). In addition the study identified seven main activities that district administrators engaged in regarding their oversight of CTE programs: (a) gathering information needed to make data-driven decisions pertaining to CTE programs, (b) providing support to school-site staff for development, implementation, and support of CTE programs, (c) allocating resources for curriculum and staff professional development, (d) allocating funds for development, implementation, and support of CTE programs, (e) serving as a liaison for postsecondary institutions, industry partners, and advisory boards, (f) verifying that district programs are compliant with requirements, and (g) assisting in the hiring process for CTE teachers (Quintero, 2018).

Most relevant to this study, the research found that, "Superintendents stated that CTE programs that were associated with strong academics and rigor were more effective than others…a strong certification program made a program effective" (Tyner, 2018, p. 87). Also, of importance to this study, researchers found that district administrators stated determining program effectiveness was a major challenge as "the majority of their

existing information [was] qualitative in nature and [was] reported sporadically" (Quintero, 2018, p. 83). Helguera (2018) asserted, "There is a clear need to develop some way to measure and analyze the effectiveness of CTE programs in preparing students to be college-and-career-ready" (p. 88). Another conclusion of the study was that "the identification of common and effective strategies can provide guidance to current and aspiring district-level administrators as they consider how to fund and support CTE programs when districts might not have enough funding available that is associated with these programs" (Helguera, 2018, p. 89). Finally, the researchers in this collaborative study all agree that further research which expands the geographical boundaries of their study is particularly important and necessary to the advancement of knowledge that will assist district and high school level administrators as they seek to meet state and federal requirements for CCR.

More recently, a doctoral study was completed by Slater (2023) that sought to explore the perceptions of the CTE leaders and educators of the Sunny Valley School System. The researcher employed a transformational leadership framework for the study. The study found that CTE leaders in that large Urban district who supervised CTE magnet high schools stated that communication and funding were the two biggest challenges that these leaders faced. There was one mention of curriculum integration via PLCs being a priority from just one of the participants in the study. The researcher's final recommendation was that CTE leaders in that district should move toward becoming transformational leaders. Slater (2023) stated,

> This would allow all educators who function in a leadership capacity to participate in decision making about educating students as they grow and prosper through high school. Gathering ideas from many leaders can result in significant input to enhance the decision-making process and ensure that all leaders can participate in making leadership decisions. (p. 67)

Transformational Leadership

A review of the literature on transformational leadership found a lengthy list of studies that support transformational leadership and practice in education and school leadership. Burns (1979) is considered the primary source of the transformational leadership conceptual framework (Stewart, 2006). In time, the theory was extended by Bernard Bass and Bruce Avolio to describe business leaders' behaviors (Berkovich, 2016). Transformational leadership theory focuses on "inspiring followers to commit to a shared vision and goals for an organization or unit, challenging them to be innovative problem solvers, and developing followers' leadership capacity via coaching, mentoring, and provision of both challenge and support" (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p. 4).

The transformational leadership framework has been the most prominent leadership theory in education for the last thirty years (Hoch et al., 2018; Mendez-Keegan, 2019). Many researchers have expanded upon the original framework develop by Burns (1997) and transformational leadership has become one of the central and most influential leadership models in the field of education administration (Berkovich, 2016; Bush, 2014; Hallinger, 2003). According to White (2022), transformational leadership is a style in which leaders have educated themselves to encourage, inspire, and motivate

students or employees to innovate and create change that will allow them to assist with the growing and forming of the future for the next generation of leadership. White (2022) also cataloged the evolution of transformational leadership through the decades and the many researchers who have expanded upon the original theory.

Two of the prominent scholars to expand upon Burns' original framework are Leithwood and Jantzi. A recent study by Kwan (2020), has reaffirmed the work on transformational leadership by Leithwood and Jantzi emphasized the ways in which it is important to curriculum development. In the study, which focused on the effects of transformational leadership on instruction, she stated the study suggested that, "transformational leadership is an enduring approach leading to student outcomes... School leaders have to inaugurate robust quality assurance monitoring policies, and yet simultaneously be aware that the underpinning of successful implementation of these policies is attending to teachers' individual needs as advocated by Leithwood and colleagues in his transformational leadership model (Kwan, 2020, p. 347).

The following six characteristics of transformational leadership as described by Leithwood and Jantzi (1997) will be used to define the nature of the leadership of the curriculum integration being employed by the district and school leaders being studied:

1. Fostering development of vision and goals: Behavior on the part of the leader aimed at identifying new opportunities for their school; developing, articulating, and inspiring others with their vision of the future; and building consensus on school goals and priorities.

2. Developing a collaborative decision-making structure: Behavior on the part of the leader aimed at promoting staff involvement in decision making and facilitating the distribution of leadership among staff.
3. Symbolizing good professional practice: Behavior on the part of the leader that sets examples for staff to follow in interactions with staff and students and demonstrates openness to change based on new understandings.
4. Providing individualized support: Behavior on the part of the leader that indicates respect for staff and concern about their personal feelings and needs.
5. Providing intellectual stimulation: Behavior on the part of the leader that challenges staff to re-examine some of the assumptions about their work and rethink how it can be performed.
6. Holding high performance expectations: Behavior that demonstrates the leader's expectations for excellence, quality, and high performance on the part of staff.

These characteristics were used to develop interview questions to explore, through the lens of transformational leadership, the experiences of district and building level administrators at existing CTE magnet high schools in the southwestern United States who have led the integration of academic and CTE curriculum.

Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore, through the lens of transformational leadership, the experiences of district and building level administrators at existing CTE magnet high schools in the southwestern United States who have led the integration of academic and CTE curriculum. The literature demonstrated that in the

United States, federal ESSA and Perkins reauthorizations have raised the bar for CCR (Malin et al., 2017; Park et al., 2017; Rosen et al., 2018). This increased standard is centered on a requirement that academics and CTE must be aligned.

Although there is still some concern regarding the number and scale of studies that have proclaimed the effectiveness of curriculum integration, most scholars agree that one of the most effective ways to ensure that these standards can be met is through the integration of rigorous academics with CTE coursework (Malin et al., 2017; Park et al., 2017; Rosen et al., 2018). Additionally, the literature has documented that there is currently not a clear way to measure and analyze the effectiveness of CTE programs in preparing students to be college-and-career-ready (Helguera, 2018; Quintero, 2018; Rosen et al., 2018; Tyner, 2018). As a result, LEAs have taken many different approaches to ensuring rigorous academics are in fused into CTE programs. One of the most common methods is the creation of CTE magnet high schools also known as regional vocational high schools or regional tech high schools (Rosen et al., 2018). In fact, there are more than 1400 of these schools spread across the United States (Neild, Boccanfusco & Byrnes, 2015). It is generally accepted that at such schools, district and school level administrators are responsible for creating programs, evaluating programs, guiding professional development, and overseeing the allocation of resources toward what they believe to be are the most effective practices that will lead to high level CCR for their students; however, a few small-scale studies from a few small regions in the US have suggested these administrators believe that making such determinations are difficult (Helguera, 2018; Quintero, 2018; Malin et al., 2017; Park et al., 2017; Rosen et al., 2018;

Tyner, 2018). These same small studies have also suggested that while all the administrators that responded saw the importance of integrating rigorous academics into CTE programs, they lacked the knowledge of best practices regarding the best manner to do so. As a result, perceptions regarding the meaning of curriculum integration, the actual amount of curriculum integration taking place, and the overall effectiveness of the curriculum integration seemed to vary widely from region to region and from school to school. Unanimously, all the authors of the small-scale studies called for additional similar research studies to be conducted in more areas of the United States and the need for those studies to focus on a wider geographical region that current studies have covered.

The following six characteristics of transformational leadership as described by Leithwood and Jantzi (1997) were used as a framework: 1) fostering development of vision and goals, 2) developing a collaborative decision-making structure, 3) symbolizing good profession practice, 4) providing individualized support, 5) providing intellectual stimulation, and 6) holding high performance expectations.

This qualitative study contributes to the existing literature by providing information related specifically to the experiences of district and building level administrators at existing CTE magnet high schools in the southwestern United States who have led the integration of academic and CTE curriculum using transformational leadership. This basic qualitative study also has future implications related to research, policy, and practice of how to lead curriculum integration at CTE high schools and other types of CTE programs. Chapter 3 of this proposed basic qualitative study is a discussion

of the methods used to gather data on the perceptions of district and school level administrators and their responses to the research questions.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore, through the lens of transformational leadership, the experiences of district and building level administrators at existing CTE magnet high schools in the southwestern United States who have led the integration of academic and CTE curriculum. With the passage of ESSA in 2015 and the additional requirements of Perkins V reauthorization in 2018, the challenge for K–12 educators in the United States has become how to prepare students for 21st century CCR (Malin et al., 2017). ESSA requires that states include CTE as part of a well-rounded education and that they align challenging state academic standards with state CTE standards to receive grant funding (Advance CTE, 2017). This expanded CCR requirement in ESSA has led to school districts needing to increase both academic rigor and the ability of students to be prepared for a wide variety of careers. Researchers tend to agree that a common way to create such rigor is by integrating academic and CTE curriculum (Park et al., 2017).

To accomplish these goals, many school districts in the United States have created CTE high schools (Schwartz, 2014). There is estimated to be more than 1,400 CTE high schools in the United States (Neild et al., 2015). In general, most scholars agree that to meet the dual mandate of ESSA and Perkins legislation, CTE high school teachers should integrate core academics into every CTE course. This means that district and high school administrators at these schools must provide professional development and lead the systemic change that must take place for CTE teachers to be able to do this effectively.

Unfortunately, peer-reviewed research regarding this process is hard to come by. Most recently, doctoral studies have been conducted examining the experiences of district and building administrators leading the curriculum integration process at such schools and the results have been a steady stream of suggestions for further research (Breier, 2020; Frazier, 2019; Jurgen, 2019). However, none of these studies have applied the lens of transformational leadership to the analysis of this process.

The problem addressed in this study is that K–12 administrators in the United States are struggling to integrate academic and CTE as required by ESSA and Perkins V legislation. This study employed a basic qualitative study design as described by Miriam and Tisdell (2016). I utilized semistructured video conferencing interviews (see Creswell, 2013) to explore the experiences of district and building level administrators at existing CTE magnet high schools in the southwestern United States who have led the integration of academic and CTE curriculum using transformational leadership. I identified six CTE highs schools in the southwestern United States and contacted building and district level administrators via email to introduce the study and recruit participants. I then identified nine participants for semistructured video conference interviews. Chapter 3 describes the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, methodology, the strategy for data collection, details of the data analysis plan, trustworthiness, and ethical procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

The following research questions guided the study:

RQ1: How have district and building level administrators at existing CTE magnet high schools in the southwestern United States led the integration of academic CTE curriculum?

RQ2: What challenges did district and building level administrators at existing CTE magnet high schools in the southwestern United States experience as they led the integration of academic CTE curriculum?

RQ3: What successes did district and building level administrators at existing CTE magnet high schools in the southwestern United States experience as they led the integration of academic CTE curriculum?

The central phenomenon being studied is the process of district and building leaders who are leading the integration of curriculum at CTE magnet high schools in one large urban district in the southwestern United States.

I considered several research designs for this study. A quantitative research design was ruled out because I was not seeking to test a theory. However, various qualitative research designs were considered such as: (a) ethnography, the study of cultural groups; (b) phenomenology, related to patterns of individuals; (c) narrative, related to individual stories; (d) grounded theory, develops theory; and (e) basic qualitative study. According to Burkholder et al. (2016), basic qualitative study research has been used since the early 1900s. In the 1950s, the field of education began to use basic qualitative study designs to gain more in-depth perspectives in research. A study utilizing a basic qualitative research design would typically exhibit features such as a focus on exploring in-depth perspectives and experiences, employing non-numeric data collection methods like interviews or

observations, and utilizing a relatively small and purposively selected sample to gain rich insights into the phenomenon under investigation (Burkholder et al., 2016). A qualitative basic qualitative study design was the most appropriate for this study because I was focused on exploring in-depth perspectives and experiences, I employed non-numeric data collection (interviews), and I used a relatively small and purposively selected sample to gain rich insights into the phenomenon under investigation. By interviewing participants, I sought to identify the transformational leadership practices district and building leaders use to lead the integration of academic and CTE curriculum.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, I assumed the role of observer. I am a teacher in a school district in southwestern Utah. I currently have no connection to the school district or to the administrators who participated in the study. I collected data from the interviews with school administrators and analyzed the data to identify themes. I interviewed each administrator individually at a time and manner determined by the administrator. Semistructured interviews consist of a dialogue between researcher and participant, guided by a flexible interview protocol and supplemented by follow-up questions, probes, and comments (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). This method allows a researcher to collect open-ended data and explore participants' thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about a particular topic and delve deeply into personal and sometimes sensitive issues.

Measures were taken to avoid bias, prejudice, or undue influence in the process. I avoided interview questions that may have caused participants to respond in a certain way. The questions were open-ended, and district and building leaders answered in any

way they chose. I shared the interview transcripts with each participant and asked each to confirm the information, thereby reducing the chance of errors in my data collection process. According to Babbie (2017), a researcher can avoid bias by maintaining a conscious awareness of their values and preferences and adhering to established data collection and analysis techniques.

Methodology

The methodology selected for this study was qualitative as described by Burkholder et al. (2016). In a basic qualitative study, as outlined by Burkholder et al. (2016), researchers typically follow steps that include defining the research question, selecting a qualitative research design, determining the sampling strategy, collecting and analyzing data through methods like interviews or observations, and finally, interpreting the findings to draw meaningful conclusions.

Participant Selection

The participants were seven building level CTE administrators and two district level administrators from one large urban school district. Participants were required to meet the selection criteria. The selection criteria were: (a) participants had experience leading the curriculum integration process and (b) participants had a minimum of 2 years' experience as a school or district administrator of a CTE magnet high school.

I employed a convenience sampling strategy. Convenience sampling is often employed in qualitative research due to its practicality and ease of access to participants who are readily available, allowing researchers to efficiently gather data within constraints of time and resources (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This approach is justified

when the research aim is exploratory, seeking a diverse range of perspectives rather than aiming for statistical generalizability, making it particularly suitable for qualitative inquiries focused on understanding complex phenomena in-depth (Guest et al., 2013). While convenience sampling may limit external validity, it is a pragmatic choice when the primary goal is to gain rich, context-specific insights from participants who are easily accessible within the study's constraints (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

I deemed that having nine building or district level CTE magnet high school administrators participate in this qualitative basic qualitative study was sufficient sample size. Burkholder et al. (2016) maintained that sample size is not as important in qualitative case studies because the depth of a qualitative basic qualitative study is more important than the breadth. Having a small sample size allows each participant's experiences to be analyzed and reviewed in depth. That is what took place in this study.

The participants were selected from six separate CTE magnet high schools in one large urban school district in the southwestern United States. The CTE magnet high schools had been operating for at least 2 years. I gathered email addresses for district and building level administrators from the district website. Upon approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and permission from the school district research department, I requested volunteers using those gathered email addresses. I originally emailed 10 district level CTE administrators and 30 CTE magnet high school administrators. In the email, I highlighted the study's purpose, described how it could benefit other CTE magnet high schools, listed the criteria to participate in the study, and provided the prospective participants with my contact information. Out of the 40 total

contacts, nine people replied stating they met the selection criteria and were willing to participate in the study. A second email was sent to those nine volunteers that included an informed consent form. After the consent forms were returned, I scheduled semistructured video conference interviews with all nine volunteers.

Instrumentation

The interview is a medium by which people's perspectives are examined to achieve a deeper compilation of information (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Semistructured interviews are effective in qualitative research studies because they offer a balance between flexibility and structure, allowing researchers to explore in-depth responses while maintaining a certain level of consistency in data collection (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Therefore, semistructured interviews were used as they were an appropriate means of collecting data about participants' perceptions about the phenomenon of district and building leaders guiding the process of curriculum integration at CTE magnet high schools in one large urban school district in the southwestern United States. The data collection instrument that I developed was an interview protocol consisting of semistructured interview questions (see Appendix C). The questions were created by operationalizing the six characteristics of transformational leadership as described by Leithwood and Jantzi (1997).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

First, consent for the proposed basic qualitative study was obtained from the Walden University IRB. Second, permission from the school district's designated research official who oversees research studies was obtained using the Partner

Organization Agreement for AEAL Dissertations (Appendix A). I gathered email addresses for district and building level administrators from the district website. Upon approval from the IRB and permission from the school district research department, I requested volunteers using those gathered email addresses. I originally emailed 10 district level CTE administrators and 30 CTE magnet high school administrators.

In the email, I highlighted the study's purpose, described how it could benefit other CTE magnet high schools, listed the criteria that were required to participate in the study (experience leading the curriculum integration process and a minimum of two years' experience as a school or district administrator of a CTE magnet high school), and provided the prospective participants with my contact information. Out of the 40 total contacts, nine people replied stating that they met the selection criteria and were willing to participate in the study. A second email was sent to those nine volunteers that included a consent form (see Appendix B). After nine consent forms were returned, semi-structured video conference interviews were scheduled with all nine volunteers.

Semi-structured video conference interviews were scheduled with all nine candidates who responded stating that they were willing and that they met the selection criteria. The participants were asked to select the time of the interview. Data were collected during the summer in July and August of 2023. The interviews were conducted and recorded by me on a computer using Zoom software. Each interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes. The same questions were asked of each participant during the interview to ensure consistency. During the interview, I asked one question at a time,

encouraged responses, and was neutral and careful about appearances when notetaking. I also noted any observations made during the interview.

Data Analysis

As recommend by Creswell and Poth (2017), the following steps were utilized in the data analysis process: (a) generating the overall impression of participants' responses, (b) coding by identifying significant phrases within the participants' responses, (c) transforming significant statements into categories and clusters of meaning (identifying themes), (f) interpreting the results and detailed description of the phenomenon, and (e) clarifying the findings with the participants and inviting their remarks and comments. I read all the responses thoroughly and carefully thereby generating an overall impression of participants' responses. I manually coded to the data using open coding for the first cycle to identify significant phrases within the participants' responses. During the second cycle I analyzed the open codes to identify categories. Finally, I analyzed the categories to identify themes that would capture the essence and meaning present in the data. I interpreted the results and developed a detailed description of the phenomenon. I member checked with the participants and member checked the findings with the participants. The analysis revealed no discrepant cases.

Trustworthiness

Experts in qualitative research agree that the research should include criteria for guaranteeing quality and trustworthiness (Connelly, 2016; Shenton, 2004). Connelly (2016) stated that trustworthiness in research "refers to the degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and methods used to ensure the quality of a study" (p. 435). Based on data

and not on the researcher's predispositions, a study's findings must be trusted by readers (Shenton, 2004). I attempted to develop an interpretation of the data that any other researcher would agree with as a reasonable set of results by following Creswell's (2014) six-step process of analyzing data for this basic qualitative study. The following sections describe how I assured the trustworthiness of my study.

Credibility

Credibility was established by utilizing member checks, conducting a peer review of interview questions and research questions, and maintaining a reflexive journal. Credibility is the equivalent of internal validity and is considered an essential criterion of a research study (Connelly, 2016). As I analyzed the interview answers and developed themes, I shared the analysis of the data with the participants via email and asked for feedback, comments, and suggestions for changes. All nine participants responded that they had received the analysis and that they had no disagreements with it. Member checks enhance credibility in qualitative research by involving participants in the validation process, ensuring their perspectives are accurately represented (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In addition, I conducted a peer review of my interview questions and research questions to see if other high school administrators with whom I associate believed that the interview questions were clear and that they would generate adequate responses to help answer the research questions. Peer-reviewed interview questions contribute to credibility by subjecting the study's methodological rigor to external scrutiny, ensuring the robustness of the research design (Morse, 1994). I emailed the questions to three

administrators, and all three responded that the questions were perfectly clear to them, and they believed they would help generate good data to answer the research questions.

I also maintained a reflexive journal during the analysis. I referred to the journal throughout the process and it is available as part of the audit trail for the analysis. Keeping a reflexive journal enhances credibility by documenting the researcher's self-awareness and potential biases, fostering transparency and trustworthiness in the research process (Finlay, 2002).

Transferability

Several steps were taken to establish the transferability of this study. Transferability in qualitative research refers to the extent to which the findings and insights of a study can be applied or transferred to other contexts or settings, enhancing the study's external validity; as Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted, it is crucial for ensuring the relevance and generalizability of qualitative research beyond the specific conditions of the study. Researchers propose that transferability in a qualitative study is a process whereby a reader or another researcher decides the applicability of findings from a study that may apply in a different context (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). One step that was taken during this study was writing a rich, detailed, and thick description of the setting. To accomplish this, I embedded descriptions of the context of the study, descriptions of the methods and settings, and descriptions of the participants involved. By incorporating thick and rich descriptions in both the methods and settings, researchers make their studies more vivid and detailed. This not only adds depth to the narrative but also allows readers to make informed judgments about the transferability of the research findings to

diverse contexts (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). A second step to improve the transferability of this study was the use of convenience sampling. Convenience sampling may enhance transferability in qualitative studies by capturing a diverse range of perspectives from easily accessible participants, potentially providing a more representative sample of the population under study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Dependability

Another essential component of trustworthiness is dependability. Ravitch and Carl (2016) highlighted that a study's dependability refers to the stability of the study data. Furthermore, to enhance a study's dependability, Guba and Lincoln (1985) propose that every step and procedure that occurs should be documented. To improve the dependability of this study, I created an audit trail to document each step of the research process. Creating audit trails in qualitative research, as outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2017), involves documenting and maintaining a transparent record of the research process. I kept a written record of decisions that were made during the study design phase, such as sampling strategies and data collection methods. I maintained detailed notes on the evolving research questions and the rationale behind my methodological choices. Additionally, I kept a comprehensive record of data analysis procedures, including coding schemes, emerging themes, and decisions regarding the interpretation of findings. All these steps help to improve the dependability of this study.

Confirmability

Confirmability is another component of trustworthiness in basic qualitative study. Researchers agree that objectivity may be improved by minimizing subjectivity and bias

(Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Johnson et al., 2016). Several steps were taken to improve confirmability in this study. First, to confirm the analysis I used reflexivity, based on Grenier and Merriam's (2019) recommendation, by maintaining a research journal to describe my own experiences, feelings, and biases that may have influenced my interpretation of the data. Second, I maintained an explicit and detailed audit trail to enhance confirmability in my research study, as advised by Creswell and Creswell (2017). This included recording decisions made during the research process, thus ensuring transparency and allowing for scrutiny of the study's credibility.

Ethical Procedures

Many steps were taken to ensure ethical procedures were followed throughout this study. Ethical procedures in a qualitative research study involve the implementation of principles and guidelines to ensure the protection, rights, and well-being of participants throughout the research process, addressing issues such as informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for autonomy (Liamputtong, 2009). These procedures are essential for upholding ethical standards and maintaining the trustworthiness of qualitative research. I took the responsibility to do no harm to the participants or the district, I exhibited professional conduct at all times, and I took steps to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. Specifically, in accordance with the Walden University IRB process, considerable attention was given to privacy, confidentiality, and ethics during the proposed basic qualitative study. I completed the following procedures: (a) the University Human Research Protection training course was completed, (b) consent for the study was obtained from the University Institutional

Review Board, (c) consent to conduct the study was obtained from the designated research officials at the school district, (d) compliance with the participating school district policies and procedures regarding research was maintained, (e) the name of the participating school district, location, and key pieces of evidence/data were redacted so they are not identifiable, (f) no confidential, private, and sensitive information was disclosed in the doctoral project document, (g) any data collected were not used for any purpose other than the current research basic qualitative study, and (h) data has been stored on my personal external drive and is being kept in a locked cabinet in my office. This data will be destroyed 5 years after the publication of the study.

First, consent for the proposed basic qualitative study was obtained from the IRB. Second, permission from the school district's designated research official who oversees research studies was obtained using the Partner Organization Agreement for AEAL Dissertations (Appendix A). I gathered email addresses for district and building level administrators from the district website. Upon approval from the IRB and permission from the school district research department, I requested volunteers using those gathered email addresses. I originally emailed 10 district level CTE administrators and 30 CTE magnet high school administrators.

In the email, I highlighted the study's purpose, described how it could benefit other CTE magnet high schools, listed the criteria that were required to participate in the study (experience leading the curriculum integration process and a minimum of two years' experience as a school or district administrator of a CTE magnet high school), and provided the prospective participants with my contact information. Out of the 40 total

contacts, nine people replied stating that they met the selection criteria and were willing to participate in the study. A second email was sent to those nine volunteers that included a consent form (see Appendix B). After nine consent forms were returned, semi-structured video conference interviews were scheduled with all nine volunteers. Once participants were selected and signed consent was received, the following procedures were followed:

- Participants were asked to select a time and date for the interview that was convenient for them.
- Interview questions were given to the participants for review before the meeting.
- Confidentiality standards were discussed with each participant before the interviews started.
- Participants were reminded that they had the right to withdraw from participation at any time before data collection was completed.
- Following discussion before the interview actually started, participants were sked if it was ok to begin recording.
- The interviews were recorded on to an external electronic drive and stored in a locked cabinet in my office.

Confidentiality prevailed throughout the proposed basic qualitative study by securing audio recordings, transcripts, and all information about the investigation in a locked file throughout the research. I am the only person with access to this information. At the completion of the basic qualitative study, audiotapes will be destroyed. Transcripts

and any information regarding the proposed basic qualitative study are stored in a locked file for five (5) years as required by the IRB.

Summary

In Chapter 3, the research method for this study was outlined, the research question design and rationale were described, the researcher's role and possible bias was addressed, and the plan for recruitment, participation, and data collection was described. Chapter 3 also outlined the data analysis from the study, how trustworthiness was ensured, and the ethical protocols that were used in this qualitative study. In Chapter 4, I discuss the setting, data collection, data analysis, results, and evidence of trustworthiness. The chapter ends with a brief summary.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore, through the lens of transformational leadership, the experiences of district and building level administrators at existing CTE magnet high schools in the southwestern United States who have led the integration of academic and CTE curriculum. The problem addressed in this study is that K–12 administrators in the United States are struggling to integrate academic and CTE as required by ESSA and Perkins V legislation. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: How have district and building level administrators at existing CTE magnet high schools in the southwestern United States led the integration of academic CTE curriculum?

RQ2: What challenges did district and building level administrators at existing CTE magnet high schools in the southwestern United States experience as they led the integration of academic CTE curriculum?

RQ3: What successes did district and building level administrators at existing CTE magnet high schools in the southwestern United States experience as they led the integration of academic CTE curriculum?

In Chapter 4, I present a description of the setting, the data collection process, the data analysis process, the results of this basic qualitative study, and the trustworthiness of the study. The chapter ends with a summary.

Setting

The setting for this qualitative study was a large urban school district in the southwestern United States. This district is comprised of more than 50 high schools with over 300,000 students, including six CTE magnet high schools serving more than 9,000 students. Data were collected during summer 2023 when school was not in session. At the time of data collection, the district was facing the situation of having more than 1,000 teaching positions unfilled to start the school year. During the interviews, every participant stated that they were affected by this teacher shortage. In addition, like many large urban school districts, this district was dealing with large budget shortfalls, low graduation rates, large low socioeconomic status populations, and large numbers of English language learners (15.6%). According to the district website, the student population was over 300,000 and 20.8% of the students were White, 15.8% Black, 6% Asian, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 47.7% Hispanic/Latino, and 0.3% American Indian or Alaska Native. The students represented 140 countries, and 111 different languages were spoken. In 2022–2023 10% of classrooms were taught by unlicensed teachers. The 2023 district financial report shows the district having over $3 billion in outstanding debt.

Data Collection

The data collection process began when I received the IRB approval from Walden University (06-02-23-0689822). I sent out an invitation to 10 district-level CTE administrators and 50 CTE magnet high school administrators requesting volunteers for the study. Nine volunteers replied to the request to be interviewed (two district administrators and seven building administrators). I conducted all interviews between

July 9, 2023, and August 12, 2023. Before each interview, I sent a calendar invite through an email with an agreed time and date with the web conferencing link for the interview.

Prior to the interview date, I provided each participant with a copy of the interview protocol via email. Using web conferencing software, I recorded each interview. Using the interview protocol as a guide, I explained to each participant the purpose of the study, my role as the researcher, how I would maintain the confidentiality of the participant, and that I would transcribe the interviews. I also confirmed with participants the option to withdraw from the study at any time. I allotted about 1 hour for each interview. I began by explaining the number of questions we would be discussing and describing that I would be potentially asking follow-up questions during the process as well. I asked the participants to give a description of the leadership role they held and an overview of the structure of the schools each participant led. I read each question clearly and carefully. As the participants responded, I noted key details I wanted to come back to with follow-up questions. After each question, I would ask follow-up questions to seek more detail and to gain more depth and clarity. The interviews lasted from 55 to 75 minutes. Each participant appeared open and willing to share their experiences of leading the integration of academic and CTE curriculum.

After I completed each interview, I assigned it a file number, downloaded the data to an external hard drive, and secured it in a locked cabinet in my home office. I transcribed each interview using the transcription service provided by Microsoft Word. I made sure the transcript was accurate by comparing the recording to the transcribed texts.

I corrected any errors that I found. I saved the transcribed files on an external drive with an assigned file number and secured the drive in my home office.

Data Analysis

As outlined in Chapter 3, I utilized Creswell's (2013) six-step data analysis process for a qualitative study. Creswell (2013) six-step approach calls for (a) organizing and preparing data, (b) reading and rereading the data and making initial observations and reflections through memos, (c) begin the process of coding and identifying patterns within the data by describing and exploring patterns in the data, (d) systematically developing themes that encapsulate key findings and insights, (e) analyzing and interpreting the themes to uncover the deeper meaning and implications, and (f) representing results by presenting the findings in a coherent and meaningful manner.

In Step 1, Creswell (2013) recommended that a researcher begin by organizing and preparing the data that were collected. I organized and prepared the data from nine participant interviews. To do this, I utilized the Office 365 transcribing feature in Microsoft Word to transcribe the audio files and edited any transcription errors. I scanned my handwritten journal from each interview and sorted the files into my external hard drive folders. I grouped the files by assigning an identifier for all nine participants. Participant 1 was labeled P1. Participant 2 was labeled P2, and so on. I secured the files with password protection.

Under Step 2, Creswell (2013) recommended that a researcher read and look at the data to identify tone, general ideas, and credibility while reflecting on the data's overall meaning. I read over and reread the data collected during the interviews during

this step. I looked for tones and big ideas and a common pattern between all participants. I looked for anything that was mentioned by all nine participants that stood out. For example, one general idea that stood out was that all nine participants stated staffing was the primary challenge in leading curriculum integration. I documented these big ideas in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. After reviewing the interviews, I documented the big ideas and tones as presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Tones and Big Ideas From Participants

Big idea or tone	Percentage of participants
Staffing was a problem	100%
Curriculum integration happens at the whole school level	100%
All six characteristics of transformational leadership were present in responses	100%
Providing individualized support was a primary function of CTE school administrators	100%
A culture of high performance was present in CTE Magnet high schools	100%

For Step 3, Creswell (2013) stated that researchers begin coding the data, identifying initial patterns, and exploring connections between different pieces of information. This is a process of systematically breaking down the data into smaller components and beginning to discern recurring themes or categories. I began by identifying the responses that showed the participants were implementing transformational leadership, and I used Microsoft Excel to code the text data by labeling the responses with a code for each transformational leadership characteristic: (a) fostering development of vision and goals, (b) developing a collaborative decision-making

structure, (c) symbolizing good professional practice, (d) providing individualized support, (e) providing intellectual stimulation, and (e) holding high performance expectations. This is shown in Table 2.

In addition, I used open coding. This process involves the initial and comprehensive examination of raw data to identify and categorize concepts without predefined categories or theoretical frameworks. Researchers immerse themselves in the data, breaking it down into discrete parts, and generate initial codes to capture the essence of participants' experiences or phenomena under investigation. Open coding enables the emergence of patterns, themes, and connections in an inductive manner, laying the foundation for subsequent stages of coding and theory development in qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I began by collecting open codes by searching for repeated words and phrases and grouping them together into an Excel spreadsheet. This process is displayed in Table 2.

In Step 4, Creswell (2013), stated the coding process should lead to the generation of categories to be analyzed. By grouping the codes, I created categories as they aligned to the research questions. This process is also displayed in Table 2.

Step 5 of Creswell's (2013) six-step data analysis process involves the identification of themes. This crucial phase requires a researcher to immerse themselves in the data, systematically organizing and coding information to reveal patterns, trends, and recurring ideas. Through a process of constant comparison and careful consideration, themes begin to emerge, providing a structured framework for understanding the underlying meaning within the data set. This step is not only about surface-level

observations but delves into the nuanced layers of the participants' experiences, perspectives, and narratives, aiming to uncover the rich tapestry of qualitative insights that can inform a study's conclusions and contribute to the broader understanding of the research phenomenon.

Table 2

Codes, Categories, and Themes Derived From the Transcribed Interview Data

Codes	Category	Theme
Vison; shared vision; our vision; set vision; set the vision; develop a vision; vision meetings; collective vision; goals; shared goal, develop goals; set-up goals; student learning goals; staff learning goals; data-based goal setting; data sharing; data analysis; mission, develop mission, shared mission; continuous improvement plan; continuous improvement cycle; professional learning communities; opportunities; opportunities for staff; opportunities for students; finding opportunities; seeking opportunities; securing opportunities; plan; planning; action steps	Fostering development of vision and goals	Extensive utilization of the six characteristics of transformational leadership
Professional learning communities; PLCs; PLC process: PLC teams; learning communities; teams; admin team; leadership team; program team; advisory team; school improvement team; school organization team; team meetings; team decision; community partners; stakeholders; stakeholder opinions; site-based decision making; collaborative decision making; collaboration; collaboration time; lots of collaboration; built-in collaboration; common preps; group decision making	Developing a collaborative decision-making structure	
Professional organizations; leadership in professional organizations; professional development; attending conferences; presenting at conferences; personal development; identifying personal weaknesses; being vulnerable; being present; improving practice; improving personal skills; leading by example; self-awareness; self-analysis; continued education; advocacy; data; using data; sharing date; gathering data; data based goal setting; data based decision making; participation in PLC; leading PLCs	Symbolizing good professional practice	
Trust; building trust; developing trust; mutual trust; support; individual support; emotional support; instructional support; one-on-one support; mentors; learning coaches; curriculum specialists; content coaches; department chair; teacher leaders; stress management; life-balance; professional development; paying for certifications; extra pay; rapport; building rapport; respect; respecting time; respecting expertise; time to discuss needs; space to discuss challenges; resources for new teachers; extra support	Providing individualized support	
Push the boundaries; no finish line; modeling continuous improvement; professional development; professional organizations; leadership in professional organizations; conferences; leadership opportunities; advancement opportunities; trainings; industry trainings; certifications; industry certifications; additional certifications; paying for certifications; national board certification; advanced degrees; supporting continued education; pushing for advancement; celebrating self-improvement; data; sharing data; data analysis; choices; freedom to make choices; projects; cross-curricular projects; project based learning; sharing; planning; collaborative planning	Providing intellectual stimulation	
Goals; professional learning goals; culture; building culture; creating the culture; developing culture; culture of success; culture of high achievement; expectations; high expectations; know the expectation; share the expectation; set the expectations; communication; communicate expectations; discuss expectations; the way we do things;	Holding high performance expectations	
accountability; evaluations; goal setting; individual learning goals; data; review the data; data collection; data sharing; data analysis; data base decision making; data-based goal setting; student achievement; all about student achievement; every conversation about student achievement; growth; student growth; individual growth; standards; set the standard; standards based teaching; standards based teaching and learning; Common planning time; cross curricular; class schedules, teachers schedules; extra-curriculars; common rubrics; grading; contract time; core mapping; staffing; multiple CTE programs	Logistics	
CTE teacher knowledge; CTE teacher staffing; CTE teacher professional development; teacher resentment; credentials; content experts not grammar experts; not reading teachers; not math teachers; not my subject	Expertise	

Codes	Category	Theme
Teacher retention; hiring; salary vs. job demands; scheduling; teacher resistance; lack of knowledge; unfillable positions; turnover; classroom management; stress levels; mental health; substitute teachers; professional development; limited advancement opportunities	Staffing	Leaders believe curriculum integration happens primarily at the whole school level rather than at the individual course level
Project based learning; cross-curricular connections; local and national competition teams; everyone teach their subject well; internships; presentations; student CTE organizations; student leadership organizations; industry connections; trust in individual subject/course experts; common cross curricular rubrics	Real-world application	
Forced connections: lower quality lessons; lack of planning and preparation time; lack of intervention time; professional learning communities; area of expertise; confidence; trust	Quality/depth of lesson	
Hiring teachers; keeping teachers; finding teachers; the right person; credentials; expertise; classroom management; CTE teacher knowledge; CTE teacher staffing; CTE teacher professional development; teacher resentment; content experts not grammar experts; not reading teachers; not math teachers; not my subject Teacher retention; salary vs. job demands; scheduling; teacher resistance; lack of knowledge; lack of planning and preparation time; lack of intervention time; lack of knowledge of school goals; trade union disconnect; move to standards base instruction	Challenges	Leaders experienced similar challenges and successes
Culture; high expectations; high achievement; student confidence; community confidence; community expectations; teacher self-efficacy; student self-efficacy; high test scores; high percentage of certifications; state awards; national awards; presidential recognition; graduation rates; award winning competition teams; high quality student organizations; individualized teacher support; community partnerships; business partnerships	Successes	
Hiring teachers; keeping teachers; finding teachers; the right person; credentials; expertise; classroom management; CTE teacher knowledge; CTE teacher staffing; CTE teacher professional development; teacher resentment; content experts not grammar experts; not reading teachers; not math teachers; not my subject Teacher retention; salary vs. job demands; scheduling; teacher resistance; lack of knowledge; lack of planning and preparation time; lack of intervention time; lack of knowledge of school goals; trade union disconnect; move to standards base instruction	Overcoming challenges	Leaders used a variety of methods for overcoming challenges and celebrating successes
Culture; high expectations; high achievement; student confidence; community confidence; community expectations; teacher self-efficacy; student self-efficacy; high test scores; high percentage of certifications; state awards; national awards; presidential recognition; graduation rates; award winning competition teams; high quality student organizations; individualized teacher support; community partnerships; business partnerships	Celebrating successes	

In Step 6 of Creswell's six-step data analysis process for qualitative studies, the focus is on representing the results. After organizing, coding, categorizing, and interpreting the data, researchers craft a meaningful and coherent representation of the findings. This often involves creating a narrative or thematic structure that communicates the essence of qualitative insights. The goal is to present the results in a way that is not only faithful to the data but also facilitates a deeper understanding of the research phenomenon, contributing to broader knowledge in the field. According to Creswell's (2013) final step in research, I developed an interpretation and reported the themes and findings from the study in way that explains what is happening in these CTE magnet high schools so that others may find the information useful.

Results

The analysis I conducted in this basic qualitative research study resulted in four themes: (a) all participants utilized the six characteristics of transformational leadership, as defined by Leithwood and Jantzi; (b) leaders stated curriculum integration happens primarily at the whole school level rather than at the individual course level; (c) leaders experienced similar challenges and successes; and (d) leaders used a variety of methods for overcoming challenges and celebrating successes.

Theme 1: All Participants Utilize the Six Characteristics of Transformational Leadership

Theme 1 describes how these administrators were leading the curriculum integration process. Data showed that all nine participants provided examples of practices that align with each of the six characteristics of transformational leadership. This suggests that these leaders have (at least partially) guided their schools through the integration of CTE and academic curriculum in ways that align with the characteristics of transformational leadership theory. Each of the nine participants provided one or more examples of practices consistent with the six characteristics of transformational leadership: fostering development of vision and goals, developing a collaborative decision-making structure, symbolizing good professional practice, providing individualized support, providing intellectual stimulation, and holding high performance expectations (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1997). In the following sections, I discuss the data that relate to each of the six characteristics.

Fostering Development of Vision and Goals

Regarding the first characteristic of transformational leadership, fostering development of vision and goals, all nine participants provided examples of how they displayed behavior aimed at identifying new opportunities for their school; developing, articulating, and inspiring others with his or her vision of the future; and building consensus on school goals and priorities (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1997). For example, Participant 3 stated:

> The admin team is present in our first vision meeting. We have a principal and four assistant principals, and we talk about these different goals and kind of have a general idea about things. And then it kind of branches down to when we have department chair meetings, so we work on that with all our department chairs and kind of let them know what our vision is and what our goals are, the plan and action steps that we would think that we've incorporated so we can get to our goals. Then after that the department chairs and our program leaders share their vison and goals as they align to that vision.

Along those same lines, P6 said,

> Setting a vision and a mission statement for the school kind of transcends to the curriculum integration. You have to have all of your stakeholders' opinions: students, parents, teachers and community members give input into all the priorities for the school—including curriculum integration.

Participant 5 added,

> Our vision is that every student is going into the work world as a prepared citizen and also able to make a living. So, we work very hard towards just ensuring that there are opportunities like jobs, internships, and situations to apply the curriculum with community partners in the real world.

All nine participants mention the development of shared vision and goals for their schools utilizing leadership teams and professional learning communities specifically to help design and develop the integration of curriculum in every school and in every program.

Developing a Collaborative Decision-Making Structure

The second characteristic of transformational leadership is developing a collaborative decision-making structure. This describes behavior on the part of the leader aimed at promoting staff involvement in decision making; and facilitating the distribution of leadership among staff (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1997). Again, all nine participants provided examples of this behavior. All nine participants mentioned the use of professional learning communities being the primary way in which curriculum is integrated through the schools. The real decisions on how and what will be taught happen in those teams. Specifically, P1 provided the example of the creation and operation of continuous improvement teams that approve the school improvement plan which includes curriculum integration adding that real important decision-making is being done at the site level through very structured PLC processes. Participant 8 detailed her leadership of the PLC process. Specifically, she described the creation of individual student learning goals for every team. She also talked about the intimate involvement of the assistant

principals (who act as individual program administrators), the department chairs, the content learning coaches, and the teachers, in the process of determining the exact curriculum that would be used to meet those goals. Finally, all nine participants also mentioned the practice of promoting good teachers to learning coaches, department chairs, mentors, and curriculum specialists throughout the schools, and providing extra pay for those leaders.

Symbolizing Good Professional Practice

The third characteristic of transformational leadership is symbolizing good professional practice: behavior on the part of the leader that sets examples for staff to follow in interactions with staff and students and demonstrates openness to change based on new understandings (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1997). Again, all nine participants provided evidence of the presence of this characteristic in their leadership of curriculum integration. Participants provided multiple pieces of evidence of good professional practice. This evidence is summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

Evidence of Symbolizing Good Professional Practice by Participants

Participants	Practices or actions
P1, P2, P4, P5	Lead a professional organization
P1, P2, P3, P8	Participated in professional development with teachers and staff
P4, P9	Presented at professional conferences
P6	Paid for and participated book studies with faculty and staff
All participants	Lead the continuous improvement plan committee
All participants	Participated in PLC meetings with faculty and staff
P3, P4, P7	Admitted to faculty and staff their own personal lack of knowledge regarding CTE and/or academic curriculum
P1, P3, P4	Organized and lead instructional rounds with faculty and staff
P5, P6, P7	Advocated/lobbied for legislative support for CTE curriculum
P1, P2, P3, P4, P8, P9	Engaged in continuing their education and earning additional professional certifications

Providing Individualized Support

Providing individualized support: behavior on the part of the leader that indicates respect for staff and concern about their personal feelings and needs, is the fourth characteristic of transformational leadership (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1997). All participants presented information showing that they provided individualized support for their staff. For example, P4 stated,

> For the teacher end of this. It takes a minute to build trust. It's going to take him a while to recognize if I'm there to help him or hurt him. So, I focus on just being present, being vulnerable, showing him that I'm there every day and that I believe in their mission. Then we set up a system of emotional and instructional support.

Participant 5 highlighted the approach to individual support at her school,

> I think that each of the admin are really good at knowing the strengths of each of our teachers, building that rapport with the teachers, learning their strengths,

> learning where they have some areas for growth and kind of concentrating on those areas of growth. I myself try to focus on each individual teacher that I supervise and kind of have those coaching conversations with them, whether it's walking them through a pacing guide or even taking some of the good teachers and kind of pushing them to add more to their plate.

This practice helped build a relationship while navigating complicated issues. Participant 7 discussed at length a special mentor program for new teachers to her school that is not required by the district. They provide lunch to those teachers once per month. The group is run by other teachers, and they set their own agenda and discuss anything at all that the teachers need help with, including their feelings about teaching, managing stress, planning classes, etc. Finally, multiple participants mentioned the challenges with moving to standards-based teaching and grading and that they have had many teachers experiencing trouble with that process. Participants 1, 3, 6, and 8 all discussed specifically the hiring of curriculum specialists/strategist withing their own school to assist teachers one-to-one with this challenging process. Specifically, P6 said,

> These people are masters at their curriculum. They know the levels and the standards, and they know what the district is pushing out. They know what is expected and they are also kind of like a buffer for who is really ready to handle what as far as curriculum and the push for students to be achieving at higher and higher levels.

Providing Intellectual Stimulation

The fifth characteristic was identified in the responses from all nine participants. Every participant discussed how they provided intellectual stimulation, which Leithwood and Jantzi (1997) defined as behavior on the part of the leader that challenges staff to re-examine some of the assumptions about their work and rethink how it can be performed. For example, P4 stated,

> There's just no finish line. That's just the culture I was very fortunate to build. Past precedents will lead to future success, but there's no finish line. We just always push the boundaries. How many more jobs can we get kids? What skills do they need so that we can get them hired at a higher salary? What do we need to do to make sure kids can finish these core courses in two years instead of 2 1/2 years? It's just always squeezing the orange. The goal is that I'm leading from the front hopefully showing and modeling that I'm never satisfied with my role as a leader and I'm growing. How can we do this a little better? Or where's the opportunity that we haven't got yet?

Participant 9 stated,

> Really pushing membership for our CTE teachers to join professional teaching organizations. Always trying to push people, especially our core teachers into becoming nationally board-certified teachers. We have a cadre here each year of teachers that are working towards that. We also have a surprising number of teachers that are going for their doctorate degrees because of the push from admin and the support for doing that level of work.

Holding High Performance Expectations

Finally, there was extensive evidence of the presence of the sixth characteristic of transformational leadership, holding high performance expectations. Leithwood and Jantzi, 1997, described this as behavior that demonstrates the leader's expectations for excellence, quality, and high performance on the part of staff. Table 4 provides a summary of the responses participants gave when asked how they hold high performance expectations for their faculty and staff.

Table 4

Evidence of Holding High Expectations by Participant

Participants	Practices or actions
All participants	Implement rigorous individual supervision and evaluation procedures
P1, P2, P3, P8	Build a culture of high performance
P1, P2, P4, P7 P8	Encourage and support membership and leadership in professional organizations
P3, P4, P5	Individualize goal setting
All participants	Individualize support
All participants	Celebrate high performance success
All participants	Insist upon and model data driven continuous improvement
P1, P3, P4, P6	Communicate all stakeholders' high expectations to faculty and students

Specifically, P4 said,

> Every conversation is about student achievement, just what's happening in this classroom, this is where can you improve? Where can the kids improve? What are you doing better next time? What unit is going to do that? How is this unit going to change next time we do it? Just all day, every day, every conversation is about growth.

Participants 1, 3, 5, 6, and 7 detailed the supervision and evaluation tools and procedures used at their schools. These included a minimum of three induvial observations and conferences around specific data driven evidence of teaching standards. Participant 1 added, “For integration, it’s just super important that you set the standard, you let them know the expectation, and you look for it, you review the data, you talk to the teacher, you make goals for it happening.

Finally, celebrating success was mentioned by all nine participants as a way of reinforcing high expectations. Participant 2 stated,

> In a whole school district where there’s more than 25,000 teachers, we’ve had a finalist for the Heart of Education award nominee that has won like three of the last five years and there are only twenty chosen in the entire district. So, we make sure that you know we’re really highlighting those teachers as well as the other ten or so nominees we get every year. We have an entire school party for it.

Theme 2: Leaders Stated Curriculum Integration Happens Primarily at Whole School Level Rather Than at the Individual Course Level

Theme 2 is developed across all three of the research questions in this study. All participants made statements indicating that while they understood the legislation regarding curriculum integration implies it is done at the individual course level, they all agreed that the real leadership of curriculum integration at CTE magnet high schools takes place (and is more effective) at the whole school level. Participant 1 stated,

> So as far as integrating CTE with our other academics, at an all-magnet high school, every kid's here for a program. It's a natural part of their day, and our core teachers and elective teachers all work to support the programs.

Participant 2 stated,

> We are always trying to get our students enrolled in more high skill, high demand programs of study. And so, in order to do that, we have to start to change our vocabulary about what CTE is? They're not electives, they're career pathways. A student that's in a health science pathway may want to go on to medical school or they want to go on to be a nurse or whatever the case may be, so all their coursework, their academic coursework and CTE coursework, should be in alignment with that.

Participant 6 commented on the challenges of expecting CTE teachers to be highly effective instructors of core academic content when they had a tough time even filling those positions. Participant 3 said,

> You know, if you're an engineer, you can obviously make six figures easy and you don't have to teach reading and writing. Where you come in as a new teacher here, you're making $50,000 and we want you to be an expert in reading and writing as well?

Participant 8 stated,

> It is very difficult for CTE teachers to integrate rigorous, math, science, and language arts standards into every course. It is also very challenging for a language arts team or a math team or a science team to meet with every CTE

> program teacher and integrate curriculum when you have 10 different CTE programs in one school.

Other participants directly addressed CCR and the difference between course level and program level curriculum integration expectations at their CTE magnet high schools. For example, P4 noted,

> I really believe in collective efficacy and the idea of we all do our own job at the high level, then the student gets all of it. So, the CTE teacher I expect to be an expert in career tech training and building skills in that area, I expect the math teacher to be an expert in math, English in English. So, the core teachers get the kid college ready, CTE teachers career ready and then elective teachers own the social, emotional. I don't want an OK lesson because it fits, and it looks neat that all five teachers are working together. I want content experts making sure students get content at a high level from that expert in that area.

Finally, multiple participants discussed that as a school, the data driven high expectations regarding the process of growth, on both CTE certifications and high levels of academic achievement on measures such as the ACT/SAT, create a synergy regarding integration in all pathway programs. For example, all nine participants mentioned using ACT scores as a measure of a school's and career pathway's success. Participant 7 stated, "As a school, we expect everyone to do their job well. That includes both high level certifications and high ACT scores. That requires a whole school approach to integrating rigorous core academics and top notch CTE programs." Also, P5 stated,

> We are very concerned about ACT/SAT data, so we're always kind of looking at that and seeing where we need to improve. For example, math scores did not do well, we kind of dropped in our math scores. So, we've hired a math learning strategist this year and we also have two pull out sessions already scheduled for the math department to do kind of semi collaboration/PD with them. That's what we really focus on data. It always comes back to data. Teachers are aware of that. Most of her job is just collecting data and disaggregating it for the teachers. She will present the scores and what they mean to the teachers. Whenever we're having meetings with teachers, we'll pull up data. We'll pull up the student learning goals and talk about that. So always bringing it back to the data.

Theme 3: Leaders Experienced Similar Challenges and Successes

Theme 3 provides evidence for RQ2 and RQ3. Participant responses revealed that the challenges and successes leaders experienced were very similar. All participants provided evidence of all six characteristics of transformational leadership being present in their leadership of curriculum integration and often what they viewed as the primary challenges and successes were similar; however, the responses regarding solutions and how they celebrated and built upon their successes were quite different. Table 5 shows a summary of the participant responses regarding the challenges they faced.

Table 5

Challenges by Participants

Participant(s)	Challenges
All participants	Hiring CTE teachers
All participants	Retaining teachers
All participants	Carving out time for collaboration on curriculum planning

All participants	Carving out time for professional development
P1, P3, P4, P5 P8	Moving to standards-based teaching
P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6	Instructional skill deficits of CTE experts
P2, P4, P9	Disconnect between trade unions and CTE programs
P5, P6, P8,	District approval of new curriculum programs
P1, P3, P4, P5	Community understanding of CTE magnet school mission

With regard to successes, all nine participants stated that they had successfully developed a culture of high expectations and high achievement—essentially overcoming any old stigmas for vocational or career training types of schools. For example, P3 stated, "We've had experiences with you know U.S. News and World Report. Were in top 5% of the schools in the country." P1 noted, "This is a career and technical academy, but it's not a votech. So, my students are going to Duke. They're going to Harvard." Participant 4 added,

> Because of our students' test scores and our high number of high skill level CTE certifications, we won Magnet School of America top school award two years ago and when we won, I mean, the governor came down. Candidate Biden spoke at our campus. So yeah, we definitely have developed a culture of high achievement and high expectations.

Multiple candidates talked about one of the important signs of successful curriculum integration was CTE from their schools' consistently winning awards at the national level. P8 noted,

> To me this is one of the quintessential indicators of success of CTE magnet high school as students must be able to demonstrate both a high level of academic skills proficiency coupled with the ability to apply that knowledge and skill in real

> world applications. Every one of our teachers is assigned to work with a student organization and our students consistently place in the top 5 nationally at competitions.

Participant 7 said,

> I was a teacher before I was an administrator at this school and honestly, as a teacher, there's like hardly anything better than that for me because you know that means that I gave you everything that I possibly know and you absorbed it and translated it into success amongst your own peers.

Additionally, all nine participants responded that they provide high levels of individualized support for their teachers and staff, which is what drives the successful integration of CTE and academic curriculum at the whole school level. For example, P2 said, "it's just providing opportunities and support for anything that helps build their, you know, professional toolbox." Participant 5 added,

> Each of the admin are really good at knowing the strengths of each of our teachers, building that rapport with the teachers, learning their strengths, learning where they have some areas for growth and kind of concentrating on those areas of growth.

Participant 1 noted,

> You know, it's not about their eval, it's more about how do we support these teachers, because sometimes they're just overwhelmed and, you know they just can't get everything without some help. And they don't need to just show up to yet another professional development meeting, they need someone to specifically

> go in individually say, hey, let's work on this with you and sit with them and make sure they know that trust and commitment to really help everyone improve is there.

Participant 9 discussed supports such as individual academic, content, and data coaches and experts provided for every PLC at the school, extra pay to attend trainings on needed subjects and skills. Participant 6 talked about paying for any conference a teacher wants to attend, extra pay for teams that want to meet to discuss curriculum outside of contract time. Participant 7 described creating and maintaining the trust, spaces, and groups essential to communicating the concerns and needs of teachers to administration in productive safe ways.

Theme 4: Leaders Used a Variety of Methods for Overcoming and Celebrating Successes

Although theme 3 discussed how participant responses revealed that the challenges and successes leaders experienced were very similar, theme 4 suggests the methods for overcoming and celebrating them were occasionally common but the responses mostly varied across the nine participants. For example, P1 stated the best way to carve out time for more collaboration on curriculum development was to provide extra days and pay during the summer; however, P5 stated the best way was to try to ensure that all time carved out was during the school year and during regular contract time as teachers were already burned out. Participant 3 stated the best way was to ensure that the department had common prep periods during the day. Participant 7 stated that quarterly pull-out days with subs for teachers in common areas was the best way. Participant 9

stated that instructional coaches meeting with individual teachers during preps and PLCs during designated collaboration time was the best way.

Similarly, while all administrators agreed that hiring and retaining issues was by far the biggest challenge to leading curriculum integration, the best solutions for those challenges were varied. For example, P2 stated that the most important way to retain teachers was to ensure that their course schedules were optimal and that teachers were not asked to do any work outside of contract time. Participant 4 said that developing trust regarding job performance was the key to teacher retention. Participant 8 stated that maximizing pay and providing leadership advancement within the school was the best way to hire and retain teachers. Participant 7 stated that providing high levels of individualized support was the most important factor in retention. Again, many other administrators reported that it was really a combination of many factors that need to come together to improve hiring and retention. While all participants recognized that hiring and teacher retention is a challenge nationally, and that it is the primary factor preventing schools from delivering consistently high levels of curriculum integration, the best ideas for addressing those issues are unique to each school and administrator philosophy.

As for building upon and celebrating success, the methods and opportunities for doing so were many and varied. For example, P4 discussed squeezing every possible bit of leverage possible from the national award that was presented to his school. He mentioned how getting that message out into the district and wider community was essential in ensuring that the right people wanted to be teaching at the school. He stated that having the right people in the classrooms was the single most important factor in

ensuring high levels of curriculum integration take place and sharing that information with the public was a key factor in getting those good people to the school. However, other administrators felt less confident about awards and accolades for their schools being the biggest successes and did not feel that celebrating the awards was essential. For example, P6 stated that it was connecting everyone in the school with the data and constantly communicating and celebrating progress within the school itself that lead to the biggest gains--even involving the students in the celebrations of the improvement in certifications and academic scores on both state and national standardized tests. Participant 8 added,

> We build that culture of, hey, this is important. This is something that you should be concentrating on. We teamed up with the student council and they did a whole lunchtime activity about MAPS scores and, you know, taking maps seriously and doing like little treats and goodies with that. Then, when they got their scores, kids that made their specific growth scores, were celebrated and they came and got prizes. We're actually using this program called Five Star Student. It's kind of an activities-based app. They also get points for their growth and other academic and CTE based growth activities in that app, and they can actually redeem those points for different things like a free yearbook or free tickets to prom or free things like that.

Answering the Research Questions

This study was guided by a set of research questions created to address the problem that K-12 administrators in the United States are struggling to integrate

academic and CTE as required by ESSA and Perkins V legislation. The following research questions guided the study.

RQ1: How have district and building level administrators at existing CTE magnet high schools in the southwestern United States led the integration of academic CTE curriculum?

Throughout the process a clear pattern emerged demonstrating that the participants in this study lead the curriculum integration process by utilizing the six characteristics of transformational leadership as described by Leithwood and Jantzi (1997). The activities, strategies, and practices the participants stated they used at their schools show that transformational leadership characteristics are an integral part of curriculum integration in this large urban school district in the southwestern United States. All participants made statements indicating they understood the legislation regarding curriculum integration implies it should be done at the individual course level. However, they all agreed that the real leadership of curriculum integration at their CTE magnet high schools takes place (and is more effective) at the whole school level.

RQ2: What challenges did district and building level administrators at existing CTE magnet high schools in the southwestern United States experience as they led the integration of academic CTE curriculum?

The data showed that leaders of CTE magnet high schools in this large urban school district in the Southwest shared many of the same challenges. Collected data suggests that some of the biggest similar challenges study participants faced were hiring and retaining staff, carving out time for professional development and curriculum

planning, and assisting staff with both instructional skills deficits and moving toward standards-based instruction. The methods for overcoming the challenges were many and varied. When discussing the common problem of carving out time for more collaboration on curriculum development, one participant stated the best way they had done that was to provide extra days and pay during the summer; however, another participant had found the best way was to try to ensure that all time carved out was during the school year and during regular contract time as teachers were already burned out.

RQ3: What successes did district and building level administrators at existing CTE magnet high schools in the southwestern United States experience as they led the integration of academic CTE curriculum?

The data shows that the leaders of CTE magnet high schools in this large urban school district in the Southwest had experienced many successes. For example, all nine participants had successfully developed a culture of high expectations and high achievement—essentially overcoming any old stigmas for vocational or career training types of schools. They also stated that they provided high levels of individualized support for their teachers and staff, which is what drives the successful integration of CTE and academic curriculum at the whole school level.

Additionally, theme four revealed the ways of celebrating success were also many and varied. For example, one participant stated that competing for, receiving, notifying the public of national awards and recognitions for their school was vitally important in securing the support of the community and ensuring that high levels of success became the culture at their school. However, another participant stated it was connecting

everyone in the school with the data and constantly communicating and celebrating progress within the school itself that lead to the biggest gains--even involving the students in the celebrations of the improvement in certifications and academic scores on both state and national standardized tests. The way that the leaders organized their schools was a contributing factor to the various ways they chose to overcome challenges and celebrate success.

Discrepant Cases

I reviewed and analyzed the data multiple times to determine and evaluate whether any of the data conflicted with the themes. I re-reviewed codes to identify any nonconforming codes. I did not identify any data provided by the participants that contradicted the themes observed in the findings of this study. After reexamining all the data, the data analysis methodology, coding, and themes, I did not find any discrepant data that conflicted with the themes outlined in this basic qualitative study.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Connelly (2016) stated that trustworthiness in research "refers to the degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and methods used to ensure the quality of a study" (p. 435). Based on data and not on the researcher's predispositions, a study's findings must be trusted by readers (Shenton, 2004). I attempted to develop an interpretation of the data that any other researcher would agree with as a reasonable set of results by following Creswell's (2014) six-step process of analyzing data for this basic qualitative study. By organizing the data, looking for big ideas, coding, and interpreting themes, I followed these steps in an attempt to build trust with the readers.

Furthermore, experts in qualitative research agree that the research should include criteria for guaranteeing quality and trustworthiness by research standards for credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Connelly, 2016; Shenton, 2004). The following sections describe how I addressed the trustworthiness of my study.

Credibility

Credibility in this study was established by utilizing member checks, conducting a peer review of interview questions to define and clarify wording, and maintaining a reflexive journal. Credibility is the equivalent of internal validity and is considered an essential criterion of a research study (Connelly, 2016). As I analyzed the interview answers and developed themes, I shared the analysis of the data with the participants in email and asked for feedback, comments, and suggestions for changes. All nine participants responded by stating in an email they had received the analysis and that they had no disagreements with it. Member checks enhance credibility in qualitative research by involving participants in the validation process, ensuring their perspectives are accurately represented (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In addition, I conducted a peer review of my interview questions to see if other high school administrators with whom I associate believed that the interview questions needed additional clarity. I emailed the questions to three administrators, and all responded that the questions were perfectly clear to them. I also maintained a reflexive journal during the analysis. Peer-reviewed interview questions contribute to credibility by subjecting the study's methodological rigor to external scrutiny, ensuring the robustness of the research design (Morse, 1994). I referred to the journal throughout the process and it is available as part of the audit trail for the

analysis. Keeping a reflexive journal enhances credibility by documenting the researcher's self-awareness and potential biases, fostering transparency and trustworthiness in the research process (Finlay, 2002).

Transferability

Several steps were taken to establish the transferability of this study. Transferability in qualitative research refers to the extent to which the findings and insights of a study can be applied or transferred to other contexts or settings, enhancing the study's external validity; as Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted, it is crucial for ensuring the relevance and generalizability of qualitative research beyond the specific conditions of the study. Researchers propose that transferability in a qualitative study is a process whereby a reader or another researcher decides the applicability of findings from a study that may apply in a different context (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). One step that was taken during this study was writing a rich, detailed, and thick description of the setting. To attempt to accomplish this, I embedded descriptions of the context, the participants involved, quotes from the participants, and activities of interest to support the findings of the research study. By incorporating thick and rich descriptions in both the methods and settings, researchers make their studies more vivid and detailed. This not only adds depth to the narrative but also allows readers to make informed judgments about the transferability of the research findings to diverse contexts (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). I used convenience sampling to select principals at CTE magnet high schools and/or district-level CTE administrators of CTE high schools who volunteered for semi structured interviews (see Creswell, 2013).

Dependability

Another essential component of trustworthiness is dependability. Ravitch and Carl (2016) highlighted that a study's dependability refers to the stability of the study data. Furthermore, to enhance a study's dependability, Guba and Lincoln (1985) propose that every step and procedure that occurs should be documented. To improve the dependability of this study, I created an audit trail to document each step of the research process. Creating audit trails in qualitative research, as outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2017), involves documenting and maintaining a transparent record of the research process. I kept a written record of decisions that were made during the study design phase, such as sampling strategies and data collection methods. I maintained detailed notes on the evolving research questions and the rationale behind my methodological choices. This will allow others to understand the decision-making process. Additionally, I kept a comprehensive record of data analysis procedures, including coding schemes, emerging themes, and decisions regarding the interpretation of findings. All these steps help to improve the dependability of this study.

Confirmability

Confirmability is another component of trustworthiness in basic qualitative study. Researchers agree that objectivity may be improved by minimizing subjectivity and bias (Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Johnson et al., 2016). Several steps were taken to improve confirmability in this study. To confirm the analysis I used reflexivity, based on Grenier and Merriam's (2019) recommendation, by maintaining a research journal to describe my own experiences, feelings, and biases that may have influenced my interpretation of the

data. To enhance confirmability in my research study, as advised by Creswell and Creswell (2017), I maintained an explicit and detailed audit trail. This included recording decisions made during the research process, ensuring transparency and allowing for scrutiny of the study's credibility. Lastly, as proposed by Yin (2016), I improved the reliability of this qualitative basic qualitative study by adequately collecting, documenting, interpreting, and representing the findings so that others would reach the same conclusions if given the same data.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore, through the lens of transformational leadership, the experiences of district and building level administrators at existing CTE magnet high schools in the southwestern United States who have led the integration of academic and CTE curriculum. The problem addressed in this study is that K-12 administrators in the United States are struggling to integrate academic and career and technical education (CTE) as required by Every Student Succeeds Act and Perkins V legislation.

The data analysis of the data provided four themes that addressed this basic qualitative study's research questions: (a) All participants utilized the six characteristics of transformational leadership as defined by Leithwood and Jantzi, (b) leaders stated that curriculum integration happens at the whole school level rather than at the individual course level, (c) leaders experienced similar challenges and successes, and (d) leaders used a variety of methods for overcoming challenges and celebrating successes.

Themes 1 and 2 answered RQ1 showing a clear pattern demonstrating that the participants in this study lead the curriculum integration process by utilizing the six characteristics of transformational leadership as described by Leithwood and Jantzi (1997), that the activities, strategies, and practices the participants described they used at their schools show that transformational leadership characteristics are an integral part of curriculum integration, and that design of the overall leadership process at each school is the primary way curriculum integration is being facilitated.

Themes 2 and 3 answered RQ2 showing leaders of CTE magnet high schools in this large urban school district in the Southwest shared many of the same challenges and successes such as carving out time for professional development and curriculum planning, assisting staff with both instructional skills deficits and moving toward standards-based instruction, developing a culture of high expectations, and providing high levels of individualized support for their teachers and staff. Themes 2 and 4 answered RQ2 showing leaders used a variety of methods for overcoming challenges and celebrating successes.

Chapter 5 provides an interpretation of the findings, the limitations of the study, recommendations for further research, and the implications of the study. A conclusion brings the study to a close.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore, through the lens of transformational leadership, the experiences of district and building level administrators at existing CTE magnet high schools in the southwestern United States who have led the integration of academic and CTE curriculum. The problem addressed in this study is that K–12 administrators in the United States are struggling to integrate academic and CTE as required by ESSA and Perkins V legislation. This study employed a basic qualitative study design. The following research questions guided the study:

RQ1: How have district and building level administrators at existing CTE magnet high schools in the southwestern United States led the integration of academic and CTE curriculum using transformational leadership?

RQ2: What challenges did district and building level administrators at existing CTE magnet high schools in the southwestern United States experience as they led the integration of academic and CTE curriculum using transformational leadership?

RQ3: What successes did district and building level administrators at existing CTE magnet high schools in the southwestern United States experience as they led the integration of academic and CTE curriculum using transformational leadership?

Four themes were identified in the analysis of the data: (a) all participants utilized the six characteristics of transformational leadership as defined by Leithwood and Jantzi, (b) leaders stated that curriculum integration happens primarily at the whole school level rather than at the individual course level, (c) leaders experienced similar challenges and

successes, and (d) leaders used a variety of methods for overcoming challenges and celebrating successes.

Interpretation of the Findings

This study explored, through the lens of transformational leadership, the experiences of district and building level administrators at existing CTE magnet high schools in the southwestern United States who have led the integration of academic and CTE curriculum. Using transformational leadership as a conceptual framework, this study's findings extend knowledge in the discipline by describing the impact of current legislation on curriculum integration and the creation of CTE magnet high schools as a possible delivery method for that integration. The findings of this study also extend knowledge in the field by showing that transformational leadership practices are being utilized in the integration of CTE and academic curriculum in CTE magnet high schools in one large urban school district in the southwestern United States. Additionally, the findings of this study show that leaders of CTE magnet schools in that large urban school district are experiencing similar challenges to those in the literature regarding curriculum integration in other parts of the United States. The findings also extend knowledge in the discipline by describing the way curriculum integration is happening in actual practice by suggesting that contrary to legislative mandates requiring every CTE course be infused with core academic rigor, these schools are taking a whole school approach to integration, involving teams of people to determine the best way forward and engaging the entire school organizational system in the integration process. Finally, this study extends knowledge in the field by describing ways that school and building leaders in this

large urban school district are celebrating success and overcoming the challenges they face regarding curriculum integration.

As stated in the literature review in Chapter 2, with the passage of ESSA in 2015 and the additional requirements of Perkins V reauthorization in 2018, the challenge for K–12 educators in the United States has become how to truly prepare students for 21st century CCR (Malin et al., 2017). Nearly all scholars in the field of educational administration and CTE agree that these two pieces of legislation have combined to require LEAs to meet a much higher standard of CCR, but also there is a great deal of leeway for them to able to determine how they will measure students and determine if they are meeting those standards (Malin et al., 2017; Park et al., 2017; Rosen et al., 2018). Specifically, ESSA requires that states include CTE as part of a *well-rounded education* and that they align challenging state academic standards with state CTE standards to receive grant funding (Advance CTE, 2017). This expanded CCR requirement in ESSA has led to school districts needing to increase both academic rigor and the ability of students to be prepared for a wide variety of careers. It also increased the pressure for district and building level leaders to ensure students are graduating college and career ready. Since then, researchers have steadily been calling for states and districts to integrate CTE and academic curriculum and ensure that high quality integration takes place (Malin et al., 2017; Park et al., 2017; Rosen et al., 2018). To accomplish these goals, many school districts in the United States have created CTE high schools (Schwartz, 2014) much like the schools in this study.

However, many of these schools have struggled to meet the promise of graduating students who are both college and career ready and little data are available regarding the experiences of administrators at such schools (Frazier, 2018). To create effective schools that meet the CCR requirements, district and building level administrators must lead the integration of academic and CTE curriculum. However, the problems with leading the integration of core academic and CTE curriculum in many different K–12 school environments in many regions of the United States have been well documented. For example, multiple studies highlight many problems with leading curriculum integration such as lack of awareness regarding current curriculum integration policies, low-quality professional development, lack of knowledge of curriculum integration models, insufficient time to prepare, insufficient resources, and inconsistent messaging from different administrative levels (see Breier, 2020; Bryk et al., 2010; Clark et al., 2010; Frazier, 2018; Gordon & Schultz 2020; Long, 2008; Reed et al., 2018).

Overall, most scholars in education, educational administration, and CTE agree that some form of curriculum integration is an effective way to assist students in meeting 21st century standards for CCR (Malin et al., 2017; Park et al., 2017; Rosen et al., 2018). Furthermore, most studies recommend that school systems immediately adopt curriculum practices that have shown some level of improving student CCR (Malin et al., 2017; Park et al., 2017; Rosen et al., 2018). In general, scholars cite that the vast majority of CTE teachers are underprepared for this task and a great deal of sustained professional development and system-wide change is necessary for real long-lasting impact to take place (Malin et al., 2017; Park et al., 2017; Rosen et al., 2018). Finally, in a more recent

study, Slater (2023) sought to explore the perceptions of the CTE leaders and educators of the Sunny Valley School System. Using a transformational leadership framework for the study, Slater (2023) recommended that CTE leaders in that district should move toward becoming transformational leaders:

> This would allow all educators who function in a leadership capacity to participate in decision making about educating students as they grow and prosper through high school. Gathering ideas from many leaders can result in significant input to enhance the decision-making process and ensure that all leaders can participate in making leadership decisions (p. 67)

Finding 1: All Six Transformational Leadership Characteristics Were Present in the Leadership Practices of All Study Participants

The first finding from this study was that all six transformational leadership characteristics were present in the leadership practices of all study participants. The transformational leadership conceptual framework has been used to examine the processes in educational organizations that have been demonstrated to improve student outcomes. For example, many researchers agree that transformational leadership has been known as a process to develop and expand a constituency's fullest potential to adapt and commit to the organization's goals (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). Also, transformational leaders communicate a precise, comprehensive, relevant, and meaningful vision so that team members feel encouraged, optimistic, and motivated to invest efforts and energies to go beyond their abilities to accomplish goals (Kramer, 2007). Ayik and Dis (2015) suggested that a principal's transformational leadership is the driving force of the change

and determining factor of the success or failure of a school. Finally, Anderson (2017) highlighted decades of research that support transformational leadership's positive impact in enhancing organizational performance. The responses to the interview questions in this study showed that all nine participants had aspects of fostering development of vision and goals, developing a collaborative decision-making structure, symbolizing good professional practice, providing individualized support, providing intellectual stimulation, and holding high performance expectations, as outlined by Leithwood and Jantzi (1997).

Fostering Development of Vision and Goals

Regarding the first characteristic of transformational leadership, fostering development of vision and goals, all nine participants provided examples of how they displayed behavior aimed at identifying new opportunities for their school; developing, articulating, and inspiring others with his or her vision of the future; and building consensus on school goals and priorities (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1997). Research on fostering the development of vision and goals has been shown to have an impact on student achievement (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). Moreover, highly transformational principals work collaboratively with staff to increase the level of personal and school support and to create a consistent vision (Hauserman & Stick, 2013). Additionally, researchers have stated that a commitment to a shared set of defensible goals develops when effective principals encouraged teachers to explicitly set relatively challenging, immediate, as well as long term goals (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990). Also, high-functioning schools were found to have transformational principals who shaped the school vision and learning processes within the organization, thus creating a positive

learning culture (Hauserman & Stick, 2013). Finally, the most powerful variable explaining teachers' leader perceptions, in-school conditions, encompasses the school's mission and goals, culture, structure and organization, policies and procedures, planning, information collection and decision making, and instruction (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1997).

Developing a Collaborative Decision-Making Structure

The second characteristic of transformational leadership is developing a collaborative decision-making structure. This describes behavior on the part of the leader aimed at promoting staff involvement in decision making; and facilitating the distribution of leadership among staff (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1997). All nine participants in this study provided examples of this developing a collaborative decision-making structure in their interviews. According to Hauserman and Stick (2013) highly transformational principals helped to develop the leadership capacity of all staff members and provided teachers with opportunities to share their leadership skills. The most effective organizational structure has shifted to a more open and democratic model. Marks and Nance (2007) suggested that transformational principals are best equipped to address the issues related to understanding how the role of collaboration is essential for implementing change.

Symbolizing Good Professional Practice

The third characteristic of transformational leadership is symbolizing good professional practice: behavior on the part of the leader that sets examples for staff to follow in interactions with staff and students and demonstrates openness to change based on new understandings (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1997). Again, all nine participants provided evidence of the presence of this characteristic in their leadership of curriculum

integration. “First, doing good work on behalf of one’s school, and being seen to do such work, is likely to be the most powerful strategy for positively influencing teachers’ perceptions of one’s leadership. Put simply, it is what you do (your actions and their perceived effects), not who you are (age, gender), that matters to teachers” (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1997, p. 11).

Providing Individualized Support

The fourth characteristic of transformational leadership, providing individualized support, has been defined as behavior on the part of the leader that indicates respect for staff and concern about their personal feelings and needs, is (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1997). All participants presented information suggesting that they provided individualized support for their staff. A transformational leader develops a supportive relationship and offers help to develop others according to their needs (Abun et al., 2020).

Providing Intellectual Stimulation

Study participants discussed how they provided intellectual stimulation, which Leithwood and Janzi (1997) defined as behavior on the part of the leader that challenges staff to re-examine some of the assumptions about their work and rethink how it can be performed. Intellectual stimulation involves motivating followers by “questioning assumptions, challenging the status quo, and encouraging problem reformulation, imagination, intellectual curiosity, and novel approaches” (Shin & Zhou, 2003, p. 704). According to Belmejdoub (2015), intellectual stimulation happens when the leader invites volunteers to be creative, innovative and make decisions that may be out of the box. Furthermore, Evangelista (2014) suggested teacher self-efficacy is greatly

influenced by a leader's ability to provide intellectual stimulation. All nine participants described aspects of their leadership that suggest they provided intellectual stimulation when leading the integration of CTE and academic curriculum.

Holding High Performance Expectations

There was extensive evidence of the presence of this sixth characteristic of transformational leadership, holding high performance expectations, in the responses of study participants. This is described as behavior that demonstrates the leader's expectations for excellence, quality, and high performance on the part of staff (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1997). All nine participants provided evidence of the presence of this characteristic in their leadership of curriculum integration. High achieving schools have been described in the literature review as schools meeting and exceeding performance expectations stemming from principals using transformational leadership approaches (Anderson, 2017). According to Day et al. (2020),

> A key strategy in the endeavors of school leaders to improve the cultures of teaching, learning and achievement in their schools is the alignment of structures and cultures with 'vision' and 'direction.' In effect, they reposition their schools internally through changing expectations, aspirations, structures, and cultures so that they are able to build and sustain performance. They increase effectiveness through a sustained focus upon raising the quality of teaching and learning, by raising the levels of individual and collective efficacy and the involvement of staff (p. 41).

Theme 1 from the data reflected that all nine participants described aspects of their leadership that suggest they held high performance expectations when leading the integration of CTE and academic curriculum. This coincided with Theme 2 in that it explained why these leaders stated they were leading that process from more of a whole school approach as opposed to an individual classroom approach. Additionally, this was evident in the development of Themes 3 and 4 as all nine leaders experienced successes in holding high performance expectations and using that process to help overcome challenges. Some examples of the presence of holding high performance expectations provided by principals during the interview included: (a) maintaining rigorous individual supervision and evaluation procedures, (b) building a culture of high performance, (c) encouraging and supporting membership and leadership in professional organizations, (d) data driven continuous improvement, (e) engaging teachers in developing the campus improvement plan, (f) individualized goal setting for faculty and students (g) individualized support for faculty and students, (h) celebrating high performance success, (i) communicating high performance expectations of stakeholders to faculty and students, (j) focusing all conversations on student achievement, (k) collecting, organizing, and sharing student performance data. All nine participants presented one or more practices during the interview process. From the data and themes of this study, I interpreted that district and building leaders of CTE magnet high schools in the southwestern United States demonstrated the presence of the sixth characteristic of transformational leadership, holding high performance expectations, in leading the integration of CTE and academic curriculum.

Finding 2: Curriculum Integration Happened Primarily at the Whole School Level Rather Than the Individual Course Level

The second finding from the study is that curriculum integration at these CTE magnet high schools happened primarily at the whole school level rather than at the individual course level. Even though federal legislation seems to point to more course level integration of rigorous academics into all CTE courses, these leaders are utilizing transformational leadership practices to integrate rigorous academics into the overall design of their schools. Study participants stated they were aware of federal legislation mandating integrating academic rigor into CTE courses and were consistently making efforts to do so; however, they cited challenges with logistics, staffing, instructor expertise, and the quality and depth of lessons as barriers that called for different solutions in the real-world application of curriculum integration. The followings sections will discuss each of these barriers individually and then outline the real-world curriculum integration practices taking place at these schools.

Logistics

Study participants stated that the logistics of integrating academic rigor from multiple academic disciplines (math, science, and language arts) into every CTE course were very challenging. Trying to ensure that high level math, science, and language arts skills were built into every CTE course was very difficult. All nine participants indicated that certain logistical challenges made it nearly impossible to integrate high level core math, science, and language arts skills into every CTE course. Some of the examples from the data were: (a) finding common planning time, (b) cross curricular connections,

(c) class schedules, (d) teachers schedules, (e) extracurriculars activities, (f) common rubrics, (g) grading, (h) contract time, (i) core mapping, and (j) multiple CTE programs.

Staffing

Study participants stated that staffing challenges were a major barrier to the consistent integration of academic rigor into CTE courses. At the start of the 2023–2024 school year, there were over 1,000 open teaching positions in the school district in which the study took place. All nine participants indicated that certain staffing challenges made it nearly impossible to integrate high level core math, science, and language arts skills into every CTE course.

Instructor Expertise

Study participants stated that instructor expertise was a barrier to the consistent integration of academic rigor into CTE courses. All nine participants indicated that certain challenges with instructor expertise made it nearly impossible to integrate high level core math, science, and language arts skills into every CTE course. Some examples from the data were: (a) problems with CTE teacher knowledge, (b) CTE teacher staffing, (c) CTE teacher professional development, (d) teacher resentment, (e) credentials, (f) CTE teachers were content experts, not grammar experts, (g) CTE teachers were content experts, not reading teachers, and (h) CTE teachers were content experts, not math teachers.

Quality and Depth of Lessons

Study participants stated that developing the quality and depth of lessons was a barrier to the consistent integration of academic rigor into CTE courses. All nine

participants indicated that certain challenges with developing the quality and depth of lessons made it nearly impossible to integrate high level core math, science, and language arts skills into every CTE course. Some examples from the data were: (a) problems with forced connections, (b) lower quality lessons, (c) lack of common planning and preparation time, (d) lack of intervention time, (e) multiple professional learning communities, (f) lack of expertise, (g) lack of confidence, and (h) lack of trust.

Real-World Application

According to the study participants, due to the many challenges of integrating academic rigor into every CTE course, alternative ways of integrating academic rigor into the programming at these schools had taken place. While all but one of the study participants stated they are committed to continuing to improve the integration of academics into as many individual CTE courses as possible, all stated that curriculum integration at the schools they lead happens in a variety of different ways. Some examples from the data were: (a) project-based learning, (b) cross-curricular connections, (c) local and national competition teams, (d) everyone teaching their own subject well, (e) internships, (f) presentations, (g) student CTE organizations, (h) student leadership organizations, (i) industry connections, (j) trust in individual subject/course experts, and (k) common cross curricular rubrics. In a nutshell, these leaders stated that the overall design of the school was more important to curriculum integration than insisting that every CTE course have specific integration requirements. They stated that the overall career focus of these types of magnet high schools combined with holding high expectations every course be taught well was more important than individual course

integration. They all stated the challenges listed above made the type of individual course integration mandated in federal legislation nearly impossible under current circumstances. Additionally, these leaders stated that the curriculum integration that is taking place through the overall design of these schools is very effective and is leading to high level results.

Finding 3: Leaders Experienced Similar Challenges and Successes

The third finding from the study is that often what the district and building leaders in the CTE magnet schools in this large urban school district viewed as the primary challenges and successes were similar. Those common issues are addressed in the following sections.

Hiring CTE Teachers

A central finding that emerged from the data was that all leaders experienced difficulties in hiring qualified and effective CTE teachers. In addition, all leaders stated that it was a barrier to providing high quality curriculum integration. Leaders reported that the salaries for teaching are very low when compared to the salaries that most credentialled CTE professionals could receive in their field of expertise were a barrier to hiring. Leaders also reported that the demands of having to learn classroom management, pedagogy, and core academic curriculum often lead to turnover, creating an unending cycle of hiring and training. Leaders stated that one of the keys to integrating curriculum is consistency of team collaboration over time. The inability to hire teachers with the skills and willingness to work at a much lower salary than those in their field made integration much more challenging.

Retaining Teachers

Another key finding is that the retaining of teachers was as much a barrier to integration as hiring teachers was. Leaders stated that even when they were fortunate enough to find and hire a very qualified CTE professional, they often lost that person within the first two years. They stated that often the professionals were able to obtain other positions in their fields with higher salaries or they simply were surprised by the challenge of classroom management and the other communication and presentation skills that teaching required. The extra time they were asked to put into developing those skills was often too overwhelming. Then, each time a teacher leaves and a new teacher is found, the training process must essentially start over and any sense of consistency or progress that had been made with integration essentially had to begin again.

Carving Out Time for Collaboration on Curriculum Planning

Another common challenge in the findings was that leaders had difficulty carving out enough time for the types of extensive collaboration required to implement core academics into every CTE course. To begin with, leaders at most of these schools had as many as 10 different CTE pathways they were managing. Ideally, the teachers in one of those programs would have to have weekly collaborative time with a language arts team, a math team, and a science team. However, leaders reported that they were lucky if they could provide enough time for those collaborative meetings to take place during contract time more than once a month. Leaders stated that without quality time to plan effective integration of lessons, the process often became forced and haphazard.

Carving Out Time for Professional Development

In addition to having difficulty carving out time for collaboration, finding time for professional development of CTE teachers during contract time was also a challenge. Leaders stated that one of the challenges that exacerbated all the issues mentioned above was the inability to get substitute teachers to cover classes on professional development days. Even when there were high quality professional development opportunities available, which leaders were willing to pay for and teachers were willing to attend, the participation was often limited by the fact that there were not enough substitute teachers available to cover classrooms. Without access to professional development to help teams of teachers learn how to collaborate to integrate curriculum effectively, the quality of integration was once again diminished.

Moving to Standards-Based Teaching

Several leaders reported that the district moving to standards-based teaching had created yet another challenge to hiring, retaining, and training teachers that would be able to effectively integrate curriculum. However, this difficulty was primarily with core teachers as opposed to CTE teachers who were much more familiar with standards-based teaching and grading because the types of training in the career fields have always been standards based. The leaders state there was a great deal of resistance to the move to standards-based teaching and grading from veteran teachers who have had different systems in place for most of their careers. Additionally, they state that the teachers who resisted were frustrated by the extra time they were being required to work with CTE teachers to integrate curriculum and that adding the change learning standards-based

teaching and grading skills was adding additional burdens of time that were making the work untenable.

Instructional Skill Deficits of CTE Experts

Another finding related to staffing challenges was the skill deficits of the CTE experts. Leaders stated that while many of the teachers they hired had extensive industry credentials, they lacked pedagogical skills, communication skills, and classroom management skills and thus their vast expertise did not always translate to quality learning environment for students. They mentioned that these CTE experts often had no formal teacher training and even when they did, curriculum integration was not emphasized in their learning programs. So often even when the leaders were able to carve out collaboration time for CTE teachers with core academic teams, the lack of academic content knowledge prevented the CTE experts from being able to effectively integrate core academic learning into their lessons.

Disconnect Between Trade Unions and CTE Programs

Several teachers reported that another barrier to quality integration was a disconnection between what the schools were trying to accomplish and what trade unions perceived was taking place. These leaders stated that while the trade unions should have been a source for teachers, expertise, and partnerships, they were instead disinterested at best and antagonistic at worst. Leaders stated that the trade unions they had approached lacked an understanding of what the schools were trying to accomplish and underestimated the quality of the training they were providing and that in turn led to an

inability to access the people and resources the leaders could have used to improve integration.

District Approval of New Curriculum Programs

Three leaders mentioned that another challenge was the bureaucracy that had to be overcome when seeking to adopt a new curriculum was another challenge to integration. The leaders reported that when they had taken the time to participate in professional development or attend conferences (particularly when it was industry based) and found new cutting-edge practices and curriculum, the strict state guidelines for CTE curriculum made it very difficult to adapt to industry changes in a timely manner. One leader mentioned having found a CTE program course that had fully integrated core science, language, and math into every lesson and yet she stated it would likely take a minimum of three years to get the curriculum adoption of that program approved.

Community Understanding of CTE Magnet School Mission

A final common barrier stated by leaders was that the communities understanding of the magnet schools' mission was a barrier to curriculum integration. The leaders reported that often, the primary reason for parents to send their students to magnet school was in hopes of gaining CTE certification for higher paying jobs. They are sometimes less concerned about integrating high level rigorous core academics into the programs because they do not see the value in the college readiness portion of the curriculum since their children do not intend to go to college. Leaders stated that this belief often led to a lack of community support for rigorous academics and the integration of curriculum which challenges students.

Finding 4: Leaders Used a Variety of Methods for Overcoming Challenges and Celebrating Successes

The 4th finding from the study is that the responses from district and building leaders of CTE magnet high schools in this large urban school district regarding solutions and how they celebrated and built upon their successes were quite different. Those differences are addressed in the following sections.

Varied Approaches to Overcoming Challenges

Leaders reported a wide variety of ways in which they overcame similar changes that their schools faced regarding curriculum integration. Regarding the challenge of finding time for important curriculum integration needs like collaboration and professional development, the solutions were often as varied as the leaders. For example, one leader paid for more collaboration on curriculum development with extra days during the summer; however, another leader insisted that all the time carved out for collaboration must take place during the school year and during regular contract time as teachers were already burned out. Yet another found ways to have common departmental prep periods during the day. Also, some leaders still found ways to provide quarterly pull-out days with subs for teachers in common areas. Finally, another leader had solved the challenge by hiring instructional coaches who me with individual teachers during preps and PLCs during designated collaboration times to improve the quality of curriculum integration design.

Similarly, while all administrators agreed that hiring and retaining issues were by far the biggest challenges to leading curriculum integration, the best solutions for those

challenges were varied. One leader stated the most important way to retain teachers was to ensure that their course schedules were optimal and that teachers were not asked to do any work outside of contract time. Another said that developing trust regarding job performance was the key to teacher retention. Two leaders stated that maximizing pay and providing leadership advancement within the school was the best way to hire and retain teachers. One other leader stated that providing high levels of individualized support was the most important factor in retention. Again, many other administrators reported that it was really a combination of many factors that need to come together to improve hiring and retention. While all participants recognized that hiring and teacher retention is a challenge nationally, and that it is the primary factor preventing schools from delivering consistently high levels of curriculum integration, the best ideas for addressing those issues are unique to each school and administrator philosophy.

Varied Approaches to Celebrating Successes

As for building upon and celebrating success, the methods and opportunities for doing so were many and varied. One leader stated it was most important to squeeze as much leverage as possible from a national award that was presented to his school. He mentioned how getting that message out into the district and wider community was essential in ensuring that the right people wanted to be teaching at the school. He stated that having the right people in the classrooms was the single most important factor in ensuring high levels of curriculum integration take place and that sharing that information with the public was a key factor in getting those good people to the school.

However, other administrators felt less confident about awards and accolades for their schools being the biggest successes and did not feel that celebrating the awards was essential. For example, one leader stated that it was connecting everyone in the school with the data and constantly communicating and celebrating progress within the school itself that lead to the biggest gains—even involving the students in the celebrations of the improvement in certifications and academic scores on both state and national standardized tests. This leader stated that doing so engaged the entire school community in the process of insisting on high quality curriculum integration and rigor and attracted higher quality teachers who were committed to doing so. Another leader focused on a culture of celebrating success and openly discussing student performance across the wider school community—even going so far as to utilize a type of in school social media phone app that celebrated end of level test scores, grades, award-winning national student organization teams and individuals, and industry certification completions. The app awarded students points/tokens for both academic and CTE accomplishments that were redeemable for rewards within the school such as tickets to events, gift cards, and school apparel. That leader stated,

> We build that culture of, hey, this is important. This is something that you should be concentrating on. We teamed up with the student council and they did a whole lunchtime activity about MAPS scores and, you know, taking maps seriously and doing like little treats and goodies with that. Then, when they got their scores, kids that made their specific growth scores, were celebrated and they came and got prizes. We're actually using this program called Five Star Student. It's kind of

an activities-based app. They also get points for their growth and other academic and CTE based growth activities in that app, and they can actually redeem those points for different things like a free yearbook or free tickets to prom or free things like that.

Limitations of the Study

There a several limitations to this study: (a) this researcher is a novice, (b) the study has a strong regional focus, (b) the study was conducted in one large urban school district, (c) the study has a small sample size, and (d) there is limited literature about this topic. To address these limitations, I: (a) limited the proposed basic qualitative study to nine school administrators, allowing for in-depth interviews, (b) maintained an audit trail, allowing others to understand the decision-making processes, (c) provided thick and rich description, allowing readers to make informed judgments about the transferability of the research findings to diverse contexts, and (d) utilized convenience sampling to select principals at CTE magnet high schools and/or district-level CTE administrators of CTE high schools who volunteered for semi structured interviews (see Creswell, 2013).

Recommendations

Leithwood et al. (2020) stated that the next stage of scholarship on school leadership needs to extend what is known to explore in greater depth how school leaders enact certain practices, what those practices are, and their resulting impact. While the finding of this basic qualitative study determined that six characteristics of transformational leadership were evident in building and district level leadership of curriculum integration in one school district in the southwestern United States, their

resulting impact was measured primarily in anecdotal responses from the leaders being studied. I interpreted from the data which showed, that while all six characteristics were present in the leadership practices of the participants who were studied, they were not all applied in the exact same way or to the exact same degree. One recommendation is that a similar study be conducted in these schools to collect data from teachers regarding their perceptions of the transformational leadership practices being utilized by district and building leaders. Additionally, it is recommended that a quantitative study to measure the impact of curriculum integration on student achievement be conducted in these schools.

Implications

This basic qualitative study contributes to research about the experiences of district and building leaders who are leading the curriculum integration process at CTE magnet high schools. One implication of this study is that positive social change may occur when district and building leaders use transformational leadership to guide curriculum integration. The study suggests that transformational leadership practices may influence the integration of CTE and academic curriculum in positive ways. By involving teams of professionals and community stakeholders in the decision-making process regarding the concepts of curriculum integration students may become more college and career ready.

Conclusion

The key to a strong democracy lies in the quality of the education of our children. When Dewey and Prosser started the debate about what was best for society over 100 years ago, the United States was set on a path to continually grapple with what would be

best for the long-lasting prosperity of Americans and democracy itself. For now, legislators and executive branch leaders seem to agree that the future depends upon increasing 21st Century CCR standards for all students so that our young people can meet the challenges and take advantage of the opportunities of our rapidly progressing technological world. For example, just since this researcher's dissertation process began 5 years ago, artificial intelligence (AI) seemed to be a long way in the future and yet, just within the last 12 months, it has already arrived; many leading business executives now believe AI could replace as 73 million jobs (46% of all existing jobs) in the United States alone by 2030. As if the rapidly changing technological and economic circumstances aren't daunting enough, exactly what constitutes 21st Century CCR is constantly changing and remains elusive, while individual states have been left alone to determine what constitutes CCR in their schools as well as determine how best to assess progress toward those goals. Thus, the stakes for finding better ways for leading the preparation of our children for 21st Century colleges and careers have never been higher.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore, through the lens of transformational leadership, the experiences of district and building level administrators at existing CTE magnet high schools in the southwestern United States who have led the integration of academic and CTE curriculum. I conducted this qualitative study to address the problem that K-12 administrators in the United States are struggling to integrate academic and CTE as required by ESSA and Perkins V legislation. The findings of this study provide qualitative evidence showing a) the presence of all six transformational leadership characteristics in the leadership practices of all study participants, and b)

curriculum integration happened primarily at the whole school level rather than at the individual course level, (c) leaders experienced similar challenges and successes, and (d) leaders used a variety of methods for overcoming challenges and celebrating successes.

At the time of this study, there was not a great deal of support to suggest that integrating core academic curriculum into every CTE course was an effective way to increase CCR. Since then, there have been no large-scale studies to show that the situation has changed. ESSA was scheduled to be re-authorized in 2021. However, the COVID pandemic has resulted in a delay of that reauthorization. Also, the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act, which was the reauthorization of Perkins 2006 legislation, is scheduled to be reauthorized in 2024. This study suggests that prior to the next reauthorization or ESSA and Perkins legislation, educational and political leaders should review the existing data regarding the real-world application of curriculum integration practices and provide greater flexibility regarding the methods SEAs can utilize to continue to improve CCR in the United States, and a more standardized way to evaluate the effectiveness of such programs. In addition, SEAs should review the existing data and sponsor additional studies to determine best practices regarding the integration of CTE and academic curriculum to ensure greater equity and access for all students while also improving CCR across the board. By ignoring existing data, leaders are creating untenable requirements for educators and failing to meet the educational needs of students in the 21st century. As we rise to meet these challenges, research studies like this one will be important so that we can take the best knowledge we have about current education leadership practices and be clear about what does and does

not work, because it is becoming more and more clear—we do not have any time to waste.

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Appendix A: Study Approval Form

Organization Name

Organization Email Address

Organization Phone Number

Date

The doctoral student, Kelly Jacob Shewmake is conducting a dissertation study and is approved to collect interview data from leaders (supervisors, board members, PTA leaders, community partners, state department personnel, and similar decision-makers) in support of that effort, in addition to analyzing internal, deidentified organization records* appropriate to release for this purpose.

*At the discretion of the organization's leadership, the student may analyze deidentified records including: aggregate personnel or student records that have been deidentified before being provided to the doctoral student, other deidentified operational records, teaching materials, deidentified lesson plans, meeting minutes, digital/audio/video recordings created by the organization for its own purposes, training materials, manuals, reports, partnership agreements, questionnaires that were collected under auspices of the partner organization as part of continuous improvement efforts (SIPs, for example), and other internal documents.

I understand that, as per the student doctoral program requirements, the student will publish a dissertation in ProQuest as a doctoral capstone (withholding the names of the organization and participating individuals), as per the following ethical standards:

a. The student is required to maintain confidentiality by removing names and key pieces of evidence/data that might disclose an organization's or individual's identity.

b. The student will be responsible for complying with policies and requirements regarding data collection (including the need for the organization's internal ethics/regulatory approval, if applicable).

c. Via an Interview Consent Form, the student will describe to interviewees how the data will be used in the dissertation study and how all interviewees' privacy will be protected.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research activities in this setting.

Signed,

Authorization Official Name

Title

Appendix B: Consent Form

Consent Form for Minimal-risk, Work-related Interview

You are invited to take part in an interview for a research study that I am conducting as part of my doctoral program.

Interview Procedures:

If you agree to be part of this study, I will be asking you interview questions about your professional work and audio-recording your responses. Opportunities for clarifying statements will be available after I analyze the interviews (via a process called member checking).

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this study would not pose any risks beyond those of typical daily life. This study's aim is to provide data and insights that could be valuable to those in professional roles related to yours. Once the analysis is complete, the researcher will share the overall results by publishing the final study on the Scholarworks website.

Privacy:

I am required by my university to protect the identities of interviewees and their organizations. I am only allowed to share interviewee identity or contact info as needed with Walden University supervisors (who are also required to protect your privacy). Any reports, presentations, or publications related to this study will share general patterns from the data, without sharing the identities of individual interviewees or their organizations. If I were to share this dataset with another researcher in the future, the dataset would contain no identifiers so this would not involve another round of obtaining informed consent. Data will be kept secure by password protection. The interview transcripts will be kept for at least 5 years, as required by my university. The collected information will not be used for any purpose outside of this study.

Contacts and Questions:

If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Walden University's Research Participant Advocate at 612-312-1210. Walden University's ethics approval number for this study is 06-02-23-0689822.

Please share any questions or concerns you might have at this time. If you agree to be interviewed as described above, please say "yes" for the audio-recording when I ask, "Do you agree to be interviewed for this study?"

Appendix C: Semistructured Interview Questions

1. (RQ1) Please describe the organizational structure of your CTE Magnet high school(s).
2. (RQ1) Please describe the overall approach to integrated curriculum used at your school or in your district.
3. (RQ1) Thinking specifically about curriculum integration, please describe how you have fostered the development of vision and goals in your district or at your school.
4. (RQ1) Thinking specifically about curriculum integration, please describe how you have developed a collaborative decision-making structure in your district or at your school.
5. (RQ1) Thinking specifically about curriculum integration, please describe how you have symbolized good professional practice in your district or at your school.
6. (RQ1) Thinking specifically about curriculum integration, please describe how you have provided individualized support in your district or at your school.
7. (RQ1) Thinking specifically about curriculum integration, please describe how you have provided intellectual stimulation in your district or at your school.
8. (RQ1) Thinking specifically about curriculum integration, please describe how you have held high performance expectations in your district or at your school.
9. (RQ2) Please describe the challenges you have faced as you have led the integration of curriculum at your school or in your district.
10. (RQ2) Please describe how you have attempted to overcome the challenges you have faced as you have led the integration of curriculum at your school or in your district.

11. (RQ3) Please describe the successes you have experienced as you have led the integration of curriculum at your school or in your district.
12. (RQ3) Please describe how you have celebrated and built upon the successes you have experienced as you have led the integration of curriculum at your school or in your district.

Appendix D: Basic Qualitative Study Protocol

Rationale

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the experiences of district and building level administrators at existing CTE magnet high schools in the Southwestern United States who have led the integration of academic and CTE curriculum using transformational leadership.

Research Questions

1. How have district and building level administrators at existing CTE high schools in the Southwestern United States led the integration of academic CTE curriculum using transformational leadership?
2. What challenges did district and building level administrators at existing CTE high schools in the Southwestern United States experience as they led the integration of academic CTE curriculum using transformational leadership?
3. What successes did district and building level administrators at existing CTE high schools in the Southwestern United States experience as they led the integration of academic CTE curriculum using transformational leadership?

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

The following six characteristics of transformational leadership as described by Leithwood and Jantzi (1997) were used to define the nature of the leadership of the curriculum integration being employed by the district and school leaders being studied: 1) Fostering development of vision and goals: behavior on the part of the leader aimed at identifying new opportunities for his or her school; developing, articulating, and inspiring

others with his or her vision of the future; and building consensus on school goals and priorities, 2) Developing a collaborative decision-making structure: behavior on the part of the leader aimed at promoting staff involvement in decision making; and facilitating the distribution of leadership among staff, 3) Symbolizing good profession practice: behavior on the part of the leader that sets examples for staff to follow in interactions with staff and students, and demonstrates openness to change based on new understandings, 4) Providing individualized support: behavior on the part of the leader that indicates respect for staff and concern about their personal feelings and needs, 5) Providing intellectual stimulation: behavior on the part of the leader that challenges staff to re-examine some of the assumptions about their work and rethink how it can be performed, 6) Holding high performance expectations: behavior that demonstrates the leader's expectations for excellence, quality, and high performance on the part of staff. This framework is implied in the research questions and will inform the data analysis and discussion of the findings. These characteristics will be used to develop interview questions to explore the experiences of district and building level administrators at existing CTE high schools in the Southwestern United States who have led the integration of academic and CTE curriculum using transformational leadership.

Data Collection Procedures

1. Collect data through semi-structured interviews with each school administrator.
2. Review and analyze the data provided by the school administrators through: (a) interview responses.

3. Analyze and make meaning of the data collected through sorting into patterns, concepts, and themes.
4. The data analysis will also reflect the concepts from the literature review and conceptual framework.
5. A thick, rich description will be summarized to reflect the strategies used to lead the curriculum integration process.

Participant Selection

1. Participants will be selected using convenience sampling.
2. Eight to ten district and/or high school administrators will be selected to participate in the proposed basic qualitative study.
3. Criteria for participants to participate: (a) experience working with at a CTE high school or as a district CTE leader who oversees a CTE high school and (b) a minimum of two years' experience as a school administrator.
4. All correspondence and communication will occur through my Walden email.
5. A list of potential school administrators will be generated through locating publicly available email addresses on the school district website.
6. A consent form will provide the following information: (a) the purpose of the proposed basic qualitative study, (b) procedures to be followed during the proposed basic qualitative study and (c) benefits of the proposed basic qualitative study.

7. School administrators meeting the criteria to participate in the proposed basic qualitative study will be asked to reply through my Walden email with the words, "I consent."
8. Each interview should last 45-60 minutes.
9. School administrators will be asked to select the time and location of the interview.

Data Analysis Procedures

1. Using a manual process of coding I sorted, organized, and analyzed the data responses using Microsoft Excel. I looked for frequently used words or phrases from each interview.
2. Collected data was placed into an Excel document which are stored on a thumb drive in a locked cabinet in my office.
3. I used an inductive form of qualitative analysis where findings emerge from the data. (Yin, 2018).
4. Through open coding, a preliminary list of patterns, concepts, and themes were developed that reflected the interview responses from the school administrators and additional data sources.
5. Through axial coding, the process of dissecting and reassembling, additional concepts and themes emerged from those identified during open coding.
6. Through selective coding, larger themes emerged.
7. I transcribed the data generated through audio recording verbatim into text.
8. Triangulation was used to maintain credibility.

9. A review of each transcript was created and sent to the school administrator for verification of accuracy of their statements as a final debriefing and exit to the proposed basic qualitative study. Responses to questions and comments were handled at that time.
10. At the completion of the proposed basic qualitative study, audio was destroyed. Transcripts and any information regarding the proposed basic qualitative study will be stored in a locked file for five (5) years as required by the IRB.