LEADERSHIP IN ACTION:
THE INFLUENCE OF LEADERSHIP PRACTICES ON REFORM

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore how schools and administrators can be most effective in meeting the needs of students while managing accountability measures such as the Common Core State Standards and ensuing Missouri Learning Standards. Although literature regarding leadership theories is prevalent (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Northouse, 2010; Sergiovanni, 1996), there remains a gap in how quality leadership translates into effective schools with high achieving children (Wallace Foundation, 2012). For struggling schools to advance reform efforts, research must determine how school leaders can best support student achievement throughout the process.

The present study sought teacher perceptions of effective leadership behaviors necessary for successful reform. Learning leadership (LL) was the comparative tool utilized to better understand effective governance. Employing a mixed method study, the researcher provided an online, single instance survey with embedded open-ended questions to obtain practitioner insights to explore possible relationships between LL and student achievement amidst reform.

The results indicated a potential relationship between the characteristics of educational leaders and positive reform results, however, further research is required to verify the actual implications of each LL behavior. In addition, gender appeared to have a significant role in the perception of practitioner insight, with females being prone to greater agreement of a successful link to instructional support. It is possible that a gap still remains between behaviors deemed supportive by teachers and those displayed by administrators. Additionally, the study highlighted the need for further study of administrative perceptions throughout large-scale transition, and the content of administrative degree programs offered by colleges and universities.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Background

For years, American schools enjoyed a traditional, industrial age approach to instruction; however, today's schools continue to struggle transitioning to the knowledge era (Marquardt, 2011; Robinson, 2011; Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007). In the early 1980's, the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education [NCEE], 1983) identified the United States education system was failing. Furthermore, the 1983 NCEE report cited traditional strongholds and a lack of classroom ingenuity as major contributors to American students falling behind in the global economy. The commission declared the United States had lost focus on the basic purposes of schooling; thus, the federal government was compelled to take corrective action (Vinovskis, 2009).

In 2001, President George W. Bush, Jr. ushered in the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB, 2002). NCLB was the first sizeable reform intended to make schools responsible for teaching and learning. Utilizing massive accountability features and stringent guidelines, the design of the legislation ensured schools measured and documented outcomes of student success. This outcomes-based emphasis (ESSA, 2018) focused on closing the achievement gaps between ethnic and low-income students, while calling for an equal education for all children.

The United States Department of Education revisited *A Nation at Risk* (NCEE, 1983) when *A Nation Accountable* (USDE, 2008) was commissioned 25 years later. The latter report recognized improvements since 1983, while clarifying that the United States

was more at risk than noted previously. Although it was the intent of NCLB (2002) to improve teacher quality, *A Nation Accountable* observed that the focus had fallen on resource inputs rather than learning outcomes, rendering NCLB less effective than was intended. The weaknesses of NCLB became the impetus for a growing reform effort (NGA, 2010).

In 2009 the National Governors Association (NGA) began work on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) initiative (NGA, 2010). According to NGA documents, the "[s]tandards provide consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them" (2010, para.1). The standards intended to resolve flaws in NCLB (2002) and develop a method of teaching basic math, English, reading, and writing skills to ensure American students graduated equipped to compete in the world market.

The original implementation of the CCSS was to occur in 2014-2015 (NGA, 2010), but required a large-scale paradigm shift. Brain-based instructional approaches to ensure all students achieved basic proficiency within the standards (ASCD, 2012) replaced old instructional pedagogies. To further complicate matters, states began turning from the original national CCSS effort to their own interpretation of the standards (DeNisco, 2017; Zubrzycki, 2016). In 2017, Missouri implemented the Missouri Learning Standards (MLS) to meet the reform requirements. Administrators concluded instructional change of this magnitude required systemic change, expanding and redefining the role of leaders. The following overarching questions for educators and school leaders emerged. What leadership and instructional approaches could best implement reform while meeting the federal and state student success indicators of the

reform efforts, was there a specific theoretical leadership model that would implement transition most effectively, and what did teachers need from instructional leaders to implement sustainable reform of this magnitude?

Conceptual Underpinnings of the Study

The leader as an educational change agent (Bush, 2007; Elmore, 2004; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Senge, Lichtenstein, Kaeufer, Bradbury, & Caroll, 2007; SREB, 2011; Wallace Foundation, 2007, 2012) was scrutinized by analyzing generic and educational leadership theories (Elmore, 2004; Firestone & Riehl, 2005; Robinson, 2006) and the potential to create sustainable school reform. Additionally, considered was whether theoretical leadership development concentrated on and provided for the real needs of teachers and students in the contemporary classroom (Creswell, 2009; Robinson, 2006).

In an effort to bridge gaps in educational research (Robinson, 2006), this study chose to prioritize the practitioner experience as the guiding focus for effective leadership practice rather than predetermining a theory to guide the relationship between leadership and achievement. The convergence of constructs prompted the exploration of practitioner perspectives to explore the type and characteristics of leadership required to impact the practice of teaching and learning effectively. The present study determined it was essential to establish the voice of the practitioner.

The research uncovered the existence of four applicable leadership theories undergirding a framework for understanding theoretical perspectives guiding the current education system. The foundational premise postulated leadership as key to organizational change and improvement (Hattie, 2009, 2012; Knapp, Copland, Honig,

Plecki, & Portin, 2006; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Lieberman, Falk, & Alexander, 1994; Rosenholtz, 1989; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). Although a plethora of valuable leadership theories exist, this study reviewed authentic, distributive, instructional and learning leadership theories for application of features associated with generating successful educational reform.

Authentic Leadership

As the call for accountable and responsible leadership increases, authentic leadership provided a viable framework for guiding reform (Freeman & Auster, 2011). Begley (2001) described authentic leadership theory as "professionally effective, ethically sound, and consciously reflective practices" (p. 353) and "a genuine kind of leadership – a hopeful, open-ended, visionary and creative response to social circumstances" (p. 354). Four characteristics of an authentic leader appeared in a variety of research (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009; Cooper, Scandura, & Schriescheim, 2005; Shamir & Eilam, 2005): (a) objectively analyzing relevant data before making decisions, (b) internalized moral perspective, or high integrity (George, & Sims, 2007), (c) relational transparency, and (d) self-awareness. Developed upon a moral foundation (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999), Freeman and Auster (2011) cited values as the primary cornerstone of responsible, ethical leadership, a driving force behind authentic leadership.

Strong opposition to this theoretical leadership approach, however, was also documented in research. Researchers (Ford & Harding, 2011; Garger, 2008; Shamir & Eilam, 2005) argued authentic leadership was easier to recognize than define, conceding that definitions of the theory remain arbitrary. Additionally, the commitment necessary to be authentic and understand oneself, and the motivations behind individual actions is

more difficult than it appears (Freeman & Auster, 2011). Hayes and Comer (2010) claimed authenticity was not an innate quality "but a quality that others attribute to you. The paradox is that you need to be who you are (authentic) while also adapting your behaviors to the situation and follower audience" (p. 20).

Additionally, Ford and Harding (2011) found fault in the presumption that a follower must choose to model him/herself primarily on the leader, who is modeling him/herself on the ideals and values of the organization and self. Questions like these caused researchers to consider whether authentic leadership could be a truly moral leadership approach (Ford & Harding, 2011). These were significant factors in the determination to set aside this leadership theory and ascertain if another theory was more concretely applicable to the purpose of the present study.

Distributive Leadership

Over time, leadership researchers (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009; Greenleaf, 1977; Yukl, 2006) advanced and considered leadership more than a specific characteristic of one person. Numerous models identified leadership as a complex social dynamic that incorporates shared responsibility (Yukl, 2002). Burke, Marx, and Lowenstein (2012) emphasized the difficulties individual leaders and organizations face "[i]n light of current turbulent learning environments regulated by federal policy that mandates high levels of student achievement coupled with a rigorous standards-based reform movement" (p. 113). In short, no single individual possesses the knowledge or the energy to lead today's organizational settings effectively.

Unlike leader-centered models in which leadership is concentrated in the hands of one or a few, distributive leadership diffuses responsibility throughout the organization

(Fusarelli, Kowalski, & Petersen, 2011). Distributive leadership theorists view leadership as a collective phenomenon, or community exercise (Lumby, 2003) rather than the work of a single agent (Ross, Rix, & Gold, 2005a). The large-scale attraction to this theoretical perspective rests in the relational and dispersed views of leadership, which emphasized inclusion of organizational followers as leaders themselves (Burns, 1978; Hunt & Ropo, 1997). The core assumption that each member encapsulates leadership abilities needed by the organization at some point (Harris, 2008) enables leadership to be a fluid, emergent property utilized by individuals and groups to generate reform (Spillane, 2006).

Difficulties in understanding and implementing the theory arise as competing and conflicting interpretations of the approach result in a general breakdown of the theory to identify forms of shared or dispersed leadership - good and bad (Harris, 2008). Woods and Gronn (2009) noted schools, traditionally authoritarian, are designed to limit teacher and leader behavior. In an era of high stakes testing and accountability (Fusarelli, Kowalski, & Petersen, 2011), schools are often hesitant to involve staff in substantial change at any level. Fitzgerald and Gunter (2007) questioned whether it was possible for distributive leadership to occur in a policy climate established on strict hierarchical structures which reserves authority for the few with appropriate titles. Although distributive leadership could provide greater opportunities for members to learn from one another, data did not support a link between this theory and networking, achievement or educational outcomes (Harris, 2008; Robinson, 2008). Thus, the present study set this theory aside as well.

Authentic and distributive leadership are considered generic leadership models. Available in any organization, neither of these leadership theories includes a specific

educational component (Robinson, 2006, 2008; Stein & Spillane, 2005). Dynamic educational reform requires a leadership theory that specifically targets student performance (Bush, 2007; Robinson, 2008; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). Consequently, the present study shifted from generic to educational leadership research. The hope was that a theory would be uncovered that was relevant and focused on academic outcomes (Elmore, 2000; Robinson, 2006).

Instructional Leadership

The first theory reviewed was instructional leadership theory. This model targets the acts of teaching and learning through intentional support of the professional development of teachers (Southworth, 2002). Researchers (Bush & Glover, 2002; Lunenburg, 2010; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Stronge, Richard, & Catano, 2008) consider instructional leadership a viable theory in executing federal mandates due to the direction of influence – focusing on the behavior of teachers working with students (Bush 2007). In 2001, the National Association of Elementary Principals defined instructional leadership about learning communities focused on making adult learning a priority and advancing a culture of collaboration.

However, interpretation of the theory has expanded to incorporate a collaborative learning process in which student success became the objective of the *total* educational community (Jenkins, 2009; Lunenburg, 2010; Stronge, Richard, & Catano, 2008). Similarly, Brazer and Bauer (2013) established a comprehensive working definition of instructional leadership as "the effort to improve teaching and to learn for PK-12 students by managing effectively, addressing the challenges of diversity, guiding teacher learning, and fostering organizational change" (p. 650). The theory espouses that leadership be a

top-down process as an administrator's vision for success shifts to those in the building and community (Jenkins, 2009).

Previous pressure on principals had been to learn new business skills, with little emphasis on understanding knowledge of curriculum, assessment, and pedagogy (Stein & Nelson, 2003). It is often assumed building leaders are experienced teachers, and therefore have sufficient understanding of teaching and learning (Robinson, 2006). However, previous knowledge did not guarantee understanding in light of wide-scale reform efforts such as the CCSS (NGA, 2010). Instructional leadership requires a broader knowledge base than one individuals teaching experience (Brazer & Bauer, 2013). Just as the context of education changes, so does the expectation of improvement, which in turn highlights the weaknesses of these poor leadership assumptions (Robinson, 2006).

Applying instructional leadership theory as a frame for this research proved too narrow for current needs imposed by educational reform efforts. As noted, instructional leadership is not without criticism; questions remain as to the viability of measuring leadership in its purest form when the context in which the instructional leader exists has a clear bearing on the outcome of the research (Brazer & Bauer, 2013; Cuban, 2013). Also, the overarching ideal of the theory, that school improvement is a top-down approach, does not compliment the philosophical parameters of the present study in which instructional needs are believed to be dictated in the classroom and shared as a community for effective support – a bottom-up approach.

Learning Leadership

Thus, the researcher chose learning leadership theory as a lens to view effective leadership as a framework for examining leaders and leadership capacity, as well as the

subsequent impact on teaching and learning (Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliot, & Cravens, 2009; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Patterson, 1993; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). Encapsulating many of the same characteristics as instructional leadership, learning leadership theory is more explicit in its methodology. Toll (2010) specified "[w]hile an instructional leader pays attention to the planning, implementation, and evaluation of instruction, a learning leader focuses on what is learned and how it is learned. These roles are not mutually exclusive, and they both have value" (p.50).

For this study, learning leadership was defined as the theoretical perspective in which learning becomes the primary method of leading (Goldring, et al., 2009) and keeping pace with a fluctuating environment (Schein, 1996). Through the collaborative "process of influencing others to achieve mutually agreed upon purposes for the organization" (Patterson, 1993, p.3) substantial achievement could be measured to federally established levels. Although other theories such as instructional leadership contain similar elements, the significant appeal of learning leadership is the result of principles and people working in unison.

Research shows that leadership characteristics serve as the framework for understanding the significance and impact of management on the learning process (Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliot, & Cravens, 2009; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Patterson, 1993; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). Learning leaders are perpetual learners who revere all learning – student, staff, personal, and collective. They support and challenge instructors to critically consider instruction while promoting an atmosphere of professional responsibility and

collaboration. Knowledgeable about cutting edge instructional practices are an integral part of the curriculum conversation. Thus, the educational leader demands high standards and rigorous student learning goals across all programs of study (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Finally, effective learning leaders support and expand internal and external accountability by holding the total learning community responsible for collective goals.

As discussed, each of the four leadership theories reviewed had merit in organizational change. Top-down theoretical models are considered questionable by some researchers (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Robinson, 2006). Leithwood warned of the "need to be skeptical about the 'leadership by adjective' literature" (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004, p. 8). Robinson concurred, having documented that a significant portion of educational leadership literature debates the merits of theories or evaluates the extent in which educational leaders exemplify the qualities of a theory through empirical evidence rather than offering evidence of impact on learning. Therefore, instructional needs were an integral consideration of this study.

In the modern market, organizations are dependent upon staff input, or human capital, making it judicious to consider building a culture of ownership for all stakeholders through sharing information, involving all staff in decisions, and breaking down hierarchies (Rosen, Case, & Staubus, 2005). Alton-Lee (2003) and Darling-Hammond, and Bransford (2005) therefore consider the difference teachers make in the accomplishments of their students as valuable in establishing a theory or identifying characteristics that are in agreement with current theories of practice. Regard should be given to all members of an organization – learning about and focusing on the very

qualities that help students do well, helping the district meet federal accountability measures (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Rosen, Case, & Staubus, 2005).

Consequently, learning leadership theory as a lens to view effective leadership provided a framework for comparing instructional needs of the practitioner and the type of leader or leadership capacity necessary for success in the classroom (Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliot, & Cravens, 2009; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Patterson, 1993; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). The perception of how leadership participation encourages basic skill acquisition is significant as schools continue to struggle with sustainable change (Fullan, 2000; Senge, Lichtenstein, Kaeufer, Bradbury, & Carroll, 2007). This research focused on how building leadership could support actual classroom needs to succeed at increasing student achievement levels mandated by CCSS and implemented through the MLS.

Statement of the Problem

NCLB (2002) reauthorization was untouched for numerous years as schools that could not meet the rigid requirements were identified and sanctioned. The United States Department of Education has since afforded states flexibility from the prescriptive provisions of NCLB in exchange for state-led reforms that maintain high achievement and accountability for all students (ESSA, 2018) and the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) signed into existence by President Barrack Obama at the end of 2015, amended the ESEA of 1965 with its own set of accountability measures to be implemented in coming years (USDE, 2017). Meanwhile, administrators at the local level struggle to keep pace with the growing number of federal and state requirements as each one augments the responsibility placed upon district and building leaders to prove student

success (ASCD, 2012). Shelton (2010) recognized the "focus on effective school leadership has elevated considerably since the United States Department of Education has made improving educator effectiveness the single most important eligibility criterion" (p. 4), making further research of effective leadership practices imperative.

Of concern is how schools and administrators can effectively meet the needs of teachers, students, and federal reform. Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliott, and Cravens (2009) stated "knowing the characteristics of effective schools would be a major step toward being able to create these schools . . . that has not proven to be the case" (p. 26). Even though evidence of stylistic approaches to leadership theory are available (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009; Carbaugh, Marzano, Toth, 2013; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005), little is known regarding the impact of these theories (e.g., authentic, distributive, instructional, learning leadership) on modern school reform (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004) and how quality leadership translates into quality schools with achieving children (DeVita, Colvin, Darling-Hammond, & Haycock, 2007; Wallace Foundation, 2012).

Leithwood, Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom (2004) agreed leadership "provides a critical bridge between most educational reform initiatives, and having those reforms make a genuine difference for all students" (p. 5). Studies (Knapp, Copland, Honig, Plecki, & Portin, 2006; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Lieberman, Falk, & Alexander, 1994; Rosenholtz, 1989; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003) highlighted the empirical link between the building leader and student achievement, identifying building leadership as the second most important factor, subsequent only to teacher instruction. Moreover, Leithwood et al. recorded there were virtually no

documented cases of distressed schools turning around without talented leaders – a top-down approach to systemic change.

Although multiple factors contribute to school improvement, researchers (Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliott, & Cravens, 2009; Lieberman et al., 1994; Sheppard, 1996) concurred school leadership is essential in promoting effective in-school processes and the conditions to achieve student success. School leadership continues as the impervious component of authentic, sustainable reform, particularly in buildings with high needs. Consequently, there is an urgency to identify innovative leadership theories and characteristics that support change efforts to meet the requirements of NCLB (2002), ESEA Flexibility (USDE, 2012), and CCSS (NGA, 2010).

The United States education system is at a critical juncture in which schools must produce students able to function in the world economy or be left behind (USDE, 2008). DeVita, Colvin, Darling-Hammond and Haycock (2007) clarified that making "the most problem-plagued schools [move] in a positive direction requires principals to have a special set of skills" (p. 10). Furthermore, DeVita et al recognized the need to be more deliberate in identifying leaders, as maintaining the right leadership makes a measurable difference in the learning outcomes of students.

Admittedly, we have much to learn about who provides the kind of leadership necessary to make significant change, how that leadership needs to be delivered within a school system, and what inspires its development (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Inquiry is necessary to identify which forms of leadership are likely to encourage learning and how leadership contributes to the process when it occurs indirectly, or outside the classroom. Robinson (2006) recognized many leadership

theories empower organizational change; however, educational research needs to identify specifically the conditions necessary for teachers to raise student achievement that in turn allow administrators to better focus skills and resources on improving instruction.

Pregot (2016) also noted in his study of preferred administrative dispositions, "[t]here is little doubt that principals need to focus on the instructional process for both the benefit of their students as well as their teachers to help them reach higher achievement levels" (p. 34). Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) indicated that research supports a positive correlation among particular types of school leadership dispositions and the academic outcomes of students. This *leadership for learning* (CCSSO, 2014) indicates the need for educational leadership preparation programs to identify and teach these dispositions to increase the likelihood of academic change early in a building administrator's tenure (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

Although the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards have existed to pinpoint the foundational core values necessary for practicing school administrators to accomplish their roles, the standards were recently restructured to highlight further the role of the administrator in the learning process (Murphy, Wilson, Anderson, Hutton, Printy, Smylie, & Supovitz, 2014), identifying administrative dispositions successful in a "learning-supportive school environment" (Pregot, 2016 p.#). The ongoing discussion of dispositions again highlights the need for additional research in support of the leadership characteristics necessary for successful school change in light of continued education reform efforts across the United States.

There is agreement that educational research should begin with evidence of how administrators and teachers make a difference in the accomplishments of their students

and end with a theory, or understanding of leadership characteristics/dispositions that support those needs (Alton-Lee, 2003; Darling-Hammond, & Bransford, 2005; Robinson, 2006). In light of this premise, it was essential that this study include the voice of the teacher to identify foundational instructional needs necessary for successful transition to the Missouri Learning Standards (MLS). Such research is critical to driving effective leadership perspectives in the midst of modern school reform.

Purpose of the Study

Exploring practices to develop and assess leaders can have a significant impact on leadership quality, and through that, on the excellence of education in schools (Glasman & Heck, 1992; Thomas, Holdaway & Ward, 2000). Although not fully researched, evaluating leaders who are successful educational change agents offers much-needed data for accountability and improves leadership practices in schools (Reeves, 2005; Waters & Grubb, 2004). Specifically, exploring a change environment can offer insight into the skill sets necessary to lead an organization through reform. Resulting data might influence the approach schools and districts take in implementing change or choosing leaders of a particular theoretical perspective, potentially improving reform results.

The ability to integrate leadership attributes into the culture of a low performing building or district could also be instrumental in future sustainability efforts (DeVita, Colvin, Darling-Hammond, & Haycock, 2007). As noted earlier, students benefit from effective leadership; however, Knapp, Copland, Honig, Plecki and Portin (2006) lamented that despite "two decades of state and federal education policy instituting learning standards and accountability measures, . . . the quality of educational leadership [at] large is neither uniformly high, nor focused to a great extent on learning" (p. 11).

This challenge indicates the need for research to target quantifiable impacts leadership has on student outcomes so change can generate improved learning.

This mixed method study was designed to investigate how leaders could best support instruction and organizational change in light of modern reform efforts. Originally, the transition to CCSS (NGA, 2010), expected to be instituted in the 2014-2015 academic year, was the naturally occurring event for which to pose the investigation. However, as CCSS was implemented, individual states began shifting away from the standards (DeNisco, 2017; Zubrzycki, 2016) and established their measures of how they would meet the accountability factors through customized state-sponsored reform (Jochim & McGuinn, 2016; Zubrzycki, 2016). Eventually, Missouri approved the Missouri Learning Standards (MLS) in 2016 (DESE, 2016) as Missouri's attempt to meet the federal reform requirements. This research chose to focus on the MLS for the opportunity to study an entire group of educators transitioning under similar expectations. The practitioner perspective identified essential leadership aptitudes that supported the improvement of classroom instruction and student achievement. These efforts should assist districts in placing well-equipped leaders with an understanding of how to best support staff and instruction for greatest academic impact in the neediest schools.

Research questions

The perception of the practitioner guided the examination of potential leadership theories to effectually implement change and support student outcomes (e.g. NCLB, ESEA, CCSS). The synthesis of the literature identified that leadership is the second most influential factor in student achievement, subsequent only to the influence of the instructor (Knapp, Copland, Honig, Plecki, & Portin, 2006; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson,

& Wahlstrom, 2004; Lieberman, Falk, & Alexander, 1994; Rosenholtz, 1989; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). The premise utilized was that learning leadership theory is a viable approach to sustaining educational reform to increase student achievement (Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliot, & Cravens, 2009; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Patterson, 1993; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). The practitioner voice verified the accuracy of this perception in a mixed method study design to establish whether learning leadership offered support of instructional practices to meet the mandates of CCSS (NGA, 2010) and MLS (DESE, 2016). The following research questions guided this study:

1. What do teachers perceive as necessary resources and learning leadership behaviors that promote the instructional objectives of the Missouri Learning Standards?
2. Is there a perceived relationship between instructional needs and the characteristics of learning leadership theory?
3. What practices do teachers identify beyond learning leadership behaviors which promote successful implementation of the Missouri Learning Standards?
4. Is there a difference in the perceptions of teachers when prioritizing resources and learning leadership behaviors to promote instructional objectives of the Missouri Learning Standards based on gender?
5. Is there a difference in the perceptions of teachers when prioritizing resources and learning leadership behaviors to promote instructional objectives of the Missouri Learning Standards based on years of teaching experiences?
6. Is there a difference in the perceptions of teachers when prioritizing resources and

learning leadership behaviors to promote instructional objectives of the Missouri Learning Standards based on areas of instructional responsibilities?

Limitations and Assumptions

The assumption that a mixed method design would strengthen the study more than qualitative or quantitative research independently framed this study (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Clark, 2007). The researcher felt that potential biases in any single method might neutralize the biases of other methods (Creswell, 2009). Still, all research has limitations and assumptions (Heppner & Heppner, 2004).

Both advantages and disadvantages were considered related to this type of study. Mertens (2010) identified several positive advantages to this method of data collection, including but not limited to: ease of data comparison and analysis, divergent population participation, anonymity, and the inexpensive nature of administering the instrument. However, researchers (Field, 2009; Fink, 2009; Gay & Airasian, 2003; Merriam, 2009; Mertens, 2010; Sapsford, 1999) again reassert the challenges in data collection of this type as well: wording may bias a respondent's answers, may be impersonal, and answers may be incomplete or poorly worded. For the present study, the methods chosen appeared to be appropriate.

Therefore, the researcher employed methods to improve the legitimacy of the study throughout the research process. Following the CCSS and MLS implementation cycles, a concurrent mixed method study provided a comprehensive analysis in which history, or timing of life experiences, did not become a detriment to the study (Creswell, 2009; Hatch, 2002). Pilot tests of the survey were conducted to establish the content validity and improve the questions and format (Creswell, 2009), along with the

establishment of reliability through a test retest format. Utilizing participants throughout the state of Missouri minimized the threat to external validity and allowed for greater cross-state generalization of inferences from the data (Creswell, 2009). Notably, survey findings were limited to the responding group, which itself may incorporate bias as the lack of participant response is an increasing problem in research overall (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003).

Additionally, limitations to the study included the complexities associated with mixed method inquiry; challenges increase when studies include both qualitative and quantitative research (Mertens, 2010). It is important to recognize that the researcher had little expertise in either research method, thereby possibly compromising the quality of the findings. Consequently, triangulation (Creswell, 2009, p. 191), or the examining of different data sources "to build a coherent justification for themes" across data sources was instrumental in verifying patterns.

Design Controls

To gather the most beneficial information in a concise period, a mixed method design was the chosen inquiry method. The target population was limited to Missouri practitioners (Mertens, 2010), to improve external validity and render the experimentally accessible population nonrandom (Hatch, 2002; Mertens, 2010). Various sampling techniques were used to establish a representative sample for increased generalization of the results across the state (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Gay, 1996; Mertens, 2010). This sample population was intended to be representative of the population of schools implementing Missouri CCSS requirements, renamed the Missouri Learning Standards

(MLS) (DESE, 2016), in "the essential, or relevant, characteristics of the population" (Fraenkel & Wallen, p. 110).

The study employed a descriptive approach to obtaining data. A single administration survey investigated the "status of some phenomenon within an identified class of people, organization, or region at a particular time" (Thomas & Brubaker, 2000, p. 112**),** and to maintain dependability, or the consistency of data collection. To encourage high participation, Survey Monkey was the web-based instrument chosen to execute the survey and follow-up emails were sent multiple times to participants to increase the return rate of the responses

For deeper understanding and a richer design (Hatch, 2002), a second, qualitative measure, was applied to the research; dialogue boxes incorporated open-ended questions, again improving external validity. Field-testing improved the validity of question protocols based upon distinct data points (Creswell, 2005; Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2009) while triangulation served as an accuracy check to verify emergent themes within the data (Creswell, 2009; Hatch, 2002; Kruger & Casey, 2009; Merriam, 2009).

Examining features substantiated throughout research increased content validity. The attributes of learning leadership included in the survey were described and presented in other research involving learning leadership theory (Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliot, & Cravens, 2009; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Patterson, 1993; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008).

Definition of Key Terms

The following terms are central to the understanding of the study. Definitions are provided for clarity of key concepts and to establish a common language (Bruffee, 1999).

Classroom teacher. Highly qualified professional educator, PK-12, in a public school who works with students in a whole class, small group (resource room) or one-on-one setting (OECD, 2012).

Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Educational standards in reading, writing, speaking and listening, language and mathematics for school/teacher use to ensure students "have the skills and knowledge they need to be successful by providing clear goals for student learning" (NGA, 2010).

Common Core State Standards initiative. A state-led effort that established a single set of clear educational standards for kindergarten through 12th grade in English language arts and mathematics that states voluntarily adopt. The standards are designed to ensure that students graduating from high school are prepared to enter credit bearing entry courses in two- or four-year college programs or enter the workforce. (NGA, 2010)

Educational Administrator/Building Level Leader. Educational administrator or building level leader are terms used interchangeably in this study. Both terms are used to designate a full-time staff member managing the day-to-day functions of a school (Bass, 1981; Lalone, 2010; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2005; Sergiovani, 2004) at any level (i.e., daycare, pre-K, K-12, career and technical education) and leading the instructional activities (Avolio, & Garner, 2005; Cuban, 2001; Tobin, 2014) of educators (Thamarasseri, 2015). These individuals hold decision-making roles (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Whalstrom, 2004; Menon, 2014; Thamarasseri, 2015; Wallace Foundation, 2013) that influence achievement by providing direction in setting the school vision (Leithwood, 1994; Tobin, 2014).

Instructional Needs. Instructional needs are a blend of the following elements that create an environment in which teaching and learning can occur, such as: autonomy to make necessary shifts in curriculum at the building and classroom level; budget allocation for research-driven curriculum, classroom technology, and proper assessment items for academic interventions; instructional materials such as reusables, project supplies, and basics like pencils, paper, and textbooks to support innovative learning activities; appropriate assignment of personnel; and quality professional development for staff (Groom, McDaniels, & Fryer, 1977).

Learning leadership theory. The theoretical perspective in which learning is the primary method of leading (Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliott, & Cravens, 2009) and keeping pace with a fluctuating environment (Schein, 1996) through the collaborative "process of influencing others to achieve mutually agreed upon purposes for the organization" (Patterson, 1993, p.3). A learning leader is one who is a: (a) perpetual learner who is dedicated to all learning, (b) supports staff and critical reflection, (c) promotes a culture of learning and professional responsibility, (d) maintains high standards and rigorous learning goals for students while remaining deeply involved in the curricular program (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005), and (e) supports and expands accountability systems while seeking common goals (Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliott, & Cravens, 2009; Patterson, 1993).

Missouri Learning Standards. The Missouri Learning Standards include the CCSS and are "a set of high-quality academic expectations in English-language arts (ELA) and mathematics" (DESE, 2016).

Summary

Considered in this chapter is how the education system in the United States evolved as it entered the knowledge era (Marquardt, 2011; Robinson, 2011; Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007) and the federal responses to a deteriorating system (NCLB, 2002; NGA, 2010; USDE, 2012; Vinovskis, 2009). Identifying that management and leadership issues necessary to transform schools have changed (ASCD, 2012; Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliott, & Cravens, 2009; Shelton, 2010), the discussion considered the increasing pressure on the building level administrator (DeVita, Colvin, Darling-Hammond, & Haycock, 2007; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Shelton, 2010).

Also identified in Chapter One is the empirical link between the building leader and student achievement established in the research (Knapp, Copland, Honig, Plecki, & Portin, 2006; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Lieberman, Falk, & Alexander, 1994; Rosenholtz, 1989; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003) as well as issues of concern present in the education system and the need to meet increasing accountability measures related to student achievement (NCLB, 2002; NGA, 2010; USDE, 2012). This study set out to determine the relationship between learning leadership theory and the instructional needs of teachers to assist schools in identifying leadership that supports learning and change efforts. Finally, key terms provide the reader insight into the researcher's perspective and the overarching research questions guide the purposes of the remaining chapters.

Provided in Chapter Two is a synthesis of related literature relevant to leadership theory and the possibilities for study. The research design and methodology undertaken

in the chosen inquiry process follow in Chapter Three and Chapter Four includes an analysis of the data obtained and corresponding findings. To conclude, presented in Chapter Five are the recommendations and implications for practice in educational leadership, while putting forth potential recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

Following *A Nation at Risk*'s scathing comparison of the United States education system to other countries worldwide (NCEE, 1983), the public demand for change and the prolonged pressure from business and industry compelled the federal government to enact ongoing measures of accountability and reform onto the seemingly failing education system. This aggressive top-down school management approach drew attention to district and building leaders, strengthening its focus as laws such as NCLB and the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) initiative emerged. Administrators implemented the stringent instructional demands required as part of these legal maneuvers to initiate deep systemic change necessary (ASCD, 2012). Although "knowing the characteristics of effective schools would be a major step toward being able to create [effective] schools . . . that [had] not [yet] proven to be the case" (Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliott, & Cravens, 2009, p. 26).

Repeatedly in the literature, (Hattie, 2009, 2012; Knapp, Copland, Honig, Plecki, & Portin, 2006; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Lieberman, Falk, & Alexander, 1994; Rosenholtz, 1989; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003) leadership is empirically linked to the outcomes of student learning, whether directly or indirectly. Second only to teacher instruction (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004) the question as to which leadership theory would best affect student achievement and transform the system remained obscure. In light of ongoing federal imperatives, the need

to identify relevant, effective leadership theory and the characteristics that support change remained paramount.

This study was concerned with where educational leaders should focus vital skills and resources for direct impact on academic success. The understanding that leadership is key to organizational change and improvement is embedded (Hattie, 2009, 2012; Knapp, Copland, Honig, Plecki, & Portin, 2006; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Lieberman, Falk, & Alexander, 1994; Rosenholtz, 1989; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003) in both generic leadership (it exists in any organization) models and educational leadership (focused primarily on the intent to impact teaching and learning) models (Brazer & Bauer, 2013, Burke, Marx, & Lowenstein, 2012; Robinson, 2006).

The following review scrutinized four relevant leadership theories and styles by providing an overview of historical and current understanding of leadership theory. Although a plethora of potential theories of value were available, this study considered authentic, distributive, instructional, and learning leadership theories for the attributes associated with successful change. Within the context of educational leadership roles, change management explored theoretical methods and leader characteristics that inspire organizational transition. Finally, the perspective of the classroom teacher was considered to validate theories positively affecting the classroom.

To begin the analysis of the theoretical understanding of leadership supporting total organization and student achievement, the researcher took into consideration authentic leadership theory. Following is an examination of the attributes and limitations of authentic leadership, discussed both historically and in present terms.

Authentic Leadership

Evidencing excellence from school reform called for leadership with greater accountability and authenticity. Accountability has become a critical ideal in education for decades as districts and schools have been required to demonstrate student success. Business, also, has sought truly authentic leadership in an era of ongoing deceit and corruption. Freeman and Auster (2011) identified that new financial crisis had:

> Prompted questioning of our basic ideas about capitalism and the role of business in society. As scholars are calling for 'responsible leadership' to become more of the norm, organizations are being pushed to enact new values, such as 'responsibility' and 'sustainability,' and pay more attention to the effects of their actions on their stakeholders (p. 15).

The growing appeal of authenticity, or authentic leadership, is part of what Fineman (2006) referred to as the positive neohumanistic turn in organizational theorizing, otherwise considered a move towards creating positive emotional states in the workplace to encourage happiness, well-being, hope and goodness, with the intention of improving worker performance (Ford, & Harding, 2011). Such theorists (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Fineman, 2006) attributed the beginnings of authentic leadership to Greek philosophy and being true to oneself. These researchers emphasized the authentic leader as a highly virtuous and self-regulating person striving for the utmost standards of moral leadership. This idea of an inner moral core delineates the leader as being good on the inside. Through disclosure of their inner goodness, they are classified as an authentic leader. Maak and Pless (2006) conceded personal values are important to responsible

leadership, yet argued that "moral persons" theories are what are necessary to replace "great man" theories of leadership to make authenticity the central tenet (p. 42).

Some researchers (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009) credited Bass (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999) as instrumental in the consideration of the term *authentic* in relationship to leadership through his notable writings on transformational leadership. Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) inserted the concept of authentic leadership into the original model following reviews that questioned the possible negative side of charisma and the potential to see authoritarian or narcissistic leaders disguise themselves as transformational leaders. In an attempt to clarify this perspective, the authors suggested there were *pseudo* versus *authentic* transformational leaders. They argued that a genuine transformational leader would be highly moral – to be anything else would result in inauthentic or pseudo-transformational leadership. This perspective described authentic leadership as built upon "a moral foundation of legitimate values" (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999, p. 184).

As George (2003) popularized the theory in the general population, Luthans and Avolio (2003) led the discussion in the academic community. Working to integrate positive organizational behavior with life-span leadership development, Luthans and Avolio introduced authentic leadership as drawing from "both positive psychological capacities and a highly developed organizational context, . . . result[ing] in both greater self-awareness and self-regulative positive behaviors on the part of leaders and associates' . . . positive self-development" (p. 243). This practice of authenticity is multilevel and includes the leader, follower and context in its consideration of a genuine leader. The intent of the researchers (Luthans & Avolio, 2003) was to study what worked

and what did not as a means of encouraging leadership development; they believed theoretical work in positive psychology might offer new, more positive means of conceptualizing leadership for future needs.

Intending to clarify authentic leadership theory, Begley (2001) described it as "professionally effective, ethically sound, and consciously reflective practices" (p. 353) and "a genuine kind of leadership – a hopeful, open-ended, visionary, and creative response to social circumstances" (p. 354). Shamir and Eilam (2005) developed a theoretical frame of an authentic leader as one whom: (a) does not fake his/her leadership, (b) deems status or rewards are irrelevant, (c) is an original rather than a copy of others, and (d) bases his/her actions on values and inner convictions. This methodology prioritized how a leader behaved rather than the behaviors itself. Cooper, Scandura and Schriescheim (2005) further clarified that it as a multidimensional viewpoint containing elements from various modalities such as characteristics, actions, and contexts.

It appears there are four factors that can be agreed upon by researchers of authentic leadership (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009; Cooper, Scandura, & Schriescheim, 2005; Sparrowe, 2005): (a) balanced processing (objectively analyzing relevant data before making decisions), (b) internalized moral perspective, or high integrity (George, & Sims, 2007) (firm adherence to internal moral code/standards which are aligned to self-regulate one's behavior), (c) relational transparency (presenting one's authentic self through openly sharing information and feelings as appropriate for situations), and (d) self-awareness (demonstrated understanding of one's strengths, weaknesses and the way one makes sense of the world). Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner,

Wernsing, and Peterson (2008) further broadened these four constructs by completing research across cultures to develop leadership scales for authentic leadership that examined its perceptions amidst diverse situations and cultures. The goal was to identify if authentic leadership represented quality leadership regardless of its appearance or location.

Freeman and Auster (2011) spoke about values as the central component of responsible, ethical leadership conversations in both business and education. Achieving a process in which authentic living could transpire while both individual and corporate value systems occurred simultaneously was, more specifically, of interest. This process of integrating diverse value systems is not easy for any individual; however, for a leader it must be intentional. Leadership requires the effort to be authentic, as illustrated by Uhl-Bien (2006), who identified that one must reflect on one's values while seeking to understand the influence of the past, the relationships (community) that the individual finds themselves in, and personal aspirations for the future.

Agreeing, Freeman and Auster (2011) recognized this approach to responsible leadership as pragmatic. Although the primary responsibility of education is learning, schools center on relationships and authentic relationships require a great deal of intentional work to grow and maintain (Crippen, 2012). A leader should work to build a community that values respect, inclusivity, collaboration and transparency for authenticity to occur. Starratt (2010) postulated that being authentic did not imply perfection, instead, it meant "owning and accepting oneself with whatever talents . . . limitations and imperfections one has . . . being 'up-front' in . . . relationships . . . present to the other person" (p. 91). The worth of authentic leadership in education lies in the

western thought that values are personal and provide a way to define an individual, establishing one's identity (Freeman, & Auster, 2011). It is because of this liberalistic approach and personal boundaries of self that individuals can exist together amidst differing values (Joas, 2000).

Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May and Walumbwa (2005) further proposed the truer, deeper development of an authentic leader is through the maturation of the authentic follower. They believe that as a leader is transparent about self-awareness and self-regulating behaviors, authenticity is easily viewable and can win over watchful followers. Taylor (1991) advanced the importance of authenticity in leader-follower relationships by suggesting that if being authentic is being true to oneself, then maybe one can only achieve that authenticity by recognizing individuals are part of the larger whole. Due to the reciprocal relationship, leaders and followers increase motivation, moral and ethical levels otherwise not achieved individually (Burns, 1978).

As part of his social cognitive theory, Bandura (1978) encouraged this idea of growth, postulating that learning takes place through authentic modeling experiences – we learn by watching and then respond by choosing to imitate, mutating or disregarding the observed action. This intricate process concentrates on the qualities and attributes possessed by the leader that reflect the perception of trustworthiness and the connection they make with followers (Northouse, 2010). Authentic leaders motivate employees through the alignment of their actions and character traits; thereby their strength lies in their ability to empower followers (Banks, & Mhunpiew, 2012).

However, there is strong opposition to this theoretical leadership approach. Hayes and Comer (2010) noted, "[a]uthenticity is not an innate quality but a quality that others

attribute to you. The paradox is that you need to be who you are (authentic) while also adapting your behaviors to the situation and follower audience" (p. 20). Arguing that authentic leadership requires critical analysis, Ford and Harding (2011) found primary fault in the presumption that the relationship of the leader and follower is vital to improving organizational functioning and fosters the development of authenticity in employees so their well-being is improved, resulting in sustainable and veritable performance improvements. The criticism is that to accomplish this, the follower must choose to model him/herself primarily on the leader, who is modeling him/herself on the ideals and values of the organization and self.

Gardner, Avolio, and Luthans (2005) supported this standard when they identified that authentic leaders pursue goals reflecting personal standards of high moral conduct. Authentic leaders are intrinsically motivated at such an intense level that they become engrossed in their work – motivated solely by curiosity, thirst for learning, and satisfaction of task accomplishment. Some researchers (Cooper, Scandura, & Schriescheim, 2005; Ford & Harding, 2011; Sparrowe, 2005) contended this organizational commitment transcends personal authenticity and growth, creating a façade that only draws the follower into a deeper commitment to the goals or the organization. By selectively disclosing aspects of themselves to others to intentionally create bonds of intimacy and trust (Gardner, Avolio, & Luthans, 2005), some argued the authentic leader is no longer authentic and is by definition manipulative, or at best, no longer true to oneself (Ford & Harding, 2011).

In further critique of authentic leadership, George and Sims (2007) interviewed 125 self-perceived authentic leaders (based on notable success) to gain an understanding

of how they had developed as leaders. As with other leadership studies, most participants worked in the private sector and had more freedom to make decisions and implement changes without hierarchical barriers. Jackson (2005) drew on the existentialist position to argue that our values rest on our ability to make choices; freedom is a necessary precursor of any set of values and a consciousness of that freedom in any decision is the real meaning of authenticity. Such freedom rarely exists in education, especially at the building level, however, George and Sims (2007) did acknowledge that participants acted in ways that were consistent with strong values and firm moral codes, intense work ethic that displayed passion and a commitment to the organization, as well as a strong propensity to persevere and show courage during difficult challenges – desirable skills for the ever-changing educational culture.

Admittedly, authentic leadership is easier to recognize than define (Garger, 2008). Shamir and Eilam (2005) conceded that definitions of the theory are arbitrary, reflecting choices that cannot be proven or validated. The commitment necessary to be authentic and understand oneself and the motivations behind individual actions is more difficult than it appears (Freeman & Auster, 2011). Knowing oneself is difficult to accomplish. To seek authenticity, values should be weighed as one reflects on the past, relationships, and future aspirations (Freeman, & Auster, 2011). Avolio and Gardner (2005) agreed authenticity is a fundamentally self-referential concept and relies heavily upon the leader-follower relationship; however, they suggested its roots are in positive psychology. Others (Freeman, & Auster, 2011) argued that one understands authenticity without the psychology reference, as there have been plenty of authentic leaders throughout history.

It is important to note that leaders should not try to be something they are not, or become inauthentic (George & Sims, 2007).

Knowing oneself seems a straightforward process, however, the assumption is that individuals have a set of values that are known and can be shared, when in reality, there are multiple interpretations of values (Freeman, & Auster, 2011; Garger, 2008). Hartman (1988) contended values are vague and general:

> Most of us cannot state our values and their implications in a coherent and airtight way; hence, unanswerable questions arise about whether we hold this or that value . . . nobody is completely rational, we cannot always know whether a failure to act on a value is a failure of rationality, an absence of the value in question, or a simple lapse. (p. 75)

Not unlike business, many educational scandals ascribe a lack of values, or more commonly, a faulty system of values (Freeman, & Auster, 2011), at fault. Werhane (1999) indicated when conflicts arise, such as between organizational and personal values, it becomes a matter of which value will take precedence so that all values are realized, often leading to questionable manipulation of situations.

Significant is Garger's (2008) analysis that authentic leadership remains in the early stages of development; concrete definitions and measures are necessary. Although responsible leadership and authenticity are steps in the right direction, this theoretical frame would benefit from a more thorough analysis of the ideals of authenticity and a more definitive understanding of values (Freeman, & Auster, 2011). A defined set of leadership behaviors is necessary to distinguish authentic leadership from other

leadership styles (Garger, 2008). For these reasons, authentic leadership was not chosen as a conceptual framework for the present study.

As desirable as authentic leadership may be to those seeking the best leadership practices, other theoretical approaches have emerged that promote a spirit of unity by incorporating a more pragmatic methodology to leading. The current educational culture necessitates leaders that can accomplish more than what was required of their predecessors (SREB, 2009). Therefore, leadership theories that exceed the traditional singular leader outlook should be considered rather than upholding a leader that is often incapable of handling all the relevant requirements for modern day leadership roles (Brown & Gioia, 2002).

Thus, this study evaluated distributive leadership theory as expanding theoretical applications of leadership become necessary to support total organization and student achievement. The following is an examination of the attributes and limitations of distributive leadership, discussed both historically and in present terms.

Distributive Leadership

Historically, distributive leadership has its roots in distributed cognition and activity theory (Gronn, 2000; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004), which considers individual work and action in the context of the practice in which it occurs. Gronn (2000) identified success was based on interdependent tasks requiring a reciprocal relationship for completion, rendering "meaningless any assumption about leadership being embodied in just one individual" (p. 331). Distributive leadership theorists viewed leadership as a collective phenomenon, or community exercise (Lumby, 2003) rather than the work of a single agent (Ross, Rix, & Gold, 2005a).

Leadership theory, defined as a social process, focuses on the thoughts and actions within situations. The present theory shifts from the traditional focus on the individual working instead to stretch over people and situations (Ross, Rix, & Gold, 2005a). Distributive leadership, once used to understand *influence* on formal and informal groups (Gibb, 1958), is a chain of actions and reactions that are not subject to any one person's control (Lambert, 2002; Ross, Rix, & Gold, 2005a).

According to Gronn (2002), leadership is a "status ascribed to one individual, an aggregate of separate individuals, sets of small numbers of individuals acting in concert or larger plural-member organizational units" (p. 427). Gronn (2008) noted in a historical review of leadership that even Gibb had not seen leadership as a *monopoly* of one; rather, he noted that although there was a tendency to think that every group had a singular primary leader, such a situation rarely existed, if at all. Instead, Gibb (Gronn, 2008) believed, as did Greenleaf (1977) that leadership passed from one individual to another depending upon the time and situation.

Katz and Kahn (1978) noted that not all the knowledge in the world is situated in the formal chain of managerial command, much less at the top of it. Gronn's (2000) contention was that leadership naturally distributes regardless of intent; by definition, distribution occurs when more than one person holds a formal leadership position. Similarly, French and Snyder (1959) believed that every member typically has some degree of influence over others, especially in informal groups, resulting in leadership naturally distributing throughout a group. Notably, when observed in a less restrictive organizational environment, Robinson (2008) declared that the natural distribution becomes even more obvious.

Agreeing, Brown and Gioia (2002) identified that singular organizational leaders are incapable of handling all relevant requirements for modern day leadership positions. Burke, Marx, and Lowenstein (2012) emphasized the difficulties individual leaders and organizations face "[i]n light of current turbulent learning environments regulated by federal policy that mandates high levels of student achievement coupled with a rigorous standards-based reform movement" (p. 113). No one individual can have the knowledge or the energy to lead effectively in today's organizational settings. Only through distributive practices is the dispersal of responsibility realized (Greenleaf, 1977).

Previously found in high performing corporations and the military (Collins, 2001), the popularity of distributive leadership in education grew in the past decade as The Council of Chief State School Officers, Wallace Foundation and Education Commission of the State sought to further study the impact of distributive leadership through incorporation into State Action Educational Leadership Projects (Mayrowetz, 2008). The large-scale attraction to this theoretical perspective rested in the relational and dispersed views of leadership that were emerging, which emphasized inclusion of organizational followers as leaders themselves (Burns, 1978; Hunt & Ropo, 1997). The core assumption that each member encapsulates leadership abilities necessary to the organization at some point (Harris, 2008) enables leadership to be a fluid, or emergent property of individuals and groups (Spillane, 2006). This does not imply formal leadership structures must be removed; instead, it is important to note powerful relationships can exist between vertical and lateral leadership processes as primary leaders remain gatekeepers of the distributive leadership practices within their organizations (Harris, 2008).

There is evidence that supports tentative conclusions about the sharing of leadership and organizational change in light of few empirical studies of the theory (Robinson, 2008; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). Both distributive cognition and action theory underscore how social context influences human interaction and learning (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004). Dialogue regarding distributive leadership in education primarily highlights teacher leaders, advocating that all teachers can take the lead and advance a school's capacity for improvement (Harris, 2003). A review of related studies (Graetz, 2000; Harris, 2004; Morrisey, 2000; Reyes, Scribner, & Scribner, 1999; Scribner, Sawyer, Watson, & Meyers, 2007; Woods, 2005) suggested distribution is an important element in school reform as the building of internal capacity contributes to overall improvement.

Unlike leader-centered models in which leadership exists in the hands of one or a few, distributive leadership seeks to diffuse responsibility throughout the organization, making it less dependent on individual leaders – potentially making schools more stable and less likely to be affected by leader turnover (Fusarelli, Kowalski, & Petersen, 2011). The argument is that institutions with stronger distributive leadership will have more staff that are knowledgeable about and take responsibility for educational outcomes, resulting in lower staff turnover and less impact when leaders leave (Robinson, 2008). However, the difficulty is that distributive leadership requires internal and external stakeholders to participate in school governance actively and remain informed about school issues.

These are not unreasonable requirements, but they are often considered undesirable commitments by those invited to participate in the process (Fusarelli, Kowalski, & Petersen, 2011). Distributive leadership is a "relational experience that is

defined in practice by those involved as they interrelate with one another producing greater social cohesion among stakeholders" (Kochan & Reed, 2005, p. 72). Harris (2004) asserted that active distributive leadership requires intentionally engaging numerous members in the leadership activities to be successful.

Added difficulties in understanding and implementing the theory arise as there are often competing and conflicting interpretations of the approach, which results in a general use of the theory to identify any form of shared or dispersed leadership - good and bad (Harris, 2008). Barry (1991) ascribed leadership as a collection of roles and behaviors that can be divided, shared, and exchanged amongst members so any one person can lead at any given time. While Woods and Gronn (2009) pointed out that schools are traditionally authoritarian in nature, defined by a myriad of rules, regulations and hierarchies designed to limit teacher and leader behavior. During this era of high stakes testing and accountability, schools are often hesitant to involve staff at any real level and stakeholders participating in decision-making at a quasi-participatory level are ineffective (Fusarelli, Kowalski, & Petersen, 2011). Participants must have some degree of equity regarding power to participate continually.

Morrisey (2000) concluded extending responsibilities for leadership beyond the principal is critical for developing effective schools. For distributive leadership dispersal to be as evenly as possible, relationships must become as important as tasks, cooperation more important than competition, and sharing more than controlling (Fusarelli, Kowalski, & Petersen, 2011). Creating these priorities is not learned naturally. Researchers acknowledge that the move to professional learning communities has advanced these

ideas (DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2008; Hord & Sommers, 2007), while some still wonder whether distributive leadership can exist.

Fitzgerald and Gunter (2007) questioned whether it was possible for distributive leadership to occur in a policy climate established on strict hierarchical structures that allow authority and responsibility to the few with the appropriate titles. Bolman and Deal (2008) ascribed authority as essential to those informal roles as social control is dependent upon it. Harris (2008) noted that current school structures mediate against any informal leadership, making it impossible for distributive leadership to exist. It does however appear there is evidence for shared or distributive leadership in organizations focused on team-based structures and hierarchies are removed (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009).

In addition to these difficulties lie the premises that distributive leadership has both defined parameters and quality outcomes. Neither of these assumptions has strong empirical support, as writers have acknowledged the existence of distributive leadership but attempts to define it specifically are few (Robinson, 2008; Yukl, 1999). There is also little research providing evidence of the dynamics of the process (Gronn, 2002; House & Aditja, 1997; Robinson, 2008). Robinson (2008) discussed the various conceptualizations as one difficulty in establishing quality evidence of distributive leadership, noting the definitions do not always fully reflect the author's empirical measures of leadership.

Hargreaves and Fink (2006) suggested the leadership patterns do not always serve the greater good, noting distributive leadership is sometimes bad leadership. Harris (2008) concurred, indicating informal leadership dispersion has been shown to have a negative effect on outcomes by contributing to the inadequacies of the team, thereby

leading to conflicting priorities, timelines and communication – all boundary management issues – that can lead to the emergence of competing leadership styles. Additionally, one cannot discount the influence of the cultural norms of the organization (Timperly, 2005) and agendas of those to whom leadership is distributed (Bryk, 1999).

Finally, as Hartley (2007) pointed out, scholars whose work was closely with distributive leadership had been promoting the theory as an idea whose time had come, however, Gronn (2008) observed that once entrenched in educational vocabulary, every initiative becomes attributed to distributive leadership or idealized as a solution to problems associated with improving student learning.

It is important to question whether it is distributive leadership in use or simply a shift from the top-down ideology to a more lateral perspective (Spillane, 2006). Harris (2008) and Robinson (2008) agreed that the reasons educators typically rejected the theory was that although distributive leadership could provide greater opportunities for members to learn from one another, data did not support a link between it and networking, achievement or educational outcomes. Robinson specifically stated that normative claims for this perspective often sprouted from theories of power rather than teaching and learning, rendering the theoretical and empirical work less useful to the goal of educational improvement. Before proceeding with recommendations to employ distributive leadership, Gronn (2008) supported refining current definitions of distributive leadership and rethinking its relationship to the conceptual domains of power and democratic leadership as they occur in organizations.

Many such concerns remain unanswered in the research community. Without clearly delineating an operational definition of distributive leadership in education,

further study appears to be inconsequential (Harris, 2008; Robinson, 2008; Yukl, 1999). The lack of outcomes ascribed to teaching and learning via distributive leadership (Gronn, 2008; Harris, 2008; Robinson, 2008; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008) renders it inappropriate for the purposes of this study, which is to offer educators and leaders possible considerations for improving schools. Although distributive leadership may be relevant to how schools operate, researchers (Fusarelli, Kowalski, & Petersen, 2011; Graetz, 2000; Harris, 2004; Morrisey, 2000; Reyes, Scribner, & Scribner, 1999; Scribner, Sawyer, Watson, & Meyers, 2007; Woods, 2005), concluded there was a need for more definitive parameters and further research into distributive leadership's authentic impact on the daily outcomes of students.

Furthermore, the focus on leadership has shifted as the educational climate has changed (Elmore, 2000; Robinson, 2006). For more than twenty years, federal policy has moved to aggressively pursue the implementation of a rigorous standards-based reform agenda with a rekindled focus on instructional improvement and the leadership that is assumed to cultivate it (Brazer & Bauer, 2013, Burke, Marx, & Lowenstein, 2012). Early on, Elmore (2000) redefined educational leadership as "guidance and direction of instructional improvement" (p. 13). This seemingly innocuous change challenged all leadership systems to do all that they had previously accomplished such that teaching and learning showed visible improvement. A shift from management skills and generic leadership (e.g., authentic and distributive leadership), which were applicable in any organization, to an increasing focus on the role leaders play in improving teaching and learning (Robinson, 2006).

The turning of the tide impacted leadership theory as well as educational leadership research. Researchers (Elmore, 2004; Firestone & Riehl, 2005) observed that the spotlight had refocused from studying what it took to manage effectively schools to how one could successfully lead teaching and learning. Firestone and Riehl (2005) in their report concurred:

> [Leaders] were [once] expected to set the stage for learning simply. Now leaders are increasingly being held accountable for the actual performance of those under their charge . . . [g]iven growing expectations that leaders can and should influence learning, it is important to understand how leadership, learning and equity are linked. (p. 2)

Robinson (2006) specifically stated:

> While generic leadership research can inform us about <u>how</u> to influence, and about the values that should inform the influence process (e.g., democratic, authoritative, emancipatory) it is silent about <u>what</u> the focus of the influence attempt should be. It is the research base on student and teacher learning, and on effective teaching in particular, that can give content to otherwise abstract learning processes. (p. 63)

Stein and Spillane (2005) agreed there was a need for research to determine better linkages between this knowledge and research on leadership in schools; however, of the thousands of educational leadership studies published prior to 2008, less than 30 had empirically explored the outcomes between leadership and the academic outcomes of students (Robinson, 2008).

Consequently, the present study shifted from generic leadership to educational research (Elmore, 2000; Robinson, 2006) in the hopes of encountering relevant theoretical understanding of the influence of leadership on student success. Instructional and learning leadership are possible theories that characterize the philosophical approach necessary to succeed in today's education and world markets. Each theory holds significant merit, as educational reform remains focused on the building leader as paramount in advancing academic achievement across the nation (Wallace Foundation, 2007, 2012).

Encapsulating some of the same leadership qualities in authentic (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Luthans & Avolio, 2003; Maak and Pless, 2006) and distributive leadership theory (Graetz, 2000; Harris, 2004; Morrisey, 2000; Reyes, Scribner, & Scribner, 1999; Scribner, Sawyer, Watson, & Meyers, 2007; Woods, 2005), instructional leadership (Bush, 2007; Robinson, 2008) has its strengths and weaknesses in educational research. In the following section, the assets and insufficiencies of instructional leadership theory are discussed both historically and in contemporary terms.

Instructional Leadership

The call for educational reform fostered leadership theories that specifically targeted student performance (Bush, 2007; Robinson, 2008; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008) such as instructional leadership, which found its way into the limelight as government accountability measures took precedence in education (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee, 1992). Its empirical origins link to studies undertaken during the 1970's and 1980's in poor urban communities where students were successful in spite of their

living and educational conditions (Edmonds, 1979). Researchers (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee, 1992; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008) identified that the early school studies designated schools that had strong instructional leadership, including learning climates free of disruptions, a system of clear teaching objectives and high expectations for students.

Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe (2008) further noted the early examples of instructional leadership research assumed it was the principal who was the primary contributor to the success of the schools, with little consideration of the instructional staff influence. This approach reinforced a heroic view of the role of the principal, which few leaders were even able to attain (Hallinger, 2005). Since Edmond's (1979) research, the characteristics of instructional leadership have advanced to include administrators as part of a team, rather than working as an individual (Brazer & Bauer, 2013; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004).

Researchers (Lunenburg, 2010; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Stronge, Richard, & Catano, 2008) consider instructional leadership a viable theory in encouraging sustainable reform efforts for schools due to the focus on the direction of influence rather than its source (Bush 2007). In 2001, the National Association of Elementary Principals defined instructional leadership about learning communities which focus primarily on making adult learning a priority and advancing a culture of collaboration to improve student outcomes. However, in light of millennial and market pressure, interpretation of the theory has expanded to incorporate a greater collaborative learning process in which student success became the objective of the *total* educational community (Jenkins, 2009; Lunenburg, 2010; Stronge, Richard, & Catano, 2008).

Resources such as e-Lead (http://www.e-lead.org/resources/resources.asp?resource id=14, 2014) coincided with the changes as it defined instructional leadership as the actions the principal engaged in with staff and the community to promote student learning. Additionally stated that, in reality, the administrator encouraged educational achievement by making it the priority and the vision for growth. Bush and Heysteck (2003), however, pointed out that this viewpoint underestimated the multiplicity of school life, such as extracurricular activities, social aspects, and self-esteem.

Many agree that leadership tasks that deliver for students must be the priority if students are to be academically successful (Jenkins, 2009; Lunenburg, 2010; Robinson, 2008; Stronge, Richard, & Catano, 2008). Expanding on the findings of the early school studies (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee's, 1992), suggested has been a dimensional approach to instructional leadership. Finding support in the educational community (Fullan, 2010; Hallinger, 2011; Lunenburg, 2010; Marzano & Waters, 2010; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010), Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) developed the following dimensions from studies relating to the influence leadership had on learning and its sustainability:

- Dimension one: Establish clear learning goals and expectations for students and staff.
- Dimension two: Ability to secure resources aligned with instructional needs and purposes rather than having leadership skills to secure resources simply.
- Dimension three: Plan, coordinate and evaluate teaching and the curriculum.

- Dimension four: Promote and participate in the learning and development of teachers.
- Dimension five: Ensure a safe and supportive environment with consistent social expectations and discipline codes.

Through focusing on these five dimensions, implied that the leader would successfully provide the influence for quality instruction and support that enabled students to be successful. Luneburg (2010) believed it was through the dimensions that the principal helped teachers shift the focus from their instruction to what students were learning and expected to learn.

Recently, Brazer and Bauer (2013) assimilated multiple perspectives to establish a comprehensive working definition of instructional leadership as "the effort to improve teaching and to learn for PK-12 students by managing effectively, addressing the challenges of diversity, guiding teacher learning, and fostering organizational change" (p. 650). Strongly concerned with the acts of teaching and learning by supporting the professional development of teachers (Southworth, 2002), Bush and Glover (2002) stressed the direction of the influence process was the key - focusing on the behavior of teachers working with students. They claimed the leader was influential when specifically targeting student learning via the instructor. The idea that leadership should be a top-down process as the administrator's vision for success transferred to those in the building and community has remained inherent in the theory (Jenkins, 2009; http://www.e-lead.org/resources/resources.asp? resourceid=14, 2014).

Whitaker's (1997) research on the instructional leadership theory identified four specific skills essential to the role of building leader, asserting instructional leaders must

be: (a) a resource provider, (b) an instructional resource available to staff, (c) a quality communicator who shares the ideals of the organization, and (d) able to create a visible presence in the building. Whitaker also uncovered personal skills that each principal should possess to be instructionally effective. Interpersonal skills (e.g., trust and motivation to empower others) assist with planning skills to anticipate and overcome obstacles that can emerge while sustaining progress. Instructional observation skills help teachers build on strengths and reduce weaknesses. Finally, research and evaluation skills are necessary to question the impact of programs and seek best practices critically.

Elmore (2004), however, stated that even in the midst of such vision and skills, school reform has historically lacked penetration of more than just a few schools. Jenkins (2009) believed "[t]o achieve this goal takes more than a strong principal with concrete ideas and technical expertise. It requires a redefinition of the role of principals, one that removes the barriers to leadership by eliminating bureaucratic structure and reinventing relationships" (p. 37). Robinson (2006) moreover considered the call for a tighter relationship between leadership and teaching. He noted the mismatch between the context in which principals work and the conditions necessary to enable them to be stronger instructional leaders. Finding the expectations unrealistic, Robinson further found fault with the intensity of focus required to support successful instructional reform amidst the bureaucratic tasks and managerial assignments.

Gibson (2005) identified many administrators stated a preference for instructional involvement, but were aware the time to engage in instructional activities was elusive amidst student behavior issues, crisis, and daily tasks that constantly required their attention. As a point of interest, there has been some evidence (Cotton, 2003) that

suggests female elementary school principals have spent longer periods of time in the classroom before taking on a building leadership role, potentially indicating greater knowledge of instruction, and were more participatory in instructional leadership than their male colleagues (Cotton, 2003). Female leaders also favored a major instructional role in their work, shaping the attitudes of staff regarding student learning, and therefore, having affected student outcomes, albeit indirectly (Cotton, 2003; Hallinger & Heck, 1998). Ultimately, rather than adding additional responsibilities to any leader, Robinson (2006) suggested existing practices be better aligned to the goal of instructional improvement, freeing up the administrator to be intentional about influencing learning.

A second disparity was that of the tension in the classroom (Robinson, 2006). The real decisions about what and how learning occurs often reside in the individual classroom rather than the organization and leadership that surround them (Elmore, 2004). Although a few *heroic* leaders have been able to develop successful instructional programs, the oversight of teaching has not always been paramount for many school leaders (Elmore, 2004). Bottoms (SREB, 2011) stated:

> We need principals who can take good schools and lead their teachers and students to excellence. We need principals who can take broken schools and help them find the path to good and then to great. School reform is a highly collaborative process — it does not work to cast the principal in the role of hero. But there is no doubt that effective principal leadership is an indispensable component of transformation. (p. i)

Despite the understanding that leadership has a role in supporting teaching and learning, Bush (2007) indicated that there exists limited evidence of principals and other school

leaders being developed for the promotion of learning. Research from Bush and Heystek (2003) found that only one-quarter of principals surveyed identified this area as a training need for their position; these findings suggested that principals did not conceptualize their role as those leading learning. Bush (2007) believed school improvement was ultimately dependent on leaders accepting their responsibility for sustained educational achievement management.

Another criticism of instructional leadership as a means of improving teaching and learning is that of the administrator. If principals are to lead pedagogical change, it is essential they understand how to promote learning in staff, including content knowledge (Robinson, 2006). Instructional leaders must know what is going on in the classroom (Jenkins, 2009) and that the instruction is in alignment with the curriculum supported by the district (Lunenburg, 2010).

The pressure on principals had been to learn new business skills, with little emphasis on understanding knowledge of curriculum, assessment, and pedagogy (Stein & Nelson, 2003). Having been experienced teachers, building principals were assumed to have had a sufficient understanding of teaching and learning (Robinson, 2006). Previous knowledge, however, does not guarantee understanding in light of reform efforts such as the CCSS (NGA, 2010).

Assuming instructional leaders understand content, pedagogy and have an understanding of the classroom enough that they can work with teachers presents a problem – instructional leadership requires a much broader knowledge base in these areas than one individual's teaching experience is likely to provide since teaching typically occurs in one or few parts of the organization (Brazer & Bauer, 2013). Building leaders

must strive to become the learner among learners (Stronge, Richard, & Catano, 2008), involved in all aspects of the educational process to appreciate some of the problems teachers and students encounter to help overcome them and support academic growth (Jenkins, 2009). Just as the context of education changes, so does the expectation of improvement, which highlights the weaknesses of poor leadership assumptions (Robinson, 2006). Current expectations are that all students can and will learn and educational leaders who are learners are necessary to ensure the success of each student (Jenkins, 2009; Lunenburg, 2010), again supporting a top-down approach as necessary for sustainability (Jenkins, 2009; http://www.e-lead.org/resources/ resources.asp? resourceid=14, 2014).

Stein and Nelson (2003) proposed principals with in-depth understanding of at least one content area were much better at recruiting, supporting, and evaluating instruction in non-specialist areas. Also, a general understanding of the qualities to look for in staff and professional development necessary to help teachers learn what is required was instrumental in administrator success. Admittedly, Stein and Nelson (2003) acknowledged the narrow band of understanding a single content area was a disadvantage, if not inadequate. For one to be an instructional leader, they must possess expertise in multiple areas.

Earl and Katz (2002) called this expertise assessment literacy, noting leaders must have sufficient understanding of all subjects and assessment practices to collaborate with staff. Subject analysis which utilizes student achievement data is necessary if administrators are to impact the teaching process successfully. Although they must broaden their knowledge of content, it is also necessary for administrators to expand their

understanding of pedagogy - first, teaching science is different than teaching mathematics and second, an understanding of the student audience (individually and collectively) is required to know how to combine both content and pedagogy in such a way as to reach all members of the audience (Brazer & Bauer, 2013). To affect student success, a leader must see the classroom in its entirety – the teacher, student, content, and how they are working together – and can communicate, or be a critic of the context (Eisner, 1998). These understandings and abilities develop more confident and capable building leaders to advance instructional improvement (Robinson, 2006; SREB, 2009).

It might not be an overstatement to say a building leader who is not skilled in understanding human learning is less than equipped for the position (Jenkins, 2009). DuFour (2002) stated it was necessary for leaders to have current knowledge of changing conceptions of curriculum, models of instruction, and assessment approaches to be effective. Research by the Southern Regional Education Board (2009) communicated that the then current methods of preparing principals had not worked:

> If principals are to turn schools around so more struggling students are taught to grade-level standards and higher, they need to understand how to engage faculty in creating and maintaining a culture of high expectations and support for all students . . . inspire faculty to develop engaging instruction and curricula . . . (SREB, 2009, p. 3)

Albeit the importance of instructional leadership is established throughout research (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008) evidence that such skills are present in the preparation of administrators is difficult to pinpoint (Brazer & Bauer, 2013).

Although educational leadership has greater merit for the intent of this study than generic leadership theories, the application of instructional leadership theory as a frame by which to view the research remains overly abstract for current leadership needs necessitated by reform efforts such as NCLB or CCSS. As discussed, instructional leadership is not without criticism. Questions remain about the viability of measuring leadership in its purest form when coordinating this with the context in which the instructional leader exists and the bearing on the outcome of the research (Brazer & Bauer, 2013; Cuban, 2013). The quantity of variables is too vast to allow specific use of the study findings. Also, the overarching ideal of the theory, that school improvement is a top-down approach, does not compliment the philosophical parameters of the present study – instructional needs are dictated in the classroom and should be shared with leaders for effective support – a bottom-up approach.

To address this perspective, the present research required use of a theory that provided similar structure to instructional leadership (Fullan, 2010; Hallinger, 2011; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Lunenburg, 2010; Marzano & Waters, 2010; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010), yet incorporated a greater degree of focus on what is being learned and how it is learned. Therefore, the review of leadership theories moved to learning leadership as a plausible framework (Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliott, & Cravens, 2009; Patterson, 1993; Schein, 1996). Finding considerable elements related to learning absent in instructional leadership theory, the parameters of learning leadership were then critically considered.

Learning Leadership

Toll (2010) specified "[w]hile an instructional leader pays attention to the planning, implementation, and evaluation of instruction, a learning leader focuses on what is learned and how it is learned. These roles are not mutually exclusive, and they both have value" (p.50). Robinson, Lloyd and Rowe (2008) found positive empirical support for school leaders to be actively involved as the learning leader in the instructional process with teachers. They also noted that teachers who identified administrators as participants in teacher learning and development encountered higher student outcomes. Friedkin and Slater (1994) indicated that leaders perceived as a resource of instructional practices and expertise also maintained a higher level of respect from staff and therefore had more influence over how teaching occurred. When learning was the primary lens by which the administrator viewed progress, they typically opened themselves up as an accessible and knowledgeable resource to staff (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008).

Notably, learning leadership is used interchangeably in the literature as leadership of learning (Timperley, 2011), learning-centered leadership (Murphy, Elliott, Goldring, & Porter, 2006; Reardon, 2011), and education leadership (Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliott, & Cravens, 2009). For the purpose of this study, learning leadership is defined as the theoretical perspective in which learning is the primary method of leading (Goldring, et al., 2009) and keeping pace with a fluctuating environment (Schein, 1996) through the collaborative "process of influencing others to achieve mutually agreed upon purposes for the organization" (Patterson, 1993, p.3), such as federally monitored student achievement levels. Although other theories such as instructional leadership contain

similar elements, the significant appeal of learning leadership is the result of these principles working in unison; therefore, this theory is appropriate background for the specific theoretical intent of this study.

The following leadership characteristics served as the framework in understanding the significance of leadership in the learning process (Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliot, & Cravens, 2009; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Patterson, 1993; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). Learning leaders are perpetual learners who revere all learning – student, staff, personal, and collective. They support staff and challenge instructors to consider instruction while promoting an atmosphere of collaboration critically. The administrator must model a culture of learning and professional responsibility for trust and cooperation to occur. High standards and rigorous student learning goals across the curriculum are required by the principal who is knowledgeable about cutting edge instructional practices and are an integral part of the curriculum conversation (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Finally, effective leaders support and expand internal and external accountability by holding staff responsible for common goals. Comparatively, Beer, Eisenstat and Spector (HBR, 2011) also identified modeling, support, collaboration, and collective responsibility as characteristics significant for successful change management in any organization.

The characteristic of continual learning is a key attribute of learning leadership theory. As a perpetual learner that reveres *all* learning, the learning leader commits to a cycle of lifelong scholarship that encompasses all stakeholders in the educational community (Burke, Marx, & Lowenstein, 2012). Although Whitaker (1997) recognized

the need for an administrator to be an instructional resource in the building, learning leadership extends that belief to prioritize the learning process of building leadership teams, teacher learners and students above all else (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). Senge, Lichtenstein, Kaeufer, Bradbury and Carroll (2007) acknowledged that building capacity within an organization is difficult in times of change, stating "[t]rue systemic change means enacting new ways of thinking, creating new formal structures, and, ultimately, transforming relationships" (p 51).

Schools are about relationships and relationships are developed through authentic caring, listening, building trust and by collaborating (Crippen, 2012). It is through learning to understand one another in an equitable environment that people develop new relationships with a new understanding of individuals and honor the multiple areas of expertise. Crippen (2012) also believed that through this development, schools might establish a place of stability and harmony where all voices were valued and supported by a network of relationships. However, people are typically not internally motivated to develop relationships without a system of shared beliefs and desires. Wheatley (2005) stated individuals inside the organization require assistance in developing the circumstances for sharing and collaboration. Kelly (1992) concurred with this notion and stressed the need for administrators to nurture and leverage a system of organizational relationships around a collegial vision focused on negotiated goals. Therefore, effective leaders must be aware of the needs and interests of staff within the context of the learning environment to first establish a safe learning community (Hollander, 2009) so individual talents are highlighted for the benefit of the organization (Crippen, 2010).

Greenleaf (1977) suggested a continuum of life viewpoint, in which leadership is at one end and following at the other. As we move back and forth during a lifetime, we come to the understanding that neither is better than the other is and both will be experienced (Greenleaf, 1977). Crippen (2012) acknowledged that when a school is authentically developing and learning through collaboration, each person is a leader and a follower at various times. Even the best leaders are aware that there are times and places in which they should take the role of follower to develop the internal capacity of the organization (Greenleaf, 1977). As Wheatley (2005) noted, quality relationships require an investment of time and energy; then again, investing in understanding the motivation of learning community stakeholders may develop greater sensitivity and smoother interpersonal connections to promote a safer, more positive school environment (Crippen, 2012).

Conversely, the value of relationships outside of the building is more apparent in areas in which the principal is communicating goals and expectations, as well as recognizing the academic accomplishments of the staff and students within the greater community (Heck, Marcoulides, & Lang, 1991; Ogawa & Bossert, 1995). These principles promote the value of high standards and rigorous student learning goals. Also, they are two aspects of management that dominate themes throughout the learning leadership theory.

In review, school reform efforts demand a great deal of educational organizations. Sustainability researchers Senge, Lichtenstein, Kaeufer, Bradbury and Caroll (2007) found meeting the sustainability challenge required “the kind of cross-sector collaboration for which there is . . . no real precedent. It must be co-created by various

stakeholders by interweaving work in three realms: conceptual, the relational and the action-driven" (p. 44). Although years have passed since this statement, the reality remains the same – education is charting new territory with little evidence of theories that actively impact student achievement. These three types of work noted by Senge et al. build a healthy learning structure for systemic change because of the joint effort they require; the failure to appreciate any one of the three will likely frustrate the school community. In addition, the collaborative process of developing conceptual frameworks builds community and fosters extended applications that benefit the building in its entirety (Senge, Lichtenstein, Kaeufer, Bradbury, & Carroll, 2007).

Learning leaders understand the necessity to grow and change an organization by focusing on promoting a culture of learning and professional responsibility. Through support, the administrator encourages critical reflection of instruction, while maintaining high standards and rigorous student learning goals. The collaboration necessary to organize these ideals for the common good is developed through relationships (Crippen, 2010) and then from "far-reaching and orchestrated dialogue that in turn sets the tone for systematic initiatives and practices" (Senge, Lichtenstein, Kaeufer, Bradbury, & Carroll, 2007, p. 48). Senge et al. explained that effective relational work encourages deep, rich, diverse conversation that puts forward the difficult questions and issues of dysfunctional practices in organizations, which in turn benefits action-oriented change initiatives.

Burke, Marx and Lowenstein (2012), stated "[a]daptive work requires individuals and social systems to *learn their way forward* because resolution of a presenting problem is so complex or unique that it exceeds the limits of current technical knowledge" (p.117, emphasis mine). Learning leaders who emphasize learning as a joint effort include all

members of the professional community, thus, enriching the conversation and critically considering the total education experience (Blasé & Blasé, 2004; Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2009).

In other research, Senge, Lichtenstein, Kaeufer, Bradbury and Carroll (2007) recognized "learning from action-oriented work done on particular projects suggest the need to take time to gather input from all stakeholders so that true systemic thinking can give rise to sometimes radically innovative action" (p. 50). Burke et al. (2012) highlighted leadership that focused on increasing student learning by critically evaluating processes and behaviors that influenced every member of the professional community, including how schools foster parent and community trust relationships (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). This ensures efforts impacting the achievement of all students through reflective practices is positively enhanced. Although rarely practiced or valued, reflection and action are necessary for quality decision-making (Senge, Lichtenstein, Kaeufer, Bradbury, & Carroll, 2007).

Nevertheless, it is through a consistent practice of both that leaders can build internal leadership capacity while creating a culture of continuous learning and professional responsibility to significantly contribute to school effectiveness and performance (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). This organizational view of improvement appreciably impacts the trust necessary for detailed reflection of instructional practices, maintaining the high standards and rigorous student learning goals envisioned by the leader and negotiated by the learning community (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004).

By focusing the organization on what and how learning is occurring at all levels in the school, administrators can express a collegial vision of expectations while modeling valuable learning processes. Toll (2010) believed principals support teacher learning directly by attending to six areas: (a) expectations, (b) demonstrations (through knowledge sharing), (c) hospitality (openness to new ideas and exploration of the unfamiliar), (d) possibility (hope in current circumstances and new visions), (e) inquiry (reflection and questioning), and (f) the whole learner (knowing, doing, and being). The learning leader, in some ways, can systematically model strategies in each of these areas.

It is important to note that a distinction be made between leaders in higher performing schools and their colleagues by their involvement in the planning, coordinating and evaluating of teachers and classroom instruction (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). Ogawa and Bossert (1995) noted that successful leadership influenced instructional practices both through face-to-face encounters and by structuring the way in which teachers approach teaching. Toll reminded administrators "all people learn all the time, including teachers" (p. 51).

The role of the building leaders is to assist staff in making the most of their motivations, commitments and capacities (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006). Learning leaders have the additional responsibility of supporting teacher learning that enhances knowing as well as doing while honoring the learning that shifts a teacher's being to deeper values, perspectives and beliefs to change the way in which they instruct (Toll, 2010). This type of focus is necessary in light of the CCSS and ensuing MLS initiatives, in which a new learning paradigm focused on brain-based

instruction or a deep understanding of human learning is necessary (ASCD, 2012; NGA, 2010).

Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris and Hopkins (2006) found that the most successful school leaders are broadminded and ready to learn from others, uprooting older stereotypes of leaders as being the primary expert. This value-added approach is possibly an explanation as to why successful leaders in challenging circumstances can progress even when there seems little hope. Leithwood et al. (2006) also indicated in their research that schools with the highest levels of student achievement ascribed the success to high levels of influence from widespread leadership contributors within an organization. The continuum of life, as Greenleaf (1977) described earlier, is again an important factor in establishing this kind of community of learners who can both model and accept new learning. Developing a professional culture that openly shares in learning without conflict is often difficult to do in the midst of a globally competitive culture. Learning communities involve both vulnerability and disclosure (Senge, Lichtenstein, Kaeufer, Bradbury, & Carroll, 2007). People grow personally and in a common commitment while sharing the responsibility for leading and the related outcomes.

Leading in these rapidly changing environments requires new knowledge and skills (Burke & Marx, 2011). Transformational learning deeply connects to an adult learning framework personally constructed by the leader (Cuban, 2001; Drago-Severson, 2009). Burke, Marx and Lowenstein (2012) believed leaders who understand who they were as learners and how they had developed were able to recognize each member of the social organization as "a learner whose individual development [was] a key component in building the leadership capacity of the larger system" (p. 114). Burke et al. stressed that

adult development is a complex process requiring an investment of time, therefore it is important to note that the current developmental stage of the adult leader has a tremendous influence on how he or she defines challenges and engages in adaptive learning, which in turn affects his and her ability to help other adults develop as leaders.

Progressive learning is what separates the learning leader from other leadership styles. Just as earlier expressed by Burke, Marx and Lowenstein (2012) this forward learning allows an organization to be in a progressive state as change occurs, always on the cutting edge of best practices to improve instruction or watchful of federal reform efforts rather than in response to new pressures. The literature regarding sustainability sees school leadership as the key to continual learning and improvement within any organization (Datnow, 2005; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Senge, Lichtenstein, Kaeufer, Bradbury, & Carroll, 2007; Wallace Foundation, 2012). Remaining current in educational trends and innovative approaches is necessary to ensure no school or student remains behind in the world economy (USDE, 2008). It is the role of the leader to guide instruction ahead of current practices, to establish high standards, and rigorous student learning goals across the content areas that lead students successfully into their future (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005).

Although the CCSS initiative is the current reform effort in process (NGA, 2010), history would dictate that it would not be the last. As the market system evolves in the United States and across the globe, education systems must as well. Learning leadership is a key educational theory in which schools can maintain a focus on necessary educational goals for future career needs, (ASCD, 2012) but is there enough empirical evidence to prove its effectiveness?

An overarching concern in educational leadership is how schools and administrators can be the most effective in meeting the needs of students through transitional times. Although "knowing the characteristics of effective schools would be a major step toward being able to create [such] schools . . . that has not proven to be the case" (Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliott, & Cravens, 2009, p. 26). While literature regarding leadership theories is prevalent, there remains a gap in how quality leadership translates into quality schools with successful children (DeVita, Colvin, Darling-Hammond, & Haycock, 2007; Wallace Foundation, 2012).

Studies (Knapp, Copland, Honig, Plecki, & Portin, 2006; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Lieberman, Falk, & Alexander, 1994; Rosenholtz, 1989; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003) have highlighted the empirical link between the building leader and student achievement, asserting leadership is the second most important factor in student achievement, succeeding only teacher instruction. Researchers (Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliott, & Cravens, 2009; Lieberman et al., 1994; Sheppard, 1996) widely recognize that school leadership is essential in promoting effective in-school processes and the conditions to achieve student success, yet it remains the impervious component in authentic, sustainable school reform.

Consequently, there is a need to identify relevant, effective leadership theories and the characteristics that support change efforts to meet the requirements of measures such as NCLB (2002), ESEA Flexibility (USDE, 2012) and CCSS (NGA, 2010). The present study is concerned with where educational leaders should focus vital skills and resources to be truly effective in guiding the academic success of today's students.

The Practitioner Perspective

Robinson (2006) ascertained that educational research is typically born of a theory based on a set philosophy or collection of values concentrated on leadership considered good or effective. Leithwood et al., however, warned of the "need to be skeptical about the 'leadership by adjective' literature" (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004, p. 8). Robinson (2006) concurred, documenting a significant portion of educational leadership literature debates the merits of theories or evaluates the extent in which educational leaders exemplify the qualities of a theory through empirical evidence rather than offering evidence of impact on learning.

In light of the gaps that exist in research, Robinson (2006) suggested a logic reversal – rather than theories being the starting point when considering the relationship between leadership and achievement, make them the outcome. A backward mapping process (Elmore, 1979) is employed to identify the conditions necessary for teachers to make bigger strides in raising the individual achievement levels of students or meet the basic proficiency requirements of current reforms. Having acquired that knowledge, administrators could focus leadership efforts on sustainably improving teaching and learning.

The key is that research ought to begin with the evidence of how teachers make a difference in the achievement of their students (Alton-Lee, 2003; Darling-Hammond, & Bransford, 2005). Prestine and Nelson (2005) believe circumstances for effective teaching must be delineated so research can explore skills leaders need to establish those situations in schools and remove any that are detrimental to the learning process.

Robinson (2006) insisted that this research approach should produce theories more firmly grounded in instruction versus those established on favored leadership styles or attributes.

The current study proposed a modification to Robinson's (2006) recommendations – study practitioner perceptions of what is necessary from building leaders for quality instruction to occur via a bottom-up approach rather than the top down models presented in the review of the literature. The missing component in recent transition initiatives appeared to be the voice of the teacher and the primary needs required for his/her success in the classroom. Although much discussion exists as to the elements of schooling that have been successful (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2005; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010; Wallace Foundation, 2007, 2012), the paradigm shift to current education initiatives indicates the need to reflect on the teaching and learning process through the eyes of the practitioner. There is a need to revisit prior instructional practices in light of present program changes, alternations, additions or deletions. Regarding research from this vantage point should validate current leadership theories or indicate a potentially new theory is necessary in the changing educational climate.

Bolman and Deal (2008) identified this perspective as "the fit between human needs and organizational requirements" (p. 117). McGregor (1960) stated in writings on *Theory Y* "the essential task of management is to arrange conditions so that people can achieve their own goals best by directing efforts toward organizational rewards" (p. 61). Changes in the global economy and technology have created highly competitive environments, which in turn place great value on an organization's ability to adapt to changes quickly; conversely, similar forces push organizations to depend on well-trained

human capital (Bolman & Deal, 2008). This dependence on employees makes it judicious for organizations to consider building a culture of ownership for all stakeholders by sharing information, involving staff in decisions, and breaking down hierarchies, among other possible steps (Rosen, Case, & Staubus, 2005). It is of utmost importance that members of the organization learn and drive the very qualities that help students do well, and therefore, help the district meet federal accountability measures (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Rosen, Case, & Staubus, 2005).

Studies done on the participation of employees in organizational decision-making show it is a powerful tool, increasing morale and productivity by increasing the effectiveness of individuals and growth in the organization (Appelbaum, Bailey, Berg, & Kalleberg, 2000). This egalitarian perspective does not eliminate the role of the leader; on the contrary, a democratic culture with shared responsibility in decision-making requires a leader to promote the vision and produce resources applicable to staff and student learning needs (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Even Likert (1961) was aware that employee centered managers who focused on human needs and incorporated the organization's human capital produced higher functioning organizations. Through participation and collaboration, an individual's need for power is likely to be replaced, eliminating conflict and enhancing outcomes (Bolman & Deal, 2008) – in modern terms, allowing schools to meet the stringent success indicators placed upon them by federal action.

Therefore, a practitioner view of participation could offer leaders insight into the primary needs of the instructional team, allowing leaders to focus their limited resources and time on needs that could have the greatest potential impact. Only through study from the teacher perspective can we verify educational leadership theory. Learning leadership

is on target, or new leadership methodology, to better support learning in productive, meaningful ways.

Summary

A Nation at Risk, the stimulus report behind the beginning of the movement toward excellence in the United States, held the country's education system liable for a poor and suffering economy. Highlighting the low standing of United States students who underperformed in comparison to other countries, the commission called for drastic systemic changes. The resulting public demand for change and influence of business and industry compelled the federal government to enact measures of accountability and change onto the public education system. The top-down management of education drew attention to district and building leader as had not occurred before and continued as laws such as NCLB and the CCSS initiative emerged over time.

DeVita, Colvin, Darling-Hammond, and Haycock (2007) reflected " . . . Leadership [had] come out of almost nowhere to become an issue that [was] . . . seen as a bridge to school reform, capable of linking all other reform strategies" (p. 3). Other researchers (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Wallace Foundation, 2012) agreed the national conversation had shifted from whether leadership mattered, to how to find and develop high-quality leadership for schools where success remained elusive.

Although studies (Knapp, Copland, Honig, Plecki, & Portin, 2006; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Lieberman, Falk, & Alexander, 1994; Rosenholtz, 1989; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003) have highlighted the empirical link between the building leader and student achievement, asserting leadership is the second most important factor in student achievement (succeeding only teacher instruction); however,

the question as to which theoretical perspective best implements change and improves student achievement remains obscure. The review of the literature scrutinized numerous potential leadership theories and styles by providing an overview of historical and current understanding of leadership theory and the emerging themes present in educational research.

Explored in Chapter Two were two generic leadership models, which can exist in any organization, and two educational leadership models, focused primarily on the intent to impact teaching and learning. This study specifically considered authentic, distributive, instructional, and learning leadership theories for the attributes associated with successful change.

It was determined that although a great deal of conversation regarding leadership theories exists, a gap remains in how quality leadership translates into quality schools with achieving children (DeVita, Colvin, Darling-Hammond, & Haycock, 2007; Wallace Foundation, 2012). Although learning leadership was demonstrated to have merit in enabling organizational change, the researcher resolved it was important to validate this outcome by identifying the conditions necessary for teachers to make bigger strides in raising the individual achievement levels of students (Robinson, 2006). Once having acquired this knowledge, administrators should be able to focus leadership efforts on the improvement of teaching and learning. Research beginning with evidence of how teachers make a difference in the accomplishments of their students and ending with a theory that supports those needs is an effective methodology, allowing for applicable theory development or confirmation of quality practices already in place (Alton-Lee, 2003; Darling-Hammond, & Bransford, 2005). This study sought the voice of

practitioners to assess the support of current leadership theory on academic improvement in schools or to reveal the need for further study.

Delineated in Chapter Three is the research design and methodology selected by the researcher for the study; included in the discussion will be a rationale for employing a mixed method research design. Analyzed in Chapter Four are the data collected based upon the guiding research questions and finally, presented in Chapter Five is a summary of findings, conclusions, implications, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The present efforts towards federal and state educational reform has created difficulty for school administrators causing them to invest heavily in keeping pace as each initiative substantially increases the measures of success for district and building leaders (ASCD, 2012). The concern is how schools and administrators effect and meet the needs of students while managing high stakes accountability measures. Literature regarding leadership theories is prevalent (Bass, 1981; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Northouse, 2010; Sergiovanni, 1996), yet there remains a gap in how quality leadership efforts translate into effective, quality schools with achieving children (Wallace Foundation, 2007, 2012).

Implementing a single investigation design (Mertens, 2010) the present study explored teacher perceptions of effective leadership characteristics when assessing management of reform efforts such as the federal Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (National Governors Association [NGA], 2010) and the ensuing state response of the Missouri Learning Standards (MLS) (DESE, 2016). A survey (Fink, 2009; Gay & Airasian, 2003; Sapsford, 1999) was created and implemented to explore practitioner perceptions through the transition. Learning leadership was the comparative tool utilized to better understand effective governance. As part of the single instance survey (Creswell, 2009), open-ended questions were offered to assist in describing practitioner insights regarding possible relationships between effective leadership characteristics and successful student achievement (Creswell, 2009; Hatch, 2002, Merriam, 2009). For

struggling schools to advance reform efforts, research must determine how educational leaders can best support student achievement through the reform process.

Outlined in Chapter Three are the research design and methodology used for this study as guided by the research questions. The rationale is provided for a mixed method approach to the study. In addition, the population and sampling method, instrumentation, data collection methods, and statistical analysis are offered to aid in advancement and replication of the study. Finally, researcher bias is discussed, as well as the assumptions impacting the research.

Research Questions

Leadership theories were viewed to effectually implement change and improve student achievement (e.g. NCLB, ESEA, CCSS, MLS) through the analysis of practitioner perspectives. The synthesis of the literature identified that leadership is the second most influential factor in student achievement, subsequent only to the influence of the instructor (Knapp, Copland, Honig, Plecki, & Portin, 2006; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Lieberman, Falk, & Alexander, 1994; Rosenholtz, 1989; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). Specifically, learning leadership theory is a viable approach to sustaining educational reform and increasing student achievement (Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliot, & Cravens, 2009; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Patterson, 1993; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). Therefore, the following research questions guided this study:

1. What do teachers perceive as necessary resources and learning leadership behaviors that promote the instructional objectives of the Missouri Learning Standards?

2. Is there a perceived relationship between instructional needs and the characteristics of learning leadership theory?
3. What practices do teachers identify beyond learning leadership behaviors, which promote successful implementation of the Missouri Learning Standards?
4. Is there a difference in the perceptions of teachers when prioritizing resources and learning leadership behaviors to promote instructional objectives of the Missouri Learning Standards based on gender?
5. Is there a difference in the perceptions of teachers when prioritizing resources and learning leadership behaviors to promote instructional objectives of the Missouri Learning Standards based on years of teaching experiences?
6. Is there a difference in the perceptions of teachers when prioritizing resources and learning leadership behaviors to promote instructional objectives of the Missouri Learning Standards based on areas of instructional responsibilities?

Design of the Study

Educational research maintains a family of study designs to garner trustworthy data on issues specific to education (Fink, 2009; Gay & Airasian, 2003; Mertens, 2010; Sapsford, 1999). The use of a mixed method design (Creswell, 2009; Gay & Airasian, 2003; Merriam, 2010; Mertens, 2010) combined quantitative and qualitative data approaches to a single research problem to yield a richer interpretation of the outcomes (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Clark, 2007; Gay & Airasian, 2003). This study implemented a quasi-experimental method, as defined by Creswell (2009), Hatch (2002) and Mertens (2010), to approximate an authentic experimental design with one modification: the survey offered to teachers was based on voluntary participation and

self-direction. As will be discussed later, district lists of employees were not manipulated and all teaching staff were equally eligible to choose to participate in the survey.

The design of this study was grounded in two research paradigms: postpositivist and phenomenological. The initial quantitative aspect of the research was geared to find the reality that was out there to be studied, identified, and understood (Hatch, 2002). According to Mertens (2010), the postpositivist paradigm is the foundation of quantitative research. The postpositivist paradigm identifies the role of research as the generation of the strongest confidence that a given theory related to a psychological or educational phenomenon is true or false through the collection of objective observations of applicable trends (Mertens, 2010). Creswell (2009), Gay and Airasian (2003), and Mertens (2010) asserted experimental research is the only means by which cause-and-effect relationships can conclusively be determined, although they also note educational problems are not often addressed efficiently by an experimental method.

In the present study, quantitative data was obtained using fourteen questions that relied upon teacher experiences and resulting educational needs throughout the reform process. Questions were established to gauge the value of each of the learning leadership characteristics and their role in student success (Hatch, 2002). Deemed less desirable (Harch, 2002; Merriam, 1998; Seidman, 2006), Sappsford (1999) defined this method as a one-shot survey, in which a researcher provides a single phase of data gathering to garner the insights of the participants. It is often used when the parameters for a complete and accurate sampling framework are not available.

Creswell (2009) labels phenomenological research as a strategy used to identify the substance of human experiences about a phenomenon, communicated by participants,

and allows the researcher to set aside personal experiences to better understand the experiences of the participants being studied (Creswell, 2009). This study specifically chose qualitative input opportunities to deepen the understanding of the practitioner experience without guiding responses to a particular outcome. Moustakas (1994) supposed soliciting participants about experiences within specific contexts adds to the depth of the themes that emerge from the research.

Admittedly, the duration of the study was not as lengthy as phenomenological research might typically extend (Creswell, 2009). Instead, the researcher consciously chose to allow practitioners to experience the complete transition prior to the data collection. The delay in the research extended the practitioner's understanding of what leadership and resources were necessary for the reform initiatives to be successful. The qualitative collection of data was embedded in the survey through eight open-ended questions. Each question was positioned to specifically match data obtained from a quantitative question and bring depth to the response, enabling the researcher to establish specific examples within the empirical data (Creswell, 2009; Sappsford, 1999).

It was the combination of these two research paradigms that offered the best outlook for determining the effect of the data collected. Predictions backed by generalizations, rich descriptions and patterns allowed the researcher to address the epistemology and methodology of a combined approach utilizing quantitative and qualitative strengths of a mixed methods design (Creswell, 2009; Gay & Airasian, 2003; Mertens, 2010). The combination (Creswell, 2009) provided a more comprehensive analysis of the research questions. A concurrent triangulation strategy (Creswell, 2009; Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2009) was applied during the study, allowing for the collection of

the data concurrently and the two databases compared to determine if there was convergence, differentiation or a combination of the two (Creswell, 2009; Hatch, 2002; Sapprsford, 1999).

Participants and Sampling Procedures

Mertens (2010) identified multiple decisions a researcher must make regarding research participants and the processes by which they are chosen. Since each of the fifty states was able to choose specific implementation processes to comply with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) initiative (NGA, 2010), the population of interest for the sampling frame (Field, 2005) became Missouri's teachers. The state's selection of the Missouri Learning Standards (MLS) as the implementation schema and relative experiences would assure participants had homogeneous understanding (Patton, 1990) of the needs to comply with the reform initiatives. Therefore, K-12, public school districts throughout Missouri were targeted for selection such that the researcher could garner access to the general population of available teachers, or participants (Gay & Airasian, 2003; Mertens, 2010), at all levels (K-12th grade).

To ensure equal probability of selection (Field, 2005; Hatch, 2002), defined as self-weighted (Field, 2005), the researcher randomly selected (Creswell, 2009; Hatch, 2002) ten school districts of the 524 districts identified by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in the State of Missouri using a randomization tool. When alphabetized, each school district in the state had an assigned number (1-524); numbers were randomly selected via a randomizing program and the districts contacted. Of the ten districts approached, only five responded with interest. However, when approached to have these five districts complete the gatekeeper approval documents, several issues

arose, including administrators who had left the respective districts for other employment opportunities and nonresponsive central office administration. In addition, similar difficulties arose when the researcher sought out replacement districts.

Because of the difficulties locating school districts willing to participate in this study, the researcher sought an alternate method for gathering participants. Upon receiving IRB approval for the change, the researcher moved forward with a state database pull, processed by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). For the study, DESE randomly selected eleven hundred (1100) K-12th grade public school teachers and pulled corresponding email addresses. The districts represented both urban and rural schools from 100 Missouri public school districts across 56 of the 114 counties available,

Field (2005) defined a sample as a smaller and hopefully representative assortment of units from a population that can be used to determine truths about that population. Missouri's population of school teachers met the parameters of a simple random sampling design (Creswell, 2009), considered a small, homogeneous and readily available group throughout the state (Creswell, 2009; Fink, 2009; Gay & Airasian, 2003; Hatch, 2002; Merrian, 2009; Seidman, 2006; Mertens, 2010).

This participant selection process also served as a purposeful sample (Creswell, 2009; Gay & Airasian, 2003; Merriam, 2009; Mertens, 2010). According to Patton (1990) purposeful sampling is a useful strategy for selecting participants in qualitative research to improve the intensity of the data gained from a distinct set of participants. He identified homogenous samples as groups in which participants share common characteristics that allow study to be focused on targeted sets of data as well as open-

ended discoveries (Patton, 1990). As all Missouri teachers, including new graduates, have been trained in the CCSS initiative and its implementation as the MLS in Missouri schools (DESE, 2016), these information rich participants (Hatch, 2002; Patton, 1990) provided perceptions based on first-hand experience through the transition of the CCSS via the MLS. Teachers in kindergarten through the twelfth grade were included in the survey invitation. According to Mertens (2010), by using identical samples, or identical population groups for both quantitative and qualitative collection methods of the study, the researcher addressed mixed methods sampling parameters.

Data Collection

Mertens (2010) classified data collection as a means of collecting information related to procedures and people. This research implemented two methods of data collection: an online survey tool that incorporated both quantitative and qualitative data collection. Research (Field, 2009; Fink, 2009; Gay & Airasian, 2003; Kruger & Casey, 2009; Merriam, 2009; Mertens, 2010; Sapsford, 1999; Weiss, 1994) recognizes the substantial impact generated from the use of multiple methods of data collection when conducting research.

Human subjects' protection and other ethical considerations.

The present study included comprehensive protection and ethical consideration of human subject's as identified by the University of Missouri-Columbia Institutional Review Board (IRB) and these standards were followed at all times. The researcher completed the IRB certification and prior approval process for the present study. Protections and other ethical considerations are detailed in the attached document (see Appendix A). The researcher closely adhered to the directions from the dissertation

review committee.

Also, the process to conceal or reveal individual identities was addressed within the study and data reporting measures. Mertens (2010, p. 342) defined confidentiality as, "the privacy of individuals…protected in…the data they provide…handled and reported in such a way that [the provided data] cannot be associated with them." Therefore, this study determined to keep personal identities confidential.

On-line Survey Protocol

The researcher used the online survey tool *SurveyMonkey* to present quantitative and qualitative questions to gather data in a single event (See Appendix B). Sapsford (1999) identified this single event method as a one-shot survey, in which the researcher seeks to collect data in a single phase to review the opinions of all participants at one time. The participants gave informed consent by participating in the on-line survey. (See Appendix C). Researchers (Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 1998; Merriam, 2009; Seidman, 2006) suggested caution when using this approach and regard was therefore given to ensure the data obtained reflected participant insights clearly.

Although allowing for greater access to larger samples of participants, Converse, Wolfe, Huang, Oswald (2008), and Mertens (2010), suggested Internet surveys are also associated with lower response rates more than targeted, smaller scaled surveys. However, Converse, et al. (2008) identified numerous advantages of web-based surveys, such as convenient access to sample populations, reduced costs, faster response rates, more interactive formats, and the ability to troubleshoot issues quickly. The additional benefits of automated data collection, scoring, and reporting through this modality served to assist in the timeliness of the present research (Field, 2009; Fink, 2009; Merriam,

2009; Mertens, 2010). Finally, the researcher's purposeful selection of *Survey Monkey* ensured complete anonymity of the participants (Field, 2009; Fink, 2009; Merriam, 2009; Mertens, 2010; Sapsford, 1999) in an attempt to circumvent participation concerns and improve authenticity of the responses, as well as response percentages.

Following the recommendations of researchers (Fields, 2009; Fink, 2009; Gay & Airasian, 2003; Mertens, 2010; Sapsford, 1999), the initial items for the survey were developed through the research of Learning Leadership Theory (Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliot, & Cravens, 2009; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Patterson, 1993; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008) and focused on obtaining perceptions of purposeful transitions (DeBray, 2006; Herrian, 2011; Rebell & Wolff, 2009; Vinovskis, 2009) related to the reform efforts. In addition, a similar study by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2016) sought practitioner perceptions regarding the fundamental needs and resources perceived as important in transitioning to the Missouri Learning Standards. Consideration was given to the style of question used and the outcome of that study so additional research could move beyond those results. Finally, discussions with practitioners at local and regional Missouri State Teacher Association meetings was considered in the draft of the initial twenty-six question instrument.

The design of each question was fashioned to garner detail about the participant's opinion of requirements necessary from leadership to secure large-scale transition. The first of these types of questions relate directly to the Missouri Learning Standards and to what was necessary for successful implementation. The final six centered on leadership skills and instructional needs that equip instructors to best teach in the midst of

educational reform.

The survey was then field-tested in suburban Kansas City K-12 schools and surrounding districts to determine values of validity and reliability of the question sets (Fink, 2009; Gay & Airasian, 2003; Mertens, 2010). Survey results were analyzed using predetermined statistical analysis procedures (Field, 2009; Gay & Airasian, 2003; Mertens, 2010). Cronbach's alpha, an estimate of internal consistency reliability (Field, 2009), was applied, however, as noted by Nunnally (1978), it is best used with an analysis of 10-20 items. The initial survey related to this study consisted of more than twenty-five items. Based upon the research of Nunnally (1978), in which he proposes .70 is acceptable variance in exploratory research, the survey instrument was reduced to seventeen items, including demographic data (three questions) for a more accurate measure of variance (Field, 2009).

Results of the analysis presented measurement validity (Fink, 2009), valid logistics within the survey instrument that indicated a reliable and valid survey tool. The content and distribution mechanism for the survey instrument was determined to have design validity (Fink, 2009), even though other researchers (Field, 2009; Gay & Airasian, 2003; Mertens, 2010) identify specific challenges to this type of data collection, as previously noted. The researcher performed an independent t-test as well as a one-way, between subjects ANOVA, and considered open-ended question responses from participants as part of the result analysis (Field, 2009; Gay & Airasian, 2003, Mertens, 2010). The score sets from the survey administration were correlated using the Pearson coefficient (r) to establish the stability for the reliability of the survey. The correlation established was a high coefficient of stability, (r = -.84), indicating the reliability of the

survey (Horner et al, 2004). Further, field-testing allowed the researcher to modify the wording and positioning of the questions for purposes of improvement and participant understanding.

In a re-test of new educational participants, analysis indicated the results did indeed prove the instrument both internally and externally valid (Field, 2009; Fink, 2009; Gay & Airasian, 2003; Sapsford, 1999; Mertens, 2010). The survey demonstrated both face validity (Field, 2009; Gay & Airasian), in which the test appears to measure what it claims to measure per participant perception, and content validity (Gay & Airasian, 2003)), in which the correspondence between survey and research questions yield results applicable to the knowledge level necessary for analysis.

Qualitative Data Protocol

As stated previously, the researcher sought to gain additional insights regarding content validity for the instrument, so survey questions were presented to educators in K-12 schools in the southern Kansas City metro that had transitioned to the MLS (Fink, 2009; Sapsford, 1999). The researcher collected input from those that responded to the open-ended questions and reworded the questions to address deficiencies (Fink, 2009; Kruger & Casey, 2009; Mertens, 2010; Seidman, 2006). Revised questions were part of the retest (Hatch, 2002; Field, 2009; Fink, 2009) in which they were analyzed to determine reliability of responses (Gay & Airasian, 2003; Merrian, 2009; Mertens, 2010), including the capacity of the questions to elicit rich, deep views of respondents with acceptable expert knowledge of the subject (Creswell, 2009; Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 1998; Seidman, 2006).

The result of the field test and follow up analysis concluded that eight of the

original ten qualitative question set had content validity (Merriam, 2009; Mertens, 2010; Seidman, 2006; Weiss, 1994). Participants in the field test indicated the questions allowed them to incorporate a broader response. Respondents also indicated that they appreciated the opportunity to explain their opinion or describe their responses in detail. Thus, the researcher eliminated the two questionable dialogue boxes and determined the remaining items represented an appropriate sample of the opinions of individuals being considered for the study (Mertens, 2010; Seidman, 2006; Weiss, 1994).

Finally, the researcher determined that the qualitative question set offered face validity (Gay & Airasian, 2003). According to Gay and Airasian (2003), face validity has been determined to be ambiguous, yet the qualitative question set appeared to measure what they were designed to measure per the respondents. Researchers denote that determining validity with a new research tool is far from an exact science (Fink, 2009; Gay & Airasian, 2003; Mertens, 2010), however, the researcher established that the questions would be sufficient for this study based on input of respondents and a review of the current literature.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involves researchers making interpretations of statistical results or interpreting themes or patterns that emerge from data collected (Creswell, 2009; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Mertens, 2010). In this mixed method study, the researcher analyzed the data in several steps to examine both quantitative and qualitative responses (Creswell, 2009; Field, 2009; Fink, 2009; Mertens, 2010). The raw data collected was initially organized for analysis (Mertens, 2010). Credibility (Field, 2009) was established through means deemed appropriate for statistical and data analysis.

Quantitative methods focused on data analysis interpreted on statistical formulas suitable in education research (Creswell, 2009; Field, 2009; Fink, 2009; Mertens, 2010; Sapsford, 1999). Demographic data was collected using three questions: male/female, novice (nine years or less of experience)/veteran (ten years or more of experience), and content (ELA, mathematics, science, social studies)/non-content instruction. In determining whether male and female respondents would differ in mean scores when attributing leadership characteristics to systematic change, the researcher used an *independent t-test* (Field, 2009). This allowed the researcher to draw inferences as to whether being a male or female influenced one's perceptions related to systemic change and the interpretation of necessary leadership characteristics. The predictive assumption (Creswell, 2009) was that there was no difference between male and female respondents.

A *one-way, between subjects ANOVA* (Field, 2009) was utilized to determine if there was a difference in the mean scores of participants with different years of experience in how they ranked critical leadership characteristics. In addition, a *one-way, between subjects ANOVA* (Field, 2009) was again used to determine differences in the mean scores of participants in differing roles (content vs. non-content). The researcher was able to draw inferences related to whether years of experience or different roles in education impact one's perceptions of what leadership characteristics and resources impact large-scale educational change. The predictive assumption (Creswell, 2009) was that there was no difference between the years of experience or roles in education.

Valuable insight into leadership qualities and resources that can lead schools through change can be found by exploring the practitioner perspective (Wallace Foundation, 2013). Determining the relationship between these qualities and teacher

experiences will influence future leadership practices and administrative training programs (Wallace Foundation, 2012). To establish the presence of correlation, the researcher used a Pearson Correlation Coefficient test for sets of questions measuring leadership characteristics or resources, and the value held throughout the transition to the Missouri Learning Standards.

Participant responses to the eight open-ended questions contained within the survey provided qualitative data. The researcher sought deeper, more specific, and independent examples of leadership characteristics teachers identified as necessary to make reform successful. The open-ended dialogue boxes allowed participants to share specific examples or clarify an answer for the researcher's understanding or to bring fuller meaning to their response. The use of dialogue boxes amidst quantitative questions was purposeful and for the express intent of garnering an individual's experience (Gay & Airsian, 2003). The researcher reviewed, coded and established themes from the open-ended survey question results (Creswell, 2009, Hatch, 2002, Mertens, 2010).

Researcher's Biases and Assumptions

The researcher was involved in all aspects of the present study, including generating and implementing the survey. Due to the extensive personal involvement, the researcher had to be keenly aware of personal influence and bias throughout the study. As a fellow educator and aspiring leader, it was important that personal perception of transitions in education, experiences related to leadership methodologies, or other factors did not influence questions or the processes of the study. An inclusive perspective respecting the insights and perceptions of educators and leaders was necessary for a valid study.

A researcher must be cognizant of bias to circumvent bias whenever likely (Creswell, 2009; Hatch, 2002). Sampling bias was a source of possible prejudice when using non-probability sampling techniques such as the purposive sampling used in the present inquiry. In purposive sampling, determining the probability of each selected member in the population for the sample was not possible (Creswell, 2009). Through a comparison of demographics among the selected school districts, the researcher sought to have a representative sample as close to the target population as possible. However, choosing of the sample was based on random selection within the 524 school public school districts available in Missouri. The researcher assumed that schools implementing MLS are typical schools and that the teachers participating in the study did not differ from teachers choosing not to participate in the study.

A potential bias when collecting data concurrently was that one form of data collection will bias the other when collected from the same participants (Creswell, 2009). To minimize this potential bias, the researcher reorganized the items on the final survey and removed section names that would denote any bias linked with the survey item.

Trustworthiness

The study implemented multiple measures of quality control. Before beginning the research, the complete survey instrument was field tested (Fink, 2009; Field, 2009; Mertens, 2010; Sapsford, 1999) with non-participants in local school districts in metropolitan and suburban Kansas City, Missouri. The purpose in field-testing (Mertens, 2010) was to pretest protocols as well as questions. The actual research tool for the survey was the online tool *SurveyMonkey*. Research participants were anonymous and voluntary even though the qualitative study implemented purposeful selection to "best

help the researcher understand the problem" (Creswell, 2009, p. 178).

Triangulation of the qualitative and quantitative data examined transferability. As an example, participants had the opportunity to provide thick descriptions when answering questions with open-ended dialogue boxes (Mertens, 2010). Additionally, qualitative questions sought a broad recruitment of participants to ensure some measure of transferability of the collected results (Field, 2009). Dependability was evaluated throughout the research using documentation of the process and noting changes (Mertens, 2010).

Summary

The purpose of the study was to examine leadership characteristics from the practitioner perspective. The assessment of instructional and leadership needs of teachers as they transitioned to the MLS served as the backdrop for the study. Learning leadership theory was considered as a means of supporting instructional needs, as was the possibility that alternate leadership attributes or theories might emerge from the data.

In Chapter Three, the research design and methodology selected by the researcher were discussed. The rationale was provided for selecting a mixed method design, population and sampling methods, and instrumentation used in the study. The researcher provided data collection methods and analysis, as well as discussed the researcher's bias and study assumptions impacting the study.

Chapter Four goes on to analyze the data collected based upon the guiding research questions, accompanied by the interpretations of the research findings. Finally, Chapter 5 presents a summary of findings and conclusions, along with possible implications and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore how schools and administrators can be most effective in meeting the needs of students while managing high stakes accountability measures. Literature regarding leadership theories is prevalent (Bass, 1981; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Northouse, 2010; Sergiovanni, 1996), yet there remains a gap in how quality leadership efforts translate into effective, quality schools with achieving children (Wallace Foundation, 2007, 2012). For struggling schools to advance reform efforts, research must determine how educational leaders can best support student achievement through the reform process. Leithwood, Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom (2004) agreed leadership "provides a critical bridge between most educational reform initiatives, and having those reforms make a genuine difference for all students" (p. 5).

The present research sought teacher perceptions of effective leadership characteristics when assessing management of reform efforts such as the federal Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (National Governors Association [NGA], 2010) and the ensuing Missouri response in the Missouri Learning Standards (MLS) (DESE, 2016). Learning leadership was the comparative tool utilized to better understand effective governance. An online, single instance survey (Creswell, 2009) was created with open-ended questions to obtain practitioner insights regarding possible relationships between effective leadership characteristics and successful student achievement (Creswell, 2009; Hatch, 2002, Merriam, 2009).

Chapter Four includes a reporting of the collection, synthesis, and analysis of the research data. This chapter specifically reviews the design of the study, data collection methods, the study's conceptual underpinnings and review of the research questions. Additionally, the chapter offers details of the data analysis process, study settings, a review of respondent demographics and, finally, a presentation of the qualitative themes.

Study Design

The use of a mixed method design (Creswell, 2009; Gay & Airasian, 2003; Merriam, 2010; Mertens, 2010) combined quantitative and qualitative data approaches to a single research problem to yield a richer interpretation of the outcomes (Creswell, 2009; Creswell & Clark, 2007; Gay & Airasian, 2003). This study implemented a quasi-experimental method, as defined by Creswell (2009), Hatch (2002) and Mertens (2010), to approximate an authentic experimental design with one modification: the survey offered to teachers was based on voluntary participation and self-direction.

Quantitative data was obtained using fourteen questions that relied upon teacher experiences and resulting educational needs throughout the reform process. Questions were established to gauge the value of each of the learning leadership characteristics and their role in student success throughout the transition to the MLS (Hatch, 2002), as well as instructional influence and importance in relationship to general leadership experiences. Sappsford (1999) defined this method as a one-shot survey, in which a researcher provides a single phase of data gathering to garner the insights of the participants.

This study specifically chose to add qualitative input by embedding eight dialogue boxes within the survey (Creswell, 2009) to deepen the understanding of the practitioner

experience without guiding responses to a particular outcome. Questions were positioned to specifically match data obtained from quantitative questions and bring depth to the responses, enabling the researcher to establish specific examples throughout the empirical data (Creswell, 2009; Sappsford, 1999). Moustakas (1994) proposed soliciting participants about experiences within specific contexts to increase the depth of the themes that emerge from the research.

This combination (Creswell, 2009) provided a more comprehensive analysis of the research questions. A concurrent triangulation strategy (Creswell, 2009; Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2009) was applied during the study, allowing for the collection of the data concurrently and the two databases compared to determine if there was convergence, differentiation or a combination of the two (Creswell, 2009; Hatch, 2002; Sapprsford, 1999). Respondent data provided the researcher the opportunity to explore practitioner perceptions of leadership characteristics necessary to successfully navigate large-scale reform. The combination of the two data types aided the research by uniting broad numeric tendencies with detailed viewpoints throughout the data (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2010; Mertens, 2010).

Data Collection Methods

This research implemented two methods of data collection through the use of an online survey tool that incorporated both quantitative and qualitative data collection. The research was submitted to the University of Missouri – Columbia, Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval. With IRB approval, the survey was opened on-line and an email was sent to 1035 Missouri K-12th grade public school teachers selected through a random selection process completed by the Missouri Department of Elementary and

Secondary Education (DESE) and provided to the researcher. The initial email introduced the respondent to the research project and included a link to the survey, identifying their involvement was voluntary.

Communication with practitioners was limited to a brief introductory email with the survey link, and included no more than four total email contacts, consisting of three follow-up reminders to potential participants, each sent four to seven days apart over the course of the three week survey window. Researcher contact with respondents was strictly through email addresses provided; individual names and additional contact information was not provided by DESE. This correspondence included emphasis on the closing of the survey opportunity (date and time) and, again, a link to the survey.

Data were collected and stored by the electronic survey provider. No identifying information was requested of DESE or the respondents to protect and ensure anonymity, however, the on-line service provider treated each respondent as unique. Respondents were given random numbers as an identifier to ensure that each could submit only one response. The survey was closed at the end of the three-week window, making certain it was no longer available to the public.

SurveyMonkey collected, stored, and partially analyzed all data. Additionally, data records were provided, which included the responses in multiple formats for review and statistical analysis, as well as to determine the overall outcome of the survey. All data has been kept private and are unavailable to the public, stored as random number identifiers to ensure confidentiality.

For qualitative data collection and analysis, the same method was utilized. The on-line service provider maintained responses to the eight open-ended questions.

Respondent data has been kept with quantitative data and, again, stored via random number identifiers. Data were examined electronically and through visual inquiry processes. Responses were collected, printed and coded by theme prior to evaluation.

Conceptual Underpinnings

Again, this study scrutinized the leader as an educational change agent (Bush, 2007; Elmore, 2004; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Senge, Lichtenstein, Kaeufer, Bradbury, & Caroll, 2007 by analyzing generic and educational leadership theories (Elmore, 2004; Firestone & Riehl, 2005; Robinson, 2006) and the potential to successfully implement school reform. Additionally considered was whether theoretical leadership development concentrated on and provided for the real needs of teachers and students in the contemporary classroom (Creswell, 2009; Robinson, 2006).

In an effort to bridge gaps in educational research (Robinson, 2006), this study chose to prioritize the practitioner experience as the guiding focus for effective leadership practice rather than predetermining a theory to guide the relationship between leadership and achievement. This prompted the exploration of practitioner perspectives to explore the type and characteristics of leadership required to impact the practice of teaching and learning effectively. It was determined it was essential to establish the voice of the practitioner for the research to be meaningful.

Four applicable leadership theories undergirded a framework for understanding theoretical perspectives guiding the current education system. The foundational premise postulated leadership as key to organizational change and improvement (Hattie, 2009, 2012; Knapp, Copland, Honig, Plecki, & Portin, 2006; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, &

Wahlstrom, 2004). Although a plethora of valuable leadership theories exist, this study reviewed authentic, distributive, instructional and learning leadership theories for application of features associated with generating successful educational reform.

Authentic leadership provided a viable framework for guiding reform (Freeman & Auster, 2011). Begley (2001) described authentic leadership theory as "professionally effective, ethically sound, and consciously reflective practices" (p. 353) and "a genuine kind of leadership – a hopeful, open-ended, visionary and creative response to social circumstances" (p. 354). Developed upon a moral foundation (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999), Freeman and Auster (2011) cited values as the primary cornerstone of responsible, ethical leadership, a driving force behind authentic leadership.

However, strong opposition to this theoretical leadership approach was also documented. Researchers (Ford & Harding, 2011; Garger, 2008; Shamir & Eilam, 2005) argued authentic leadership was easier to recognize than define, conceding that definitions of the theory remain arbitrary. Additionally, the commitment necessary to be authentic and understand oneself, and the motivations behind individual actions is more difficult than it appears (Freeman & Auster, 2011). Hayes and Comer (2010) claimed authenticity was not an innate quality "but a quality that others attribute to you. The paradox is that you need to be who you are (authentic) while also adapting your behaviors to the situation and follower audience" (p. 20). These were significant factors in the determination to set aside this leadership theory.

As leadership researchers (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009; Yukl, 2006) advanced and considered leadership more than a specific characteristic of a single person, numerous models identified leadership as a complex social dynamic that incorporates

shared responsibility (Yukl, 2002). Therefore, distributive leadership, which diffuses responsibility throughout the organization (Fusarelli, Kowalski, & Petersen, 2011), was considered. Distributive leadership theorists view leadership as a collective phenomenon, or community exercise (Lumby, 2003) rather than the work of a single agent (Ross, Rix, & Gold, 2005a).

The large-scale attraction to this theoretical perspective rests in the relational and dispersed views of leadership, which emphasized inclusion of organizational followers as leaders themselves (Burns, 1978; Hunt & Ropo, 1997). The core assumption that each member encapsulates leadership abilities needed by the organization at some point (Harris, 2008) enables leadership to be a fluid, emergent property utilized by individuals and groups to generate reform (Spillane, 2006).

Difficulties in understanding and implementing the theory arise as competing and conflicting interpretations of the approach result in a general breakdown of the theory to identify forms of shared or dispersed leadership (Harris, 2008). Woods and Gronn (2009) noted schools, traditionally authoritarian, are designed to limit teacher and leader behavior. In an era of high stakes testing and accountability (Fusarelli, Kowalski, & Petersen, 2011), schools are often hesitant to involve staff in substantial change. Fitzgerald and Gunter (2007) questioned whether it was possible for distributive leadership to occur in a policy climate established on strict hierarchical structures which reserves authority for the few with appropriate titles. Thus, the present study set this theory aside.

The present study shifted from generic to educational leadership research in the hope a theory would be uncovered that was relevant and focused on academic outcomes

(Elmore, 2000; Robinson, 2006). Instructional leadership theory was the first model considered. Targeting the acts of teaching and learning through intentional professional development of teachers (Southworth, 2002), researchers (Lunenburg, 2010; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Stronge, Richard, & Catano, 2008) consider instructional leadership a viable theory in executing federal mandates due to the direction of influence – focusing on the behavior of teachers working with students (Bush 2007). Brazer and Bauer (2013) established a comprehensive working definition of instructional leadership as "the effort to improve teaching and learning for PK-12 students by managing effectively, addressing the challenges of diversity, guiding teacher learning, and fostering organizational change" (p. 650). The theory espouses leadership is a top-down process as an administrator's vision for success transfers to those in the building (Jenkins, 2009).

Previous pressure on principals had been to learn new business skills, with little emphasis on understanding knowledge of curriculum, assessment, and pedagogy (Stein & Nelson, 2003). It is often assumed building leaders are experienced teachers, and therefore have sufficient understanding of teaching and learning (Robinson, 2006). However, previous knowledge offers no guarantee of understanding in light of wide-scale reform efforts. Instructional leadership requires a broader knowledge base than one individuals teaching experience (Brazer & Bauer, 2013). Therefore, applying instructional leadership theory as a frame for this research proved too narrow for current needs imposed by educational reform efforts.

Thus, the researcher chose learning leadership theory as a lens to view effective leadership as the framework for examining leaders and leadership capacity, as well as the subsequent impact on teaching and learning (Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliot, &

Cravens, 2009; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Patterson, 1993; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). Encapsulating many of the same characteristics as instructional leadership, learning leadership theory is more explicit in its methodology. Toll (2010) specified "[w]hile an instructional leader pays attention to the planning, implementation, and evaluation of instruction, a learning leader focuses on what is learned and how it is learned. These roles are not mutually exclusive, and they both have value" (p.50).

In review, learning leadership was defined as the theoretical perspective in which learning becomes the primary method of leading (Goldring, et al., 2009) and keeping pace with a fluctuating environment (Schein, 1996). Through the collaborative "process of influencing others to achieve mutually agreed upon purposes for the organization" (Patterson, 1993, p.3) substantial achievement could be measured to federally established levels. Although other theories such as instructional leadership contain similar elements, the significant appeal of learning leadership is the result of principles and people working in unison.

Learning leaders are perpetual learners who revere all learning – student, staff, personal, and collective. They support and challenge instructors to critically consider instruction while promoting an atmosphere of professional responsibility and collaboration. Exhibiting knowledge of cutting edge instructional practices is an integral part of the curriculum conversation. The reform-minded educational leader is required to establish high standards and promote rigorous student learning goals across all programs of study (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Finally, effective learning leaders support

and expand internal and external accountability by holding the total learning community responsible for collective goals.

As discussed, each of the four theories reviewed had merit in organizational change. Top-down theoretical models are considered questionable by some researchers (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Robinson, 2006). Leithwood warned of the "need to be skeptical about the 'leadership by adjective' literature" (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004, p. 8). Robinson (2006) documented that a significant portion of educational leadership literature debates the merits of theories or evaluates the extent in which educational leaders exemplify the qualities of a theory through empirical evidence rather than offering evidence of impact on learning. Therefore, instructional needs were an integral consideration of this study, which was investigated through the practitioner perspective.

Alton-Lee (2003) and Darling-Hammond, and Bransford (2005) considered the difference teachers make in the accomplishments of their students as valuable in establishing a theory or identifying characteristics that are in agreement with current theories of practice. Regard should be given to all members of an organization – learning about and focusing on the very qualities that help students do well, helping the district meet federal accountability measures (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Rosen, Case, & Staubus, 2005). Consequently, learning leadership theory as a lens to view effective leadership provided a framework for comparing instructional needs of the practitioner and the type of leader or leadership capacity necessary for success in the classroom (Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliot, & Cravens, 2009; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). As a result, this

research focused on how building leadership could support actual classroom needs to succeed at increasing student achievement levels mandated by CCSS and implemented through the MLS.

Research Questions

Leadership theories were viewed to effectually implement change and improve student achievement (e.g. NCLB, ESEA, CCSS, MLS) through the analysis of practitioner perspectives. The synthesis of the literature identified that leadership is the second most influential factor in student achievement, subsequent only to the influence of the instructor (Knapp, Copland, Honig, Plecki, & Portin, 2006; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Lieberman, Falk, & Alexander, 1994; Rosenholtz, 1989; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). Specifically, learning leadership theory is a viable approach to sustaining educational reform and increasing student achievement (Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliot, & Cravens, 2009; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Patterson, 1993; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008).

Therefore, the following research questions guided this study:

1. What do teachers perceive as necessary resources and learning leadership behaviors that promote the instructional objectives of the Missouri Learning Standards?
2. Is there a perceived relationship between instructional needs and the characteristics of learning leadership theory?
3. What practices do teachers identify beyond learning leadership behaviors which promote successful implementation of the Missouri Learning Standards?
4. Is there a difference in the perceptions of teachers when prioritizing resources and

learning leadership behaviors to promote instructional objectives of the Missouri Learning Standards based on gender?

5. Is there a difference in the perceptions of teachers when prioritizing resources and learning leadership behaviors to promote instructional objectives of the Missouri Learning Standards based on years of teaching experiences?
6. Is there a difference in the perceptions of teachers when prioritizing resources and learning leadership behaviors to promote instructional objectives of the Missouri Learning Standards based on areas of instructional responsibilities?

Process of Data Analysis

Analyses of the data occurred in primarily three steps. First, quantitative information was statistically analyzed through the survey instrument. Next, a thematic analysis of qualitative information was obtained through dialogue box responses, contained within the quantitative survey. Finally, a triangulation of data was implemented to combine both data sets. Although analysis of quantitative and qualitative data was conducted separately, triangulation combined the data for a deeper, richer understanding.

Data was collected as one hundred thirty-one (131) participants completed the on-line survey distributed via email; however, two (2) respondents answered that they did not want to participate (the first question on the survey), so these results were not included in the overall data analysis. Informed consent was provided for participants as part of the survey introduction. For participant protection, respondents could opt-out of the survey (which twenty-one respondents [2%] chose to do) or exit the survey at any time without consequence (which three hundred twenty-two respondents [31%] chose to do). The researcher identified there were no incomplete responses to disqualify.

Each quantitative research question was analyzed according to a predetermined, specified testing method. A single, standard question type was utilized throughout the survey for consistency and to simplify the process for respondents. Participants were asked to choose one of the following responses: strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, somewhat agree, and strongly agree. Such questions were then given a point value: 1 point for strongly disagree, 2 points for somewhat disagree, 3 points for somewhat agree, and 4 points for strongly agree. The mean scores of responses were then calculated using the 4-point response scale.

The first research question, in the quantitative analysis section of the survey, sought teacher perception of what resources and learning leadership behaviors promote the instructional objectives of the Missouri Learning Standards. A linear correlation and regression test, the *Pearson Correlation Coefficient*, was applied to the two survey question sets – transition to MLS and instructional impact – to determine the relationship of survey submissions relative to teacher perception of necessary resources and leadership characteristics, as determined by a composite mean score of the responses.

To secure a comparative mean, the mean score of survey questions 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13 measured respondents' perceptions of leadership characteristics and whether each was considered valuable throughout the transition to MLS. The mean score of survey questions 14, 16, 18, 20, 22, 24 and 25 measured respondents' perceptions of learning leadership characteristics and the relationship to instruction in purer form to determine if they held value on their own. Data from completed surveys were recorded as raw data from individual participants and are included Chapter 5 *Summary of Findings*.

The data were quantitatively analyzed to determine if there were differences in the mean scores for each of the two question sets. The data analyses are presented for each research question using an *alpha, P* < .05, to determine if there was a significant difference for each category and variable chosen for comparison. This information can be found in Chapter 5 *Summary of Findings.*

Research question four postulated female and male participants would not differ in mean scores calculated when attributing leadership characteristics to systemic change. An independent t-test was utilized to compare female and male responses on each of the survey questions. Analysis was then completed based on the results of the t-test for two samples with unequal variance (Fields, 2009).

Research question five postulated participants with different years of experience in education (those with 0-9 years of experience, and those with 10+ years of experience) would not differ in mean scores when ranking critical leadership characteristics and resources necessary for successful reform transitions. A one-way, between subjects ANOVA was implemented to compare both categories across years of experience in education. Analysis was then completed based on the results from the ANOVA test for standard weight means analysis (Fields, 2009).

The sixth research question postulated respondents with different roles in education (those instructing in core academic areas, and those instructing in non-core areas) would not differ in their mean scores when ranking critical leadership characteristics and resources necessary for successful reform transitions. A one-way, between subjects ANOVA was implemented to compare both content/non-content responsibility areas.

Analysis was then completed based on the results from the ANOVA test for standard weight means analysis (Field, 2009).

The second phase of the study, or the qualitative analysis, centered on rich, textual examples that strengthened or gave witness to the quantitative counterparts. Open-ended questions allowed respondents to voice opinions or offer examples and further details to extend their quantitative selection.

All educators participating in the survey were given opportunity to answer the eight open-ended questions. The educators were able, and encouraged, to provide rich discussion of the main ideas for each of the questions. Data from the responses were analyzed for content and focus, electronically determining the key words used by respondents. The top response categories were identified as maintaining the strongest themes for each question and formed the primary impetus of the analysis. Occasionally, themes of lesser significance, or those determined to be statistically insignificant, were included in the discussion to place the value of administration and/or learning leadership characteristics in perspective with other themes at higher average values.

Phase three of the data collection and analysis process included the researcher triangulating the quantitative and qualitative data. The research questions expressed the opinions of educators as to whether administrators exhibited learning leadership behaviors through the large-scale transition of the Missouri Learning Standards (MLS) and held value for educators in purer form outside of transition events. The data obtained were coded utilizing grouping and labeling methods (Gay &Airasian, 2003, Mertens, 2010, Merriam, 2009). Common responses were aligned, forming subscales and emergent themes (Creswell & Clark, 2007).

Settings

The researcher obtained potential participant contact information from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). DESE provided the researcher with eleven hundred (1100) email addresses of a randomized sample of Missouri K-12th grade public school teachers. The researcher then contacted possible survey participants via district provided email addresses of employment. Of the potential educators provided by DESE, only one thousand thirty-five (1035) had viable addresses. The survey was conducted in April and May of 2019 to coordinate with spring breaks and end of the year dismissal.

Participants

The researcher had great difficulty locating school districts willing to participate in this research. Several administrators who had agreed to participate moved on to other employment opportunities and incoming leadership was unwilling to maintain the agreement, while other school district did not return requests for participation. Initially, the researcher had assigned numbers to each of the 524 public school districts in Missouri and randomly generated a list of ten potential districts to work with that represented both rural and urban education, as well as each quadrant of the state, however, with the above challenges, the researcher sought an alternate method for gathering participants. The researcher moved forward with a state database pull, processed by the Missouri Department of Elementary Education (DESE).

Once approved by the IRB, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) randomly selected potential study participants from the

database of instructors working at public school districts throughout the state. Participants spanned 56 of the 114 Missouri counties and represented 100 public school districts of the 524 Missouri public school districts available (70 Elementary only, 448 Elementary/MS/HS, 3 state operated, 36 public charter, 1 virtual school). DESE determined participants represented both rural and urban K-12th grade school teachers. Of the eleven hundred (1,100) educators possible for the research, one thousand thirty-five (1035) were determined to be active and who had up-to-date district email addresses.

Missouri's school teachers are a population meeting the parameters of a simple random sampling design; defined as a small, homogeneous and readily available group. This participant selection process also served as a purposeful sample, which is a useful strategy for selecting participants in qualitative research to improve the intensity of the data gained from a distinct set of participants. These homogenous samples are groups in which participants share common characteristics that allow focused study on targeted sets of data and-= open-ended discoveries. As all Missouri teachers, including new graduates, have been trained in the CCSS initiative and its implementation as the MLS in Missouri schools, these information rich participants provided perceptions based on first-hand experience through the transition of the CCSS via the MLS. By using identical samples, or identical population groups for both quantitative and qualitative collection methods of the study, the researcher addressed mixed methods sampling parameters.

Upon DESE's completion of the random participant pull, the researcher was forwarded participant email addresses, along with district name and county location. An introductory email was distributed to all possible participants, including a summary of the survey, explanation of procedures and consent statement. Teachers received the *Informed*

Consent Statement as part of the survey distributed via email by the online survey tool *SurveyMonkey*. Teachers voluntarily chose to complete the on-line survey and the researcher collected responses through the survey device, which gathered only demographic data for each individual as requested in three opening questions (questions 2, 3, and 4). Informed consent was agreed to by completion of the survey and only surveys with complete results were included in the analysis.

Again, the participant pool began with the initial eleven hundred (1100) potential addresses, however, only one thousand thirty-five (1035) addresses proved viable. From the participants emailed, seven hundred ninety-two (792) individuals opened the survey (76.5%), two hundred twelve (212) remained unopened (20.5%), and ten (10) bounded (1.0%)(address was undeliverable). Of the surveys opened, three hundred twenty-two (322) clicked through (31.1%) but did not answer any questions, twenty-one (21) opted out (2.0%) prior to reviewing the survey, zero (0%) completed any part, and one hundred thirty-one (131) completed the entire survey, including two individuals who responded "no" to participation but replied to each survey questions anyways. This rendered a return rate of 12.66% (131 of 1,035 eligible participants).

It is important to note that an error on the part of the survey tool was discovered midway through the survey window, which may reflect on why seven hundred ninety-two (792) individuals clicked through while leaving no footprint in the data. *SurveyMonkey* indicated for some unknown reason, the survey instrument altered the format of one question per page to a running scroll of questions. This alteration set respondents up to potentially time-out, which would result in no data being saved at the end of the survey. Respondents unaware of the format change may have exited without

understanding they had not completed and saved their input. Therefore, any participant that did not resubmit results was not included in the analyzed data sets.

It is also important to clarify that of the one hundred thirty-one respondents, two (0.015%) replied "no" to participation and yet went on to complete the survey questions. The researcher was able to separate and remove the quantitative responses of both individuals from the analysis; however, qualitative data could not be separated due to the nature of the survey instrument and the process in which the dialogue responses were saved; therefore, the two (0.015%) participants who indicated "no" to study participation were not disassociated from the qualitative data set.

The following demographic data was included in the survey: gender, years of teaching experience, and job responsibility/area of certification. The demographic data reflected all respondents who fully completed the survey. For reader clarity, data on study participants are included in the following figure (Figure 1). The informed consent specified that stopping the survey at any point indicated the participant's desire to no longer participate in the research, individuals who did not engage in the question sets while clicking through, as well as those who opted out, were not included in any of the demographic or question data.

Figure 1. Demographic data of survey participants (131 completed - 2 declined yet answered all questions, 0 completed a portion of the survey).

Demographic	Choices	Results
Gender	Female Male	**99** (75.57%) **32** (24.43%)
Years of Experience	Completing 0-9 years Completing 10+ years	**33** (25.19%) **98** (74.81%)
Area of Certification	Core Academic Instructor Non-Core Academic Instructor	**101** (77.1%) **30** (22.9%)

Participants were also given the opportunity to respond to eight open-ended questions seeking deeper, richer practitioner examples and opinions in non-directed statements. Of the teachers participating in the survey, all respondents completed the applicable open-ended questions. For designated questions (question 7), participants who choose responses of *strongly disagree* or *somewhat disagree* were disqualified from contributing to the dialogue box because the question was designed only to explore further details for participants answering *somewhat agree* or *strongly agree*, rendering a dialogue response not applicable. In addition, some statements (questions 21 and 23) may also have lacked a response because the participant had no contribution since there was no viable answer or the data would not have been appropriate.

After completion of the survey, the researcher determined that of the one hundred thirty-one (131) completed surveys, a majority of the respondents noted learning leadership characteristics were a positive part of their transition to the MLS (questions 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13) and enhanced the outcome. Additionally, a majority of the respondents noted learning leadership characteristics as important to ongoing learning and instruction (questions 14, 16, 1, 20, 22, 24, and 25). Both sets of data results are shared below in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Results of quantitative question set per designated learning leadership characteristic

Question #	Learning Leadership Characteristic	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
6	MLS: Administrative Support	4.58%	9.16%	45.04%	41.22%
8	MLS: Professional Development	11.45%	29.01%	35.88%	23.66%
9	MLS: Curriculum Alignment	12.21%	22.14%	35.88%	29.77%
10	MLS: Resources	7.63%	13.74%	46.56%	32.06%
11	MLS: Collaboration	4.58%	12.21%	32.06%	51.15%
12	MLS: Professional Development	6.87%	21.37%	43.51%	28.24%
13	MLS: Teacher Input/Participation	0.76%	9.92%	41.98%	47.33%
14	LLC: Perpetual Learning	4.58%	11.45%	45.80%	38.17%
16	LLC: Culture of Learning	4.58%	10.69%	31.30%	53.44%
18	LLC: Critical consideration of instructional process; critical analysis/reflection	6.87%	8.40%	42.75%	41.98%
20	LLC: Supports rigorous curriculum, high expectations, stays involved	3.05%	10.69%	40.46%	45.80%
22	LLC: Bottom-up influence	0.76%	0.76%	16.03%	82.44%
24	LLC: Community involvement, common goals, accountability	1.53%	4.58%	21.37%	72.52%
25	LLC: Supportive of staff	0.76%	3.05%	16.79%	79.39%

MLS–influenced Missouri Learning Standard transition; LLC–Learning Leadership Characteristic

Themes

In the qualitative analysis, themes were determined from respondents' comments for the eight open-ended questions as part of the survey instrument. These comments were analyzed electronically and reviewed by the researcher to determine validity and strength

of relevance to the study analysis. It was determined that the top two to three themes for each question held the strongest identification within the analysis.

A complete examination and summary of the participant responses is included in Chapter Five. Chapter Four therefore focuses on a general descriptive representation of the themes as determined by an electronic evaluation of the data. In addition, the percentage of occurrences for each theme is included for review.

Two open-ended questions, questions 5 and 7, provided additional information on influences to teacher perception of necessary resources and learning leadership behaviors that coincided with meeting the instructional objectives of the MLS. Question 5, the first open-ended question, asked for the *evidence of effective implementation of the MLS in [her/his] classroom as demonstrated by …* The major categories resulting from the analysis were: Formal student performance outcomes (43%), Learning (24%), and Curriculum (18%). Question 7, the second open-ended question, asked respondents to *identify the types of administrative support perceived as beneficial in implementing the MLS.* The major categories resulting from the analysis were: Time (42.11%), Professional development/training (29.6%), Feedback (16.7%), and Innovative ideas (16.7%). Although a few respondents noted a struggle defining *support*, and one stated "[a]dministrators never even ask what they can do to help …," the remaining responses were direct answers to the question. Additional minor themes were determined for both questions; however, the low quantity of responses caused the researcher to focus on only the top two or three emergent themes, with the exception of occasional commentary regarding administrative or learning leadership theory reference for the sake of consideration.

Six open-ended responses (questions 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, and 26) provided additional information on whether teachers perceived a relationship existed between instructional needs and characteristics associated with learning leadership. Question 15 asked teachers to identify who *outside of [their] own effort provides the strongest influence on the improvement of [his/her] instruction*? The major categories resulting from the analysis were: Colleagues (64.12%), Professional organizations (21%), and Administrators (11.5%). Question 17 asked participants to identify *characteristics required for a highly collaborative environment*? The major categories resulting from the analysis were: Time (36.6%), Willingness (21.8%), and Communication (18.3%).

Practitioners were then asked to complete the following statement as part of question 19: *I find I teach better when …* The major categories resulting from the analysis were: Preparation/Organization (25.4%), Time (18.3%), and Collaboration (16.79%). Then, question 21 asked teachers to list *specific, positive contributions administrators made to [their] curriculum development or implementation.* The major categories resulting from the analysis were: Collaboration (25%), and Support (15.87%). Finally, question 23 requested that participants *list examples of how [their] building administrator used teacher input to make positive growth in [their] school*. The major categories resulting from the analysis were: None (26.7%), Meetings (24.17%), and Building Leadership Teams (15.8%).

So that this study did not limit participant voice to only those characteristics of learning leadership, the research explored all possibilities to improve instruction by allowing alternate input in all eight open-ended responses (questions 5, 7, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, 26). This provided an opportunity for respondents to include additional information

on leadership characteristics and practices that promote successful implementation of the MLS or in pure form beyond those suggested in the survey. The analysis of the eight qualitative questions resulted in no statistically relevant measures or major categories identified outside of learning leadership characteristics. Most data shared by study participants outside of those that are considered specific to learning leadership theory were attributes of morality (i.e., trust, integrity, honesty, fairness) or specific to management skills (i.e., time management, organization, budgetary), however, none were mentioned in any statistically significant measure. Therefore, this research question provided no further insight into the attributes necessary for successful large-scale reform.

Summary

Chapter Four included a summation of the process for collection, synthesis, and analysis of participant data. This chapter reviewed the design of the study, data collection methods, conceptual underpinnings and a restatement of the research questions. In addition, the chapter presented details regarding the process for data analysis, a review of the study demographics regarding participants and a synopsis of the electronically established qualitative themes. Discussed in Chapter 5 is a summary of the findings, limitations of the study, implications for practice, recommendations for future research, conclusions and summary.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The present study utilized a mixed method design to explore how schools and administrators can be most effective in meeting the needs of students and teachers while managing high stakes accountability measures. For struggling schools to advance reform efforts, research must determine how educational leaders can best support student achievement through the reform process. Therefore, the present research sought teacher perceptions of effective leadership characteristics when assessing management of reform efforts such as the federal Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (National Governors Association [NGA], 2010) and the ensuing state response in the Missouri Learning Standards (MLS) (DESE, 2016). Learning leadership was the comparative tool utilized to better understand effective governance.

An online, single instance survey (Creswell, 2009) was administered to K-12th grade teachers in Missouri public schools who experienced the large-scale transition to MLS. The intent of the study was to garner practitioner insights regarding possible relationships between effective leadership characteristics and successful student achievement (Creswell, 2009; Hatch, 2002, Merriam, 2009). Further study sought deeper insight into the perceptions of survey participants through the use of open-ended questions embedded in the survey which allowed participants to offer details specific to individual experiences or opinions.

Summary of Findings

The following research questions were addressed within the context of this study:

1. What do teachers perceive as necessary resources and learning leadership behaviors that promote the instructional objectives of the Missouri Learning Standards?
2. Is there a perceived relationship between instructional needs and the characteristics of learning leadership theory?
3. What practices do teachers identify beyond learning leadership behaviors which promote successful implementation of the Missouri Learning Standards?
4. Is there a difference in the perceptions of teachers when prioritizing resources and learning leadership behaviors to promote instructional objectives of the Missouri Learning Standards based on gender?
5. Is there a difference in the perceptions of teachers when prioritizing resources and learning leadership behaviors to promote instructional objectives of the Missouri Learning Standards based on years of teaching experiences?
6. Is there a difference in the perceptions of teachers when prioritizing resources and learning leadership behaviors to promote instructional objectives of the Missouri Learning Standards based on areas of instructional responsibilities?

The analyses of the data were synthesized and blended with the review of research to provide a foundation on which to consider each of the research questions.

Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative questions were sorted in two groups for later analysis of correlation. The focus of group one explored the value of learning leadership characteristics as applied to the MLS (questions 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13). The group two explored the value of learning leadership characteristics as important to ongoing learning and instruction

(questions 14, 16, 1, 20, 22, 24, and 25) in purer form. Both sets of data results are shared below in Figures 3 and 4.

Research Question 1: What do teachers perceive as necessary resources and learning leadership behaviors that promote the instructional objectives of the Missouri Learning Standards?

Results indicate a general tendency (71.43%) of teachers to agree that learning leadership behaviors support(ed) the transition to the Missouri Learning Standards (MLS). Two areas in which respondents indicated a mean of less than 3.0 were reviewed by the researcher: question eight – need for additional training, practice and evaluation in developing MLS units/lessons (2.72) - and question twelve – need for training in content specific strategies to implement MLS (mean=2.91). Data results are shared in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Measures of Central Tendency, group 1

	Q6	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13
Mean	3.23	2.72	3.24	3.09	3.29	2.91	3.36
Std Dev	0.81	0.96	0.89	0.88	0.86	0.88	0.70
Mode	3	3	3	3	4	3	4
Median	3	3	3	3	4	3	3

Research Question 2: Is there a perceived relationship between instructional needs and the characteristics of learning leadership theory?

Results indicate a general tendency of teachers to agree that learning leadership behaviors support(ed) the transition to ongoing learning and instruction as all questions indicate a mean above 3.0. Three areas in which respondents indicated a higher mean all related to input and support for the instructional process. Respondents indicated agreement that successful schools required teacher input (mean=3.80), community involvement (mean=3.64), and strong administrative support (mean=3.74). Data results

are shared in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Measures of Central Tendency, group 2.

	Q14	Q16	Q18	Q20	Q22	Q24	Q25
Mean	3.03	3.34	3.18	3.30	3.80	3.64	3.74
Std Dev	0.85	0.85	0.86	0.78	0.49	0.64	0.55
Mode	3	4	3	4	4	4	4
Median	3	4	3	3	4	4	4

In comparing a composite score for the responses of the two question sets, a linear correlation and regression test, the *Pearson Correlation Coefficient*, was applied to the two survey question sets – transition to MLS and instructional impact – to determine the relationship of survey submissions relative to teacher perception of necessary resources and leadership characteristics, as determined by a composite mean score of the responses. Individual respondent scores in each set were added for a composite score, which was then compared, set-to-set. The results were statistically significant, indicating a strong correlation between learning leadership characteristics through large-scale transition such as the MLS and characteristics necessary for successful instruction in a purer form. The results of the analysis are identified in Table 1.

Table 1

Pearson Correlation Coefficient, linear correlation and regression test

r	**r^2**	**t**	**df**	**P**	one-tailed	**<.0001**
0.4953	0.2453	6.43	127		two-tailed	<.0001

Note: P-scores < 0.05 are considered significant.

Research Question 4: Is there a difference in the perceptions of teachers when prioritizing resources and learning leadership behaviors to promote instructional objectives of the Missouri Learning Standards based on gender?

Differences were examined between female and male responses by calculating an independent t-Test with unequal sample variance (total participants: 99 females, 32 males) for practitioner perspectives related to leadership behaviors. Participants responded to a series of questions predetermined to identify the individual's perceptions of behaviors leaders' exhibit that promote student success through large-scale transition. This characteristic served as a subscale on the survey and was measured by combining categorical questions as previously stated.

The t-test conducted analyzed the difference between males and females and the composite mean score obtained from combining the question responses (*f*=3.300, *m*=3.098). The following table (Table 2) identifies the results obtained for this analysis. The results indicate that on average, in a two-tailed test, the mean comparison of males and females was significant, t (697.39) = 4.11, $P > 0.05$; Contained in Table 2 are the differences in means ($M_a - M_b$), *t*-score, degrees of freedom (*df*) and the *P*-score. In review of the individual data entries for female and male responses, females were more likely to be within the *somewhat agree* to *strongly agree* range (88.89% [88 of 99]), vs. males (59.375% [19 of 32]).

Table 2

t-Test results, Assuming Unequal Sample Variances (99 females, 32 males)

$Mean_a$-$Mean_b$	**t**	**df**	**P**	one-tailed	<.0001
0.2022	4.11	697.39		two-tailed	<.0001

Note: P-scores < 0.05 are considered significant.

Research Question 5: Is there a difference in the perceptions of teachers when prioritizing resources and learning leadership behaviors to promote instructional

objectives of the Missouri Learning Standards based on years of teaching experiences?

Differences were examined for total years of experience by calculating a composite mean score and standard deviation for teachers with just beginning their career to nine (9) years of experience (3.25[0.88]) and those with ten (10) or more years of experience (3.25[0.85]) Participants responded to a series of questions predetermined to indicate the individual's perceptions of behaviors building leaders utilize that promote instruction. This characteristic served as a subscale on the survey and was measured by combining categorical questions as previously stated.

A one-way ANOVA was performed for the independent samples and analyzed to determine if there were significant differences between individuals within units of experience (beginning teachers to nine years of experience-33, ten years of experience and beyond-98) when using the composite mean score obtained from combining the designated questions used to identify the practitioner's perspective on leadership behaviors that promote student success. The following table (Table 3) identifies the results obtained from this analysis. The output indicates that on average, the comparison of years of experience was not significant, F (1) = 0.01, $P > 0.05$. Contained in Table 3 are the SS, MS, *F*-score, and the *P*-score for each category.

Table 3

One-Way Independent Anova Summary (k=2): Years of Experience Means Compared

Source	SS	dF	MS	F	P
Treatment [between groups]	0.0038	1	0.0038	0.01	0.920355
Error	1326.8711	1804	0.7355		

Note: P-scores < 0.05 are considered significant.

Research Question 6: Is there a difference in the perceptions of teachers when prioritizing resources and learning leadership behaviors to promote instructional objectives of the Missouri Learning Standards based on areas of instructional responsibilities?

Differences were examined based on areas of instructional responsibilities by calculating a composite mean score and standard deviation for teachers instructing in the content area (English, math, science, social studies) (3.25[0.88]) and those instructing in non-core areas (i.e., CTE, arts, physical education) (3.25[0.85]). Participants responded to a series of predetermined questions indicating the individual's perceptions of leadership behaviors that support instruction. This characteristic served as a subscale on the survey and was measured by combining categorical questions as previously stated.

A one-way ANOVA was performed for the independent samples and analyzed to determine if there was a significant difference between individuals within particular curricular areas (core instruction-101, non-core instruction-30) when using the composite mean score obtained from combining the designated questions used to identify the individual's perceptions of leadership behaviors that promote instruction. The following table (Table 4) identifies the results obtained from this analysis. The output indicates that on average, the comparison of individuals with different instructional responsibilities was not significant, F (1) = 0.3, $P > 0.05$. Contained in Table 4 are the SS, MS, F-score, and the P-score for each category.

Table 4

One-Way Independent Anova Summary (k=2): Instructional Responsibilities Means Compared

Source	SS	dF	MS	F	P
Treatment [between groups]	0.2235	1	0.2235	0.3	0.583950
Error	1326.6513	1804	0.7354		

Note: P-scores < 0.05 are considered significant.

Qualitative Analyses

As previously presented, the survey included eight (8) open-ended questions, which were presented to all participants. Figure 1 provides the demographic data for the study respondents.

Figure 1. Demographic data of survey participants (291 completed, 2 declined yet answered all questions).

Demographic	**Choices**	**Results**
Gender	Female Male	**99** (75.57%) **32** (24.43%)
Years of Experience	Completing 0-9 years Completing 10+ years	**33** (25.19%) **98** (74.81%)
Area of Certification	Core Academic Instructor Non-Core Academic Instructor	**101** (77.1%) **30** (22.9%)

Of the one-hundred twenty-nine (129) individuals who answered "yes" to participation, plus the two (2) individuals who stated "no," yet went on to complete the survey, participants chose to answer all requisite qualitative questions. Particular questions were designed to explore further details for participants answering *somewhat agree* or *strongly agree,* rendering a dialogue response not applicable, or, a lack of a response to the requested data as inappropriate. Occasionally, a participant who answered

somewhat disagree or *strongly disagree* completed the dialogue box with a response that reiterated their answer choice of *somewhat disagree* or *strongly disagree*, rendering their response a negative and removing it from consideration within the data set. This analysis rendered the response rate one hundred percent (100%).

Question responses were organized and analyzed for commonalities. Informed consent within the survey instrument served as permission to incorporate respondent submissions as part of the study analysis. To analyze the qualitative data, a constant comparative method was utilized (Creswell & Clark, 2007; Merriam, 1998). This strategy provided a process for establishing categories by grouping cohesive units of data. The data collected from dialogue boxes were electronically examined to determine key terms presented for each question. Additionally, the researcher reexamined respondent submissions to ensure accurate interpretation of frequently used words within each question specific submission, coding, grouping and organizing words for the identification of data categories, otherwise called themes.

Themes that emerged from the analyses of qualitative questions linked the transition to the MLS with necessary characteristics of learning leadership. It is equally important to note that respondents were able to respond to qualitative questions using multiple words, phrases or examples. Interpretations, identified by the number of responses collected, correspond themes and were translated into an overall percentage. In a final step, triangulation of responses was conducted by interlacing information with data from the quantitative analysis. A synthesis of the results for each question follows.

Research Question 1. *What do teachers perceive as necessary resources and learning leadership behaviors that promote the instructional objectives of the Missouri Learning Standards (MLS)?*

Two open-ended questions, questions 5 and 7, provided additional information on teacher perception of necessary resources and learning leadership behaviors that coincide with meeting the instructional objectives of the MLS. Just as with quantitative elements of the survey instrument, each qualitative question was designed to draw out a deeper understanding of the practitioner perspective by having participants identify specific behaviors perceived to influence instructional success. This approach allowed quantitative data to be linked with qualitative data in the survey.

The first open-ended question, question 5 asked for the *evidence of effective implementation of the MLS in [her/his] classroom as demonstrated by …* The major categories resulting from the analysis were: Formal student performance outcomes (43.1%), Learning (24.02%), and Curriculum (18.5%). The following summarizes how each category was used in the response to this question.

Formal student performance outcomes. A sizeable number of teachers commented on student performance as a chief indicator of the MLS being met. The items supplied in the category of performance were vast, including student success on state exams, ACT outcomes, and results of student certification tests such as ASE. Numerous respondents identified state data and standardized assessment results as gauges in determining if active classroom implementation of the standards was occurring. Additionally, a large population commented on student performance in the classroom, including student grades, and assignment completion and unit tests results as assessment

success indicators. The inclinations were that student performance could be measured by multiple means, however, practitioners stated assessment type activities could be translated as "evidence of successful execution of the MLS as completed by the teacher."

Learning. Respondents indicated an increase in student skills and understanding of the content demonstrated successful MLS implementation. Math reasoning, research skills, real world problem solving and "students creating, performing, responding, and connecting to music" were some of the examples offered by the teachers. "Students improving their reading, writing and communication in creative ways" indicated the totality of the MLS implementation rather than specifically in a single content area. Others shared the belief that students effectively communicating, or "[s]tudents being able to apply the information to different situations," acknowledged the intent of the MLS and the true acquisition of student skill levels within the standards.

Curriculum. Although a noticeably measureable theme, curriculum did not present enough to be statistically significant, but is worth identifying as the third area of focus in light of the purpose of this study. This topic included clearly stated objectives, aligned curriculum, lesson plans, classroom activities, purposeful assignments, and formative, as well as, summative classroom assessments**.** Some teachers shared comments about teacher collaboration that improves lessons, indicating "district curriculum written by teachers using text that support and align with those standards" as well as being given the opportunity to choose which standards should be considered priority are key elements in implementation success.

The second open-ended question, question 7, asked respondents to *identify the types of administrative support perceived as beneficial in implementing the MLS.* The

major categories resulting from the analysis were: Time (42.11%), Professional development/training (29.6%), Innovative ideas (10.7%), and Feedback (10.7%). Although a few respondents noted a personal struggle defining *support*, the remaining responses were direct answers to the question. The following summarizes how each category was shared in response to this question.

Time. Again, teacher perceptions of beneficial administrative support were clear in the numerous comments related to time as a valued resource. Administrators who offer teachers time to "read and unwrap the standards for greater understanding," discern the pedagogy changes necessary for implementation, as does the time to "create new lessons," which was cited over and over again in the data. Additionally, teachers valued administrators committed to difficult building schedules that allowed for common, or shared planning time, time to assess students and examine the data, as well as, cross-curricular and vertical planning time rather than focusing on building or grade level team time only. One submission summed up the academic needs related to time in stating "providing time for teachers to collaborate … so there are specific targets that students are aiming for allows teachers to know where students left off from year to year." Another noted the need for "time and resources to implement with fidelity," while another went so far as to identify the need for time "… in the summer revising the curriculum."

Professional development. Responses from teachers included comments about administrative support of Data Review Teams (DRT), Professional Learning Communities (PLC), professional development (PD), and specific training opportunities. One teacher indicated professional development that "[helps] to identify curriculum,

creates a continuum of learning by identifying key standards for each grade and subject, provides time for staff to develop [curriculum] and collaborate" were beneficial to instruction focused on the standards. Another respondent noted "[m]onetary support to go to professional conferences, observe teachers in other schools …" was instrumental in effectively implementing changes. In addition, teachers indicated that administrative support for these activities highlights opportunities to determine what is best for students and allows teams to implement curriculum changes that need to move forward with improved student outcomes. It is important to note that practitioners felt administrative support through professional development and training opportunities helped increase the "validity of the implementation process and improve their overall instruction."

Innovative ideas. Although statistically insignificant, but pertinent as a learning leadership characteristic, the researcher noted that teachers shared perceptions of the importance of administrators having a knowledge of instructional best practices as critical to success. It was noted multiple times that support for less predictable or creative learning practices offers teachers opportunities to seek out new methods to improve instruction, sometimes for the most difficult students. Administrative permission to experiment with new learning styles, nontraditional projects or grading frees up a teacher to explore options or expand pedagogy. "[F]reedom to be academically creative, further personal learning to make the switch to the new learning modalities required [by MLS] …" assisted teachers throughout the process. One practitioner noted administrators "[s]upporting nontraditional projects and grading" validated the efforts of the teachers. Concurring, another instructor stated "[w]hen the administration is supportive with …

creative learning implementation, it gives the teacher and students confidence in their work and products."

Feedback. Also insignificant statistically but significant as a learning leadership characteristic, respondents indicated positive, focused feedback was equally important to innovative ideas. The researcher noted throughout coding the mention of positive feedback and constructive criticism in a supportive way influences implementing new standards for some respondents. Again, some noted that building leaders attending the same professional development or training opportunities allowed for continuity in their feedback, making it more meaningful. One respondent stated administrators show support of teachers by "believing in what I am doing in the classroom and being open." Another shared, "[j]ust having someone who I can ask questions when I need to or someone who offers constructive criticism if they see a change that needs to be made" is helpful. Teachers indicated they would be grateful to "[j]ust have someone who [they] can ask questions when [they] need to or someone who offers constructive criticism if they see a change that needs to be made."

Research Question 2. *Is there a perceived relationship between instructional needs and the characteristics of learning leadership theory?*

Six open-ended responses (questions 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, and 26) provided additional information on whether teachers perceive that a relationship exists between instructional needs and characteristics associated with learning leadership in a purer form and directly linked to the MLS. Just as with quantitative elements of the survey, each qualitative question was designed to offer insight into specific leadership traits that

support instruction, allowing the researcher to link data gathered from the survey with the responses.

Question 15 asked teachers to identify, *outside of [their] own effort who provides the strongest influence on the improvement of [his/her] instruction*? The major categories resulting from the analysis were: Colleagues (64.12%), Professional organizations (21%), and Administrators (11.5%). The following summarizes how each category was shared in response to this question.

Colleagues. A substantial number of respondents identified colleagues as their primary influencer on the improvement of instruction. This category encompassed professional learning community members, grade level teams, vertical team peers, department chairs, and mentor teachers. Responses included "[t]eachers learning from other teachers in practical, hands-on ways will go farther than simply having teachers review articles or do book studies," and "collaborating teachers working together to create the best environment possible to learn," as well as "working together to create lessons that are meaningful and responsive." One teacher noted being the only teacher of their kind in the building and shared that individuals they work with are always willing to help enhance their curriculum if something is available in another content area. Such cross-curricular collaboration was identified as edifying and validating everyone's expertise. Multiple practitioners noted the relationship of peers outside of grade or content level teams, with one respondent stating: "meeting as a vertical team in each department is very helpful in influencing my improvement in instruction." However, some responses went beyond identifying peers to include "[c]ollaborating with those outside of my department … can help me implement new ideas."

Professional organizations. Teachers shared the influence of professional organizations in furthering their instructional delivery. Organizations such as MCTM, National Writing Project, NSTA, RPDCs, outside advisory groups, Interface, STOM, NBPTS, National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, Foreign Language Association of Missouri, NCTE, science news, and Missouri Speech Theatre Association of Missouri were just a few of the many listed. These organizations were noted as offering support and training in specific areas of instructional need. One respondent stated: "Teachers are incredibly busy. They need quality training with no frills … in as efficient way as possible." Some use social media and online forums or discussion boards offered by outside organizations, while others mentioned using "ideas I see on training videos of training I choose." Another science instructor shared the influence of 'the scientific news and the NFTA to ensure that [he/she teaches] the most up to date information in the most hands on approach possible." Such comments indicate the need for teachers to go beyond the four walls of their schools to gain greater access to the specific instructional needs of their students and help meet the framework of the applied standards.

Administrators. As the third visible theme, albeit statistically insignificant, administrators rounded out the measureable responses. It is interesting to note, only a small number of teachers indicated administrators as the third line of support when seeking improvement of instruction. Occasionally, a response indicated administrative follow-up was necessary to make sure all teachers participated in instructional delivery determined necessary by a department or building, however, most submissions stated building administrators served in a similar capacity as colleagues – willing to offer

feedback, oversight, or encouragement. Quite often, administrators were identified in a general list of colleagues, students, and/or professional organizations.

Question 17 asked participants to identify *characteristics required for a highly collaborative environment*? The major categories resulting from the analysis were: Time (36.6%), Willingness (21.8%), and Communication (18.3%). The following summarizes how each category was shared in response to this question.

Time. It was clear in thirty-four (34) of the forty-eight (48) responses that time was the priority and in each case, the response began with "Time" and time alone. Teachers indicated the need to be able to collaborate, both during the day and outside of normal school hours if necessary. Although administrative support was lower on the overall theme outcomes, with ten (10) distinct comments made, it was typically spoken in conjunction with being supportive of time for collaboration or in relation to time with pay. Working without boundaries of time was clearly shared in most of the replies. Teachers requested time to meet, time to implement, blocks of time, time for lesson planning, time to coordinate and learn from each other, common planning time, and consistent meeting times so they could be anticipated. Time was listed as necessary "…to establish and build relationships amongst colleagues" and collaboration defined as requiring dedicated time.

Willingness. The researcher noted the collection of thoughts regarding the need for teachers to be willing in both spirit and commitment to make collaboration effective or even possible. Responses were not many, but included comments such as "[a]ll team members as willing collaborators," a willingness to help, buying-in, "positivity," a willingness to share ideas, work together, share goals, as well as a willingness to learn

from others. Others shared the need to be willing to share and seek out information, try new things and be creative, or bring a positive attitude of hope to the table.

Communication. This data set spoke directly to the requirements of open communication such as "open sharing and stability," and patience while hearing or listening. Again, responses were not many, but those submitted noted the need for an open and honest dialogue. One practitioner defined an effective collaborative group as one in which "[a] group is willing to listen and help" communicate "the main ideas of what is necessary to change". Some required a positive environment where people feel like they can talk and be heard, while multiple comments stated colleagues must be able to effectively communicate and an "…organized structure that helps guide the conversation."

Next, practitioners were asked to complete the following statement as part of question 19: *I find I teach better when …* The major categories resulting from the analysis were: Preparation/Organization (25.4%), Time (18.3%), and Collaboration (16.79%). The following summarizes how each category was shared in response to this question.

Preparation/Organization. The most commonly cited need for best practice teaching was the need for preparation and organization. Responses were as simple and clear as "being prepared is the key" to "I [need to be] well rested and have well planned lessons." Multiple entries identified the need to be organized as starting at the beginning of the year with a curriculum outline for the entire year, including calendars, while others went so far as to practice lessons, including with other staff. Preparation allowed instructors to gain a level of comfort with the subject and sometimes anticipate deficits or

explore new and creative ways to reteach a subject. One practitioner noted he/she was better when having time to "prepare a thoughtful lesson" and another having more time to find "the necessary resources" while organizing a lesson. Understanding one's content appeared to be as important throughout the data set as intentionally planning what was going to occur in the classroom on any given day. One teacher indicated he/she was at his/her best when "I've had the time to do intentional planning of engagement strategies and have everything laid out" and another stated the need to "reflect and prepare lessons while [dialoguing] with colleagues to improve said lesson." Others require the reflective piece to improve their practice in the classroom.

Time. As with prior questions, time again was noted as a necessary element for best practice instruction from the practitioner perspective. Similar themes ran concurrent with time: ample time to implement new or best practices, time to plan, collaborate or reflect, time to hunt down resources or explore new ideas. One response indicated the need to "self-assess and build upon [his/her] lessons." It seems teachers require time to do all sorts of activities related to effective instruction, from pre- to post-lesson. This go around, time was less likely to be linked to administrative support and more often connected to preparation (primarily) or collaboration (secondarily).

Collaboration. Although the third most discussed theme for this question, collaboration was statistically insignificant. It was also closely tied to both preparation/organization and time. Collaboration was noted as necessary for a quality curriculum to enhance individual teacher skills or lessons, implementation practices, as well as part of the reflective process following teaching experiences. Teachers shared the value in "bouncing ideas off coworkers" as a preparatory tool or obtaining feedback from

peers regarding lesson outcomes or working with the most difficult students. Working with co-teachers was noted as "learning more effectively." One teacher noted he/she was best in the classroom when he/she was "…in the flow with other teachers and [knew] what the department, building and team [were] doing together … finding places where [he/she] could tie in [her] subject area into other subjects areas with assignments and assessments." It is important to note that none of the submissions included the administrator as a member to any form of collaboration.

Question 21 asked teachers to list *specific, positive contributions administrators made to [their] curriculum development or implementation.* The major categories resulting from the analysis were: Collaboration (25%) and Support (15.87%). The following summarizes how each category was shared in response to this question.

Collaboration. Administrators were described as understanding the time it takes to plan and implement curriculum changes and therefore providing time for collaboration within content areas, buildings and across districts. Additionally, they provided on-going collaborative training and protected PLC meeting times. A few practitioners reported being given "time to prioritize standards and chunk down learning targets," as well as "being present and active participants during DRT" and observations, engaging in collaboration in the moment.

Support. Support was shared through different behaviors and activities, such as checking in on the progress of curriculum development to noticing things in observations that might be missing from lessons that would make teaching easier. Administrators were reported to give teachers necessary resources and support to "try new something and fail," including altering teaching styles.

Question 23 requested that participants *list examples of how [their] building administrator used teacher input to make positive growth in [their] school*. The major categories resulting from the analysis were: None (26.7%), Meetings (24.17%), and Building Leadership Teams (15.8%) The following summarizes how each category was shared in response to this question.

None. Of concern was the percentage of respondents that did not feel as though their administration makes use of teacher input in school improvement. A major premise in learning leadership theory, the absence of teacher input makes a statement. Twenty-six (26) responses indicated no teacher input in making positive changes, and, in several responses, teachers went beyond "none" to state they "couldn't think of any examples" or "does not use teacher input." One respondent explained his/her perception as "…being mostly told what we will do…few suggestions are actually implemented. Asking our opinion seems to be a mere formality as admin has already decided they know what is best." Another concurred, stating: "I'm not sure I have really seen any. Administrators seem to have their own ideas about what is good for a school and don't care about teacher input."

Meetings. It seemed the greatest access to obtaining teacher input occurred in meetings: staff meetings, Professional Learning Committee (PLC) meetings, during Response to Intervention (RTI) meetings, through departments, at grade level planning meetings, and even during Professional Development (PD) sessions. Although multiple entries noted conversations, a trend emerged in administrative use of surveys as a tool for input or feedback (9 occurrences). A pattern of question and answer sessions for feedback and obtaining teacher input listened occurred in roughly 25% of the total themed

responses, while just as many indicated just the meeting that was utilized to share teacher feedback.

Building Leadership Teams. Another trend in education was visible in responses related to a single building team of teachers utilized as a touch point for administrative contact and input or regarding decisions for the greater good. Some commented on the type of team, sharing "[w]e have a core group of teachers who make up a principal's advisory council," or administrators "… utilize a Building Leadership Team to acquire [teacher] input," as well as "professional development is a teacher led group." Other administrators utilize a wider purpose Comprehensive School Improvement Plan committee (CSIP), which typically includes members from all parts of the school community – administrators, teachers, students, parents, and community members – to seek input from the wider community.

Finally, question 26 asked practitioners to share their perceptions of *the most important attributes of an effective administrator*. The major categories resulting from the analysis were: Support (33.59%), Listen (16.79%), Communication (11.45%), and Classroom presence (11.45%). The following summarizes how each category was shared in response to this question.

Support. There was consistency throughout the data set in the category of support. The teachers perception of administrative support was identified using descriptors such as "supporting teaching in [content] and classroom management," supporting relationships with students, being willing to "fight for classroom resources," stand up to "demanding parents," enforcing building and district rules and supporting teachers also enforcing those same expectations. Participants saw support as guiding them, being a "sounding

board," seeking out the knowledge necessary to impact their instruction and communicating that information. When considering curriculum and classroom expectations, one teacher summed up numerous responses when he/she stated "… you know that your administration is going to support you when you set a rigorous curriculum, it is easier to stick to demanding those levels of achievement." Overall, the pattern in responses indicated a desire of teachers for a "conducive environment for teachers to thrive" by being supported, safe, and respected. One respondent summed it up when he/she shared they desired "someone who remembers what it is like to be a teacher in the classroom and offers their support and understanding. "

Listen. Active listening was identified as another important attribute of an effective administrator. Participants in the study wanted "one who listens to input without becoming defensive … listens to all faculty members' ideas … not a select few." Practitioners were interested in leaders willing to listen rather than tell them "what/how to teach." In this category, the trend was consistent and "listen" was often in line with other descriptors such as "[a]n administrator who will listen, communicate and effectively and positively lead a group of people," and "those that listen, care and act to make improvements," as well as "someone who can listen and brainstorm." Listening comes with a purpose for the practitioner; they view this as a prerequisite skill to be a moral or effective leader in their profession. Teachers noted the desire to see school leaders "truly listen to staff, to their suggestions and appreciate their knowledge of their profession; someone who values the teachers in their building in a genuine way." The intent is to listen and "use the information to make decisions" and "dialogue about [instructional] needs." This data set determined an effective administrator is one who

"listens and works to understand where the teacher is coming from" and act upon those needs.

Communication. Although statistically insignificant, practitioners identified an important factor in being an effective school leader as being able to communicate. Often preceded by an adjective, communication was qualified as needing to be honest, transparent, effective, and open. Additionally, just as with listening, this attribute was often included in a string of supportive, or moral attributes like "communication, transparent, integrity, consistency, honesty, impartiality" or "honesty, communicates effectively, dynamic."

Classroom presence. Again, with few responses overall, classroom presence was deemed statistically insignificant, however, the researcher noted that teachers want administrators to be learning leaders – active participants in the educational process and "one who is supportive of academics and culture, one who is present in the classroom on a regular basis." Study participants describing this attribute stated: "being able to come into the classroom and participate in it … being able to give effective strategies and being versed in the content is very important." Practitioners noted multiple times that being not only present but visible in the school and classroom helps in understanding what is actually occurring in classrooms vs. being visible only for an occasional observation or walk-thru. Often, this characteristic was related to understanding the classroom experience for behavior or classroom management issues and the assumed behavioral support that could result for teachers and students alike. Not only did teachers note the need to have had classroom experience for understanding of their position, they also desire the sharing of experiences across classrooms to improve instruction. Although they

cannot see each other teach, an administrator in classrooms can share instructional experiences of other teachers as a method of support for the greater good. Descriptors that were used in conjunction with classroom were "hands-on/in classrooms to observe and willing to try new things," and "know what goes on in the classroom to [offer] support of a positive kind, providing teachers with the [resources] they need to teach" based on the experiences observed in the rooms. In addition, not only could a classroom presence assist in management or student behavior issues, teachers noted that when administrators are regularly seen, "…other professionals are most likely to teach at more effective levels and student involvement increases."

Research Question 3. *What practices do teachers identify beyond learning leadership which promotes successful implementation of the MLS?*

So that this study did not limit participant voice to only those characteristics of learning leadership, the research explored all possibilities to improve instruction by allowing alternate input in all eight open-ended responses (questions 5, 7, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, 26). This provided an opportunity for respondents to include additional information on leadership characteristics and practices that promote successful implementation of the MSL beyond those suggested in the survey. Again, each qualitative question was designed much like the quantitative questions, to offer insight into the practitioner's perspective of what leadership skills best assist in large-scale transition. This insight allowed the researcher to again link extended data gathered from the survey with the responses to see where additional traits needed would present.

The analysis of the eight qualitative questions resulted in no statistically relevant measures, or major categories identified outside of learning leadership characteristics.

Most data shared by study participants outside of those that are considered specific to learning leadership theory were attributes of morality (i.e., trust, integrity, honesty) or specific to management skills (i.e., time management, organization, budgetary), however, none were mentioned in any statistically significant measure. Therefore, this research question provided no further insight into the attributes necessary for successful large-scale reform.

Triangulation of Data

Following independent analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data sets, responses were triangulated to merge data implications for comparison and validation of results. Through this method, the researcher was able to combine quantitative and qualitative data to better understand patterns and inferences of the overall research problem. Triangulation assumes the researcher will verify information collected from various inputs and search for continuity of evidence across multiple sources (Mertens, 2010). The following represents the triangulation of the quantitative and qualitative data.

The quantitative analysis of the data showed relative significance through comparison of males and females in a t-Test where means were calculated for gender and responses were evaluated revealing consistent, strong opinions of the sexes. Females tended to express that a stronger relationship exists for learning leadership behaviors and the value they have in the transition to MLS for improving classroom instruction. In addition, female responses indicated a disposition towards learning leadership behaviors as positive in the analysis of individual survey questions, statistical applications (including the *Pearson r)* and open-ended questions.

An underlying tendency of learning leadership behaviors to generate enrichment when engaging reform and as a tool for improving instruction appeared prevalent for a substantial number of participants. However, as will be covered in *Recommendations for Future Research*, the present study did not adequately reveal detailed analysis to verify with certainty more significant conclusions. For example, the present analysis revealed that when given the opportunity to identify preferences of an effective administrator, teachers identified moral and management behaviors as part of perceptions, further calling into question the summation that leadership theory truly meets the needs of the modern day classroom. Therefore, triangulation revealed consistency, patterns, and perceptions that validated the use of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods; however, there was also strong indication of the need for further and future research.

Conclusions

Research Question 1

What do teachers perceive as necessary resources and learning leadership behaviors that promote the instructional objectives of the Missouri Learning Standards?

Data for research question one yielded results that indicate a strong level of agreement for learning leadership characteristics in promoting the instructional objectives of the MLS. Quantitative responses (questions 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13) indicate teachers perceive administrative support (86.26%), professional development (65.65%), curriculum alignment (65.65%), resources (78.62%), collaboration (83.21%), and teacher input/participation (89.31%) as necessary resources and learning leadership behaviors for successful transition to the MLS.

In addition, qualitative analysis of themes indicated teachers found the most beneficial administrative support they could receive to inspire effective implementation of the standards in a classroom to be increased time (42.11%) for professional development/training (29.6%), and administration offering teachers feedback (support) (16.7%). Teachers measured successful implementation by evaluating student outcomes on formal assessments (43%), actual learning or skill acquisition (24%), and improved curriculum (18%). Although none of the themes were of statistical significance, they do appear to coincide with the quantitative responses above, indicating agreement that at least the characteristics held value through the transition to the MLS.

Research Question 2

Is there a perceived relationship between instructional needs and the characteristics of learning leadership theory?

Data results for research question two also yielded similar findings. Survey questions related to research question two all indicated an agreement of the value learning leadership characteristics have in meeting instructional needs. Quantitative responses (questions 14, 16, 18, 20, 22, 24, and 25) indicate teachers perceive perpetual learning (83.97%) and critical consideration of the instructional process (84.73%) necessary to positively implement the MLS. Additionally, administrative support of staff (97.17%), support of a rigorous curriculum and high expectations (83.26%), as well as bottom-up (teacher led) approach (98.49%) and community involvement (93.89%), were noted as leadership characteristics necessary for successful student outcomes through instruction.

In addition, qualitative analysis of themes indicated teachers found colleagues (64.12%) to be their greatest support system, followed by professional organizations (21%). Administrators were measured, but were not part of the common response set (11.52%). In addition, to establish a highly collaborative environment, practitioners believe they must be allotted time (36.6%), embody a willingness, individually and corporately (21%), and participate in clear and open dialogue (18.3%). Time (18.3%) again came up when teachers were asked what made them a better teacher as well; it fed into their preparation/organization (25.4%) and collaboration opportunities (16.79%). It seemed teacher needs of administrators, collaboration opportunities (25.1%) and general support (15.87%), were met, in part, the same way administrators sought practitioner input, through meetings (24.17%) and building leadership teams (15.8%). Interestingly, the largest response group (26.7%) identified that their administrator did not seek teacher input to their recollection.

Again, it is important to identify none of the themes were of statistical significance, yet they do not appear to be as similar to the quantitative responses above, which potentially indicates some gaps in relationship to learning and instructional leadership needs. Instead, study participants indicate the need for time to work together with those in their content areas, or as collegial partners, rather than seeking administrative influence, yet they see that time offered as administrative support. In addition, participants did not identify the administrator as part of the collegial partnership group; instead, numerous submissions indicated the administrator was not involved and sought out teacher input in minor ways. The building leader as a manager of time and

resources appeared more apparent in the qualitative assessment of the themes. Additionally, few were of any significance as many presented in low percentages.

Additionally, both question sets were considered for an analysis as to whether leadership characteristics held value to both the implementation of MLS and successful instruction. The results were statistical significant, indicating a strong correlation between learning leadership characteristics through large-scale transition such as the MLS and characteristics necessary for successful instruction in a purer form.

Research Question 3

What practices do teachers identify beyond learning leadership behaviors which promote successful implementation of the Missouri Learning Standards?

So that this study did not limit participant voice to only those characteristics of learning leadership, the research explored all possibilities to improve instruction by allowing alternate input in all eight open-ended responses (questions 5, 7, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, and 26). This provided an opportunity for respondents to include additional information on leadership characteristics and practices that promote successful implementation of the MSL beyond those suggested in the survey. The analysis of the eight qualitative questions resulted in no major categories identified outside of the responses related to learning leadership as posed in the quantitative question set. Most data shared by study participants outside of those that are considered specific to learning leadership theory were attributes of morality (i.e., trust, integrity, honesty) or specific to management skills (i.e., time management, organization, budgetary), however, none were mentioned in any statistically significant measure. Therefore, this research question provided no further insight into the attributes necessary for successful large-scale reform.

Research Question 4

Is there a difference in the perceptions of teachers when prioritizing resources and learning leadership behaviors to promote instructional objectives of the Missouri Learning Standards based on gender?

Quantitative statistical analysis yielded a significant difference between male and female respondents. In review of the individual data entries for female and male responses, females were more likely to be within the *somewhat agree* to *strongly agree* range (88.89% [88 of 99]), vs. males (59.375% [19 of 32]). The outcome of both common and scattered themes for all respondents was not available to support this finding based upon the qualitative analysis of the open-ended questions. Responses displayed no obvious presentation of a male or female viewpoint. Thus, an overall view of the qualitative responses presented as practitioner perspectives rather than gender specific viewpoints of the issues.

Research Question 5

Is there a difference in the perceptions of teachers when prioritizing resources and learning leadership behaviors to promote instructional objectives of the Missouri Learning Standards based on years of teaching experiences?

Again, quantitative statistical analysis did not yield significant results when comparing years of experience and leadership characteristics that supported large scale reform efforts. Survey responses enveloped a wide range of years of experience. It was intriguing to note that a majority of respondents had taught beyond the parameters of the MLS, as ninety-eight (98) respondents identified having ten (10) or more years in education, and were therefore embedded in the transition to the MLS. The smaller group

of respondents was those beginning teachers to those with nine (9) years of teaching experience (33). Yet again, qualitative analysis did not produce a significant pattern of responses that could be attributed to a level of experience in teaching. Although responses had commonalities across all respondents, no pattern could be attributed to either group.

Research Question 6

Is there a difference in the perceptions of teachers when prioritizing resources and learning leadership behaviors to promote instructional objectives of the Missouri Learning Standards based on areas of instructional responsibilities?

Finally, an individual's instructional responsibility did not appear to be distinctly different as results for quantitative measures proved insignificant and the qualitative analysis displayed no substantial indicators of discrepancies. The open-ended dialogue responses included generic, non-content and specific examples. It was not apparent that one hundred one (101) content instructors and thirty (30) non-content instructors participated in the survey. Results seemed to indicate it was about the leadership behavior rather than the specific area of instruction or responsibility.

Research Questions Summary

Quantitative analysis revealed that one hundred thirty-one individuals (12.66% of eligible respondents) completed the survey. More females (99) than males participated (32) in the study, as did core instructors (101) and non-core instructors (30). Teachers with ten (10) or more years of experience (98) offered their opinion in greater quantity than newer teachers with nine (9) or less years of experience (33). Participants agreed in

large percentages that the characteristics and behaviors of learning leadership were positive influences on the transition to the Missouri Learning Standards.

Comments obtained through the use of open-ended survey questions reflected both similarities and a lack of consistency in responses. As reviewed with each specific question, the responses could be grouped into at least two or three significant themes, albeit not all themes were of a strong nature. Research question one revealed agreement as patterns yielded consistent needs to inspire effective implementation of the MLS in the classroom, such as time for training, preparation, curriculum issues and collaboration.

Research question two lent itself to further questions as participants identified their greatest assets in improving instruction were colleagues and professional organizations, leaving administrators at the low end of any influential resource. In addition, time again was discussed as a primary source of opportunity, preparation and collaboration. However, question two also included some consistency in conversations across dialogue boxes highlighting instructional needs and the impact of administrative involvement or support.

Research question three failed to produce any measureable results for leadership needs beyond those identified as part of learning leadership, however, the entries that were submitted did include multiple references to moral traits and management skills, indicating a need for foundational, or generic leadership skills to be reconsidered. There were no significant trends that emerged from the data and therefore, no significant data could be obtained.

Finally, research questions four, five and six – demographic questions - produced mixed results. Although a significant relationship between females and males and the

relationship to perceived value of leadership characteristics were found to exist, there were no measureable relationships uncovered between practitioner responses to years of experience in teaching. Similarly, a possible relationship between teaching responsibilities (core, non-core) and perceived value of leadership characterizes was also found to be insignificant.

Limitations of the Findings

As with all research, there are limitations to every study (Heppner & Heppner, 2004). Therefore, there are multiple limitations and assumptions in regard to this inquiry. The researcher did take action to manage the following limitations and diminish the effect on the study findings. The following limitations are provided for the benefit of the reader and to provide a framework to understand the results of the investigation. The limitations of this research included the following:

1. Geography was a primary limitation for this research, as participating instructors were all teachers in the state of Missouri. Additionally, the use of the Missouri Learning Standards also limited generalization of results to Missouri.
2. This research was limited to 1035 potential participants. Although this quantity appeared sufficient for this research, the low rate of return (12.66%) was potentially in part due to an unforeseen alteration in survey design by *SurveyMonkey*. The change from a page-by-page design to a single page, scrolling document which timed out participants may have rendered many entries unsaveable and, therefore, a loss to the contribution of the research.

3. Study participation was anonymous and solicited in an impersonal manner – unknown email correspondence. Lack of personalization may have hindered participation. In addition, the structural change of the survey by *SurveyMonkey* may have been an additional deterrent, attributed to the researcher and therefore, causing potential participants to grow frustrated with the additional correspondence to clarify the issue.
4. The survey was opened and available for three weeks near the end of the second semester of the academic year. Teacher willingness to respond, as well as response length or quality, may have been influenced by school testing schedules, end of year timelines, the interest or energy level of the instructors, and the number of requests for participation in research studies received by participants.
5. When using surveys, individuals respond differently and communication can be misinterpreted or responses misunderstood. In addition, researcher bias can interfere with the research validity.
6. Although a pilot study was completed with validity and reliability assessed, there is a need for further testing of the instrument to determine if it can be utilized with a larger population for greater generalization.
7. Results of the study indicate the question set for both the qualitative and quantitative portions of the study were not specific enough, nor had great enough depth for both the participant to fully understand what was being measured and the researcher to fully understand the potential significance of the responses.

The researcher attempted to minimize limitation effects through multiple means, including the utilization of experienced researchers throughout this study. With reference to the sample population for the study, various sampling techniques were sought and attempted to ensure a representative sample to improve generalization of results (Gay & Airasian, 2003, Mertens, 2010, Merriam, 2009). To ensure a positive return rate, the researcher worked diligently to secure quality gatekeepers that would include all teaching staff in the administration of the surveys; however, the fluid nature of administrative positions and employment changes made that partnership difficult and was ultimately abandoned for the state data pull option in order to complete the research in a timely manner. The survey instrument was created to be short to encourage participation. Including the open-ended questions not only allowed participants to add their input, even if it had not been considered in the research, it added to the value of the study in the rich data that could be collected.

Implications for Practice

In 2009 the National Governors Association (NGA) began work on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) initiative (NGA, 2010). According to NGA documents, the . . . "[s]tandards provide consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them" (2010, para.1). The standards intended to resolve flaws in NCLB (2002) and develop a method of teaching basic math, English, reading, and writing skills to ensure American students graduated equipped to compete in the world market.

The original implementation of the CCSS was to occur in 2014-2015 (NGA, 2010), but required a large-scale paradigm shift. Brain-based instructional approaches to

ensure all students achieved basic proficiency within the standards (ASCD, 2012) replaced old instructional pedagogies. To further complicate matters, states began turning from the original national CCSS effort to their own interpretation of the standards (DeNisco, 2017; Zubrzycki, 2016). In 2017, Missouri implemented the Missouri Learning Standards (MLS) to meet the reform requirements. Administrators concluded instructional change of this magnitude required systemic change, expanding and redefining the role of leaders. The following overarching questions for educators and school leaders emerged. What leadership and instructional approaches could best implement reform while meeting the federal and state student success indicators of the reform efforts, was there a specific theoretical leadership model that would implement transition most effectively, and what did teachers need from instructional leaders to implement sustainable reform of this magnitude?

In an effort to bridge gaps in educational research (Robinson, 2006), this study chose to prioritize the practitioner experience as the guiding focus for effective leadership practice rather than predetermining a theory to guide the relationship between leadership and achievement. The convergence of constructs prompted the exploration of practitioner perspectives to explore the type and characteristics of leadership required to impact the practice of teaching and learning effectively. The present study determined it was essential to establish the voice of the practitioner.

Pregot (2016) also noted in his study of preferred administrative dispositions, "[t]here is little doubt that principals need to focus on the instructional process for both the benefit of their students as well as their teachers to help them reach higher achievement levels" (p. 34). Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) indicated that

research supports a positive correlation among particular types of school leadership dispositions and the academic outcomes of students. This *leadership for learning* (CCSSO, 2014) indicates the need for educational leadership preparation programs to identify and teach these dispositions to increase the likelihood of academic change early in a building administrator's tenure (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

Although the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards have existed to pinpoint the foundational core values necessary for practicing school administrators to accomplish their roles, the standards were recently restructured to highlight further the role of the administrator in the learning process (Murphy, Wilson, Anderson, Hutton, Printy, Smylie, & Supovitz, 2014), identifying administrative dispositions successful in a "learning-supportive school environment" (Pregot, 2016). The ongoing discussion of dispositions again highlights the need for additional research in support of the leadership characteristics necessary for successful school change in light of continued education reform efforts across the United States.

There is agreement that educational research should begin with evidence of how administrators and teachers make a difference in the accomplishments of their students and end with a theory or understanding of leadership characteristics/dispositions that support those needs (Alton-Lee, 2003; Darling-Hammond, & Bransford, 2005; Robinson, 2006). In light of this premise, it was essential that this study include the voice of the teacher to identify foundational instructional needs necessary for successful transition to the Missouri Learning Standards (MLS). Such research is critical to driving effective leadership perspectives in the midst of modern school reform.

At the turn of the century, the United States stepped into an era of reform in which outcomes based emphasis was designed to close achievement gaps between ethnic and low income students. Reform called for equal education for all by improving teacher quality (NCLB, 2002; USDE, 2008). As calls for further substantial improvement continued, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) initiative (NGA, 2010) moved to the forefront. Intended to solve the flaws in No Child Left Behind (NCLB), CCSS required a method of teaching basic math, English, reading and writing to ensure American students graduated equipped to compete in the world market (NGA, 2010). In 2017 Missouri broke away from the CCSS and implemented the Missouri Learning Standards (MLS) to meet reform requirements (DESE, 2017). Administrators concluded that instructional changes of this magnitude required systemic change, expanding and redefining the role of educational leaders.

Examining leaders as change agents (Bush, 2007), this study purposed to determine if theoretical leadership provides for the real needs of teachers and students in the contemporary classroom. Learning leadership was defined as the theoretical perspective in which learning becomes the primary method of leading (Goldring et al., 2009) and keeping pace with a fluctuating environment (Schein, 1996). The appeal of learning leadership theory over other theoretical models lies in principals and teachers working in unison for instructional improvement. This mixed method study was designed to investigate how leaders can best support instruction and organization change in light of modern reform efforts.

As discussed earlier, exploring practices to develop and assess leaders can have a significant impact on leadership quality, and through that, on the excellence of education

in schools (Glasman & Heck, 1992; Thomas, Holdaway & Ward, 2000). Although not well researched, evaluating leaders who are successful educational change agents can offer much-needed data for accountability and improves leadership practices in schools (Reeves, 2005; Waters & Grubb, 2004). Specifically, exploring a change environment can offer insight into the skill sets necessary to lead an organization through reform and highlight characteristics that were successful. Resulting data might influence the approach schools and districts take in implementing change or choosing leaders of a particular theoretical perspective, potentially improving reform results.

Therefore, in an effort to bridge gaps in educational research (Robinson, 2006), this study chose to prioritize the practitioner experience as the focus for effective leadership practice to guide the relationship between leadership and achievement. The convergence of constructs prompted the exploration of teacher experiences, giving voice to the practitioner, throughout large-scale transition to explore the type and characteristics of leadership required to impact the practice of teaching and learning effectively.

From the analysis of the resulting data, the researcher identified two implications for leadership practices. Two trends that emerged from the quantitative and qualitative data obtained from the survey responses led to the following suggestions offered when planning for large-scale educational transition, and leadership development or training programs: the collaborative relationship and questions concerning administrative training programs.

In multiple data sets, it became clear that the primary point of need, support and improvement for teachers was linked to collegial groups – individuals as well as teams. It surfaced in more than one question that administrators were significantly less influential

than fellow teachers and, in several cases, were not even considered a part of the instructional process, although when having considered the transition to MLS, learning leadership traits were identified as valuable to the success of the transition. This identification is not intended to discount the positive responses in which building leaders were identified as active participants or engaged with curriculum or students learning; however, it was apparent in the quantity of responses that a reasonably concerned group of teachers still see leadership as lacking. It is possible that a chasm may continue to exist in education, hindering increased student success due to a lack of collaboration.

In multiple quantitative as well as qualitative questions, teachers agreed administrative support and/or input would improve instruction, yet many submissions stated the need for administrators who would participate in training, pay attention at meetings, and be present in the classroom as a normal activity in the school day. Several responses indicated students were unable to identify the building administrator due to a lack of visibility and presence with the staff and student body. Others spoke to the old adage that administration still thinks they have all of the best ideas, no teacher input required. The researcher is unsure if this is a possible stereotyping that still exists in education (possibly on both sides of the paycheck), yet, even if true, responses still speak to the need to bridge the gap that seemingly continues in schools. The following two possibilities may offer some form of opportunity for administrators to advance beyond these deficiencies.

One implication for practice regarding administrative involvement may be the need to improve administrative connections to the educational community in which he/she serves. Multiple submissions articulated the desire to have administrators engage

with students. The effect of such interactive, or maybe even co-teaching activities, may reach well beyond the classroom and reverberate with all community members. Connecting in personal and engaging ways unlocks a door to open dialogue, clarity of vision, understanding the experiences teachers are living out daily and, possibly, growth in understanding the curriculum being taught. Although this study focused on the transition to the Missouri Learning Standards (MLS), practitioner responses insinuated their requests were more foundational.

Study participants did recognize specific training was necessary to successfully implement the MLS paradigm shift, but they also indicated the need for daily, consistent, interactive relationships with administrators as necessary to successfully walk the rough trail of transition together, from the beginning. The data would indicate that teaching staff desire an administrator who has earned the trust of the staff through his/her activities and becomes a part of the collegial network necessary for success rather than being a footnote at the bottom of the pool of themes.

The second implication for practice focuses on the differences between the data assessing the large-scale transition to the MLS and the general leadership needs identified by teachers to improve instruction and student achievement measures. Again, the data implies there is a potential disconnect between what teachers deem necessary for improvement and what they actually designate as qualities to be an effective administrator. When given the opportunity to identify target behaviors or characteristics, teachers reverted to terms of moral persuasion – honest/trustworthy, integrity, transparent, compassionate, respectful, fair, good communicator, loyal – to describe the qualities that make building leaders effective. Instructional influence was rarely

acknowledged in such questions. The second most often identified set of attributes for an effective administrator was that of management skills – organized, able to discipline, stands up to irate parents, holds staff accountable to rules, consistent, locate money for resources.

Several questions also come to mind in light of this data. Is it possible that individuals in higher education programs seeking administrative degrees are not being taught the instructional component of leadership? Advanced degree programs focus a great deal on the responsibilities of the building leader – finance, legal, human resources, state and federal regulations – but are they also instructing potential leaders in areas of curriculum development, instruction, and assessment?

Earlier, it was identified that because school leaders are expected to have been teachers at one time, it is assumed they understand content, curriculum alignment and development, but do they? One possible implication may be that universities and colleges need to enhance the instructional experiences of the modern leader seeking an administrative role. Institutions are in a primary position to combat the potential lack of understanding or training in instructional leadership theory such as Learning Leadership. Teachers indicated the positive impact of learning leadership characteristics as a source of success, especially through reform efforts, however, the same behaviors were not identified in descriptors of what effective administrators can or do engage in on a regular basis.

As a matter of practicality, it would seem that the power to improve the educational situation for students lies in communication and consistency. If the chasm that exists between future leaders, educational programs and the real needs of teachers

can be threaded together, exponential healing of our schools could possibly occur. Students deserve a commitment of school leaders, all of them – teachers, administrators, institutions of higher education – in improving the education programs students count on for a successful future in a modern economy. With further research and consideration of how administrative training can improve so they perform differently in schools and become a trusted part of the collegial instructional team, improving instruction and student outcomes can ultimately expand.

Recommendations for Future Research

In an effort to bridge gaps in educational research (Robinson, 2006), this study chose to prioritize the practitioner's voice as the guiding focus in determining the relationship between effective leadership practice and achievement. The convergence of constructs prompted the exploration of practitioner perspectives to explore the specific type and characteristics of leadership required to effectively impact the practice of teaching and learning.

The findings of this study indicated the potential use of learning leadership characteristics as a resource for large-scale reform efforts. Additionally, this theoretical perspective offers the potential to assist schools of greatest need in finding quality leadership through an understanding of effective leadership practices. Replication of this study, applied to different transitional events or larger teacher populations, could provide insights of commonalities across improvement efforts, thereby increasing the capacity to sustain change.

Three specific recommendations for future research indicated by the data include a need to explore in greater depth the differences practitioners identify between what

supports instruction and what is actually occurring daily in schools. An obvious recommendation for future research from the present study includes the need to do statistical analysis on the ranking of characteristics, a weakness in this study. The present study was fairly representative of learning leadership characteristics; however, it did not require participants to rank the importance of particular skills and their value in transition, as well as within the daily fabric of the school experience. Questions to consider include: What do teachers specifically perceive to be the most important attributes of leaders in improving instruction when ranking a series of characteristics and behaviors? What specific behaviors and characteristics do practitioners rank as encountered in school that directly impact instructional practices?

In reference to building leadership, future research would benefit from a focus on the perspective of building administrators as well. Questions to consider: Do leaders see their impact, or lack of impact, as identified by teachers? What role do administrators believe they play in impacting instruction? What do building leaders identify as their instructional learning needs? Research might also benefit from further review of learning leadership and how administrators can improve collegial relationships through its practices. Finally, there could be potentials benefits from the study of learning leadership applied to further large-scale reform over larger regions or across states.

In relation to possible issues with training or professional administrative degree programs, questions to consider might include: What specific coursework or training do future leaders receive in degree, and/or certification programs that specifically relate to curricular development, implementation and assessment? Is learning leadership theory a viable method of improving instruction? The consideration of post-secondary degree

programs and the influence they have on emerging leaders should not be overlooked in research.

Concluding Overview

In 2009 the National Governors Association (NGA) began work on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) initiative (NGA, 2010). According to NGA documents, the . . . "[s]tandards provide consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them" (2010, para.1). The standards intended to resolve flaws in NCLB (2002) and develop a method of teaching basic math, English, reading, and writing skills to ensure American students graduated equipped to compete in the world market.

The original implementation of the CCSS was to occur in 2014-2015 (NGA, 2010), but required a large-scale paradigm shift. The brain-based instructional approaches necessary to ensure all students achieved basic proficiency within the standards (ASCD, 2012) replaced old instructional pedagogies. To further complicate matters, states began turning from the original national CCSS effort to their own interpretation of the standards (DeNisco, 2017; Zubrzycki, 2016), including Missouri when the Missouri Learning Standards (MLS) were unveiled to meet the reform requirements. Administrators concluded instructional change of this magnitude required systemic change, expanding and redefining the role of leaders. At that time, the following overarching questions for educators and school leaders emerged: What leadership and instructional approaches could best implement reform while meeting the federal and state student success indicators of the reform efforts, was there a specific theoretical leadership model that

would implement transition most effectively, and what did teachers need from instructional leaders to implement sustainable reform of this magnitude?

In an effort to bridge gaps in educational research (Robinson, 2006), this study chose to prioritize the practitioner experience as the guiding focus for effective leadership practice to explore the relationship between leadership and achievement. The transition event to MLS served as the large-scale reform effort in which to investigate change and learning leadership as the possible leadership characteristics necessary to impact instruction in light of the event. The convergence of constructs prompted the exploration of practitioner perspectives to explore the type and characteristics of leadership required to impact the practice of teaching and learning effectively.

The results of the research offered positive insight into potential leadership characteristics that proved valuable to teachers and classroom instruction through large-scale reform; however, it also revealed a discrepancy in what best supports large-scale transition and what leadership skills may be without representation on a daily basis in schools. Evidence indicated that learning leadership characteristics, although noted as valuable in the practitioner perspective, were not identified as necessary for an effective administrator when separated from the MLS needs. In addition, when practitioners were asked to identify behaviors of effective leaders, there was no significant evidence to indicate a required skill set, however, small amounts of moral and management behaviors did present themselves.

Although there appears to be a positive response to learning leadership as a means of supporting large-scale transition, such as Missouri's transition to MLS, there is need to further study the possibility. Some limitations of the present study included a formatting

issue with the online survey, geographical considerations in using only Missouri teachers, as well as the study of the MLS transition. Researcher bias and lack of experience have the potential of influencing empirical outcomes and should be considered in further research modifications. In addition, further research would benefit from understanding the administrative perspective and what role building leaders believe they provide during transition, or whether they believe they meet the instructional needs of the modern classroom. Post-secondary degree programs should be considered and reviewed for possible effects on administrative training and whether such programs are currently not providing the necessary training to support instruction effectively.

At a time in which the United States seeks to improve student opportunities in the world economic system, it is imperative that we continue to ask questions that will encourage leaders as change agents and improve student outcomes through ongoing reform efforts. Identifying characteristics of effective leadership that best influence classroom instruction is a primary way of leading through reform. Considering what impacts teaching and learning from the perspective of the practitioner offers insights not yet fully considered.

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APPENDIX A

Informed Consent - Educator Participant (statement as part of online survey)

Informed Consent Statement – Educator Participant
(included as the introduction to the survey)

What is the study about? You are invited to participate in a research study being conducted for a dissertation at the University of Missouri in Columbia, Missouri. The researcher is interested in your opinions about leadership skills and their impact on large-scale transition, such as the move to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the resulting Missouri Learning Standards (MLS). You were selected to participate in the study because you are a teacher employed at a Missouri school district. There is no deception in this study. Your opinion is sought simply to aid in understanding what leadership promotes successful change when implementing a large-scale transition such as the MLS.

What will be asked of me? You will be asked to answer some questions in an online survey regarding your perceptions about the transition to the Missouri Learning Standards and what leadership skills best impact such change. Please answer the questions in the survey as they apply to your experiences or opinion. With the possibility of nine open-ended questions that allow you to offer a deeper description of your opinion, it is estimated that the survey will take 20-30 minutes of your time.

Who is involved? The following people are involved in this research project and can be contacted at any time through email. The researcher or the project chair would be happy to answer any questions that may arise regarding this study.

Please direct any questions or comments to:
Principal Researcher: Lisa P Ruhman, Ed. S. LPRNR9@mail.missouri.edu.
Dissertation Chair: Dr. Barbara Martin bmartin@ucmo.edu

Are there any risks? There are no known risks in this study. Please answer all questions to the best of your ability and allow yourself to be free from the expectation that there are answers that are better than others. Share what you think when answering the questions; it is your opinion that is sought.

What are possible benefits? There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this research. No incentives are offered. The results have scientific interest that may eventually have benefits for the improvement of school leadership programs, how educators approach systemic change, or as a district leadership tool.

Can I stop participating in the study? You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Please do not skip any questions, as your answers are important in order for the study to reflect professional opinions.

What if I have questions about my rights as a research participant or complaints? If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, any complaints about your participation in the research study, or any problems that occurs during the study, please contact the researchers identified above. Or, if you prefer to talk to someone outside the study team, you may contact the University of Missouri-Columbia's Institutional Review Board at irb@missouri.edu or (573) 882-9585.

Participant Online Consent Signature:
I have read the description above for this study. I understand what the study is about and what is being asked of me. In lieu of a signed consent form, my participation in the study by answering the survey questions indicates that I have read and understand the informed consent form and agree to participate in the study.

APPENDIX B

Survey Protocol

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Missouri-Columbia's Institutional Review Board at irb@missouri.edu or (573) 882-3181. We would be happy to answer any questions that may arise about the study.

* 1. Will you voluntarily accept the invitation to participate in this survey?

- ◯ Yes, by answering yes you have agreed to complete the survey.
- ◯ No, thank you for considering this opportunity. Please exit the survey now.

* 2. The information requested in this section of the survey will help to determine if there are differences in responses based upon demographic factors. Please answer each question as it applies to you.

What is your gender?

- ◯ Female
- ◯ Male

* 3. How many years of experience in education do you have?

- ◯ 0-9 years
- ◯ 10+ years

* 4. What statement best describes your area of teacher certification?

- ◯ CORE: Academic Instructor (English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies)
- ◯ NON-CORE: Academic Instructor (Physical Education, Fine Arts, Career and Technical Education/Practical Arts, Foreign Language, etc.)

The following questions relate directly to your transition to the Missouri Learning Standards (MLS). Answer the following questions indicating strongly disagree to strongly agree, or type your response (extended description or specific examples) to the statement when a dialogue box is provided.

* 5. Complete the following statement: "Evidence of effective implementation of the Missouri Learning Standards (MLS) in my classroom would be demonstrated by..."

* 6. Increased administrative support benefits effective implementation of MLS?

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
◯	◯	◯	◯

* 7. Dialog Box: If you chose a response from "somewhat agree" to "strongly agree," identify the types of support you perceive as beneficial.

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* 8. I personally found there to be a need for additional training, practice and evaluation in developing MLS unit(s)/lesson(s) for my classroom/content.

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
○	○	○	○

* 9. I personally found there to be a need for additional training, practice and evaluation to align curriculum and assessments to the MLS.

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
○	○	○	○

* 10. Effective implementation of MLS could happen in my classroom if additional or improved instructional materials and resources to help students were available.

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
○	○	○	○

* 11. For me, successful transition to MLS requires additional time to collaborate with colleagues during the day.

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
○	○	○	○

* 12. As a personal evaluation, I found there to be a need for training in content specific strategies to implement MLS.

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
○	○	○	○

* 13. Increased teacher input/participation would have assisted in a successful transition to MLS.

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
○	○	○	○

The following questions relate to instruction and leadership. Answer the following questions indicating strongly disagree to strongly agree, or type your response (extended description or specific examples) to the statement when a dialogue box is provided.

* 14. Professional development related to educational initiatives and innovative teaching practices (such as: reviewing educational articles, book studies, contracted training, and collegial conversations) promotes instructional improvement in the classroom.

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
○	○	○	○

15. Dialogue Box: Outside of my own effort, the following individual(s) or group provides the strongest influence on the improvement of my instruction...

* 16. My instructional delivery improves when I am given planning time with my colleagues during the school day.

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
○	○	○	○

17. Dialogue Box: What characteristics does a highly collaborative environment require?

* 18. Input from my colleagues (such as: team-teaching, peer observation, and peer evaluation) improves my theory and practice of instruction, guiding me to improve as a teacher.

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
○	○	○	○

19. Dialogue Box: Please finish the following statement: "I find I teach better when..."

* 20. It takes the collaboration of teachers and administrators to develop rigorous curricula that establishes learning goals with high expectations.

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
○	○	○	○

21. Dialogue Box: In your experience, what specific, positive contributions have administrators made to your curriculum development or implementation?

* 22. In my opinion, teacher input is required for promoting effective, measurable school-wide achievement.

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
○	○	○	○

23. Dialogue Box: List examples of how your building administrator used teacher input to make positive growth in your school(s).

* 24. In my opinion, involving the entire school community is important for developing a successful school culture.

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
○	○	○	○

* 25. In my opinion, successful classrooms require administrator support (such as: resources, professional development, instructional supports, additional staffing needs, etc.)

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
○	○	○	○

* 26. Dialogue Box: In your opinion, what are the most important attributes of an effective administrator.

Thank You!

You have completed the survey. Please accept our sincerest thanks for your effort to make this research possible.

If you would like information about the results of this project, please email me at LPRNR9@mail.missouri.edu and you will be sent the results when available.

Again, thank you for your time and consideration of this material. You are the reason education is the best profession in the world.

Respectfully,
Lisa P. Ruhman, Doctoral Candidate
University of Missouri-Columbia
Education Leadership and Policy Analysis

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APPENDIX C

University of Missouri – Columbia Institutional Review Board Approval

Institutional Review Board
University of Missouri-Columbia
FWA Number: 0002876
IRB Registration Numbers: 00000731, 00009014

482 McReynolds Hall
Columbia, MO 65211
573-882-3181
irb@missouri.edu

April 08, 2019

Principal Investigator: Lisa P. Ruhman (MU-Student)
Department: Educational Leadership-EDD

Your IRB Application to project entitled LEADERSHIP IN ACTION: THE INFLUENCE OF LEADERSHIP PRACTICES ON REFORM was reviewed and approved by the MU Institutional Review Board according to the terms and conditions described below:

IRB Project Number	2014354
IRB Review Number	246993
Initial Application Approval Date	April 08, 2019
IRB Expiration Date	April 08, 2020
Level of Review	Exempt
Project Status	Active - Exempt
Exempt Categories (Revised Common Rule)	45 CFR 46.104d(2)
Risk Level	Minimal Risk

The principal investigator (PI) is responsible for all aspects and conduct of this study. The PI must comply with the following conditions of the approval:

1. No subjects may be involved in any study procedure prior to the IRB approval date or after the expiration date.
2. All changes must be IRB approved prior to implementation utilizing the Exempt Amendment Form.
3. The Annual Exempt Form must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval at least 30 days prior to the project expiration date to keep the study active or to close it.
4. Maintain all research records for a period of seven years from the project completion date.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the MU IRB Office at 573-882-3181 or email to muresearchirb@missouri.edu.

Thank you,
MU Institutional Review Board

VITA

Lisa Ruhman was born in Hancock, Michigan to Gerald and Nancy Perreault. She graduated from Lake Linden-Hubbell High School in 1986 and from Southeast Missouri State University in Cape Girardeau, Missouri with a Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary and Special Education in 1992. She completed her Master's degree in School Administration, incorporating middle, high school, and Career Education to her certification. She most recently earned a Doctorate in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Missouri – Columbia in 2019. Lisa's has devoted her twenty-seven year career to those marginalized and in need of educational support.