



## Educating Preservice School Librarians to Lead: A Study of Self-Perceived Transformational Leadership Behaviors

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### Abstract

*The purpose of this study was to determine the factors that impacted the level of self-perceived transformational leadership potential in preservice school librarians who participated in a master's degree program in library and information studies focusing on leadership development. A mixed-method concurrent triangulation research design was implemented by using pre-existing data, the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI), and a survey designed by the researcher. The study findings indicated that the participants' leadership training facilitated the development of their self-perceived transformational leadership behaviors to a significantly higher level than the established national norms for the LPI in two areas—Modeling the Way and Enabling Others to Act. In addition, the assessment of leadership potential given during the program selection process had a positive correlation with the LPI subscale for Enabling Others to Act. Moreover, the social context of each participant's circumstances had an impact on their self-perceived transformational leadership potential when considering the participants' satisfaction with the support they received from their mentors, the amount of time they spent with their mentors, whether they selected or were assigned a mentor, their Graduate Record Exam scores, and the poverty level within their schools districts.*

### Introduction

Historically, professional school librarian guidelines have advocated for leadership as a defining role of the school librarian (AASL 1988; AASL and AECT 1998). The most recent guidelines, *Empowering Learners: Guidelines for School Library Media Programs* (AASL 2009), explicitly states, "The school library program is built by professionals who model leadership and best practices for the school community" (45). Furthermore, for the first time, the guidelines devote an entire chapter to leadership, "Empowering Learning Through Leadership," and prescribe specific leadership responsibilities in the following areas: leadership in a global society, building relationships, modeling leadership, and planning for the future. Nevertheless, even though this prescription for leadership exists on the national stage, school librarian leadership has been historically slow to manifest itself at the building level (McCracken 2001) or through library education (Vansickle 2002). This study employs both quantitative and qualitative methods to examine the self-perceived leadership potential of preservice school librarians who took part in a

recently conceived graduate education leadership program, Project LEAD (Leaders Educated to Make a Difference).

Project LEAD is similar to several university teacher education programs in various subject areas that have aligned themselves with the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards to promote excellence and leadership (NBPTS 2008a). Developed in 2005, in the graduate school library media program at the Florida State University School of Library and Information Studies, Project LEAD's goal is to address the critical shortages and need for highly trained school librarians who exhibit leadership skills (Everhart and Dresang 2007) and began as the only program in the nation to focus on the Library Media National Board Certificate. In 2006, 30 teacher-leaders from throughout Florida were chosen to participate as a cohort in this newly developed leadership curriculum as part of their master's degree. This approach—targeting teacher-leaders and enticing them with full scholarships—was specifically designed to create a leadership model for experienced teachers who transition from the classroom to the school library.

The development of programs such as Project LEAD is important for school librarians because the outcomes of school librarian leadership are compelling. It is clear from the longitudinal research conducted in various states and settings that when school librarians take on leadership roles, they contribute to the school environment in ways that create better learning opportunities for children (Scholastic 2008).

In accord with the definition of transformational leadership, (Bass and Bass 2008; Burns 2003) the Project LEAD program endeavored to teach its students to be transformational leaders. The National Board Standards, embedded into the curriculum, note that a school librarian has the opportunity to be such a leader within a school (NBPTS 2008b). As such, students were taught many skills that would allow them to model outstanding leadership practices, to encourage change through collaboration, create a shared vision and mission, use technology to enhance their school communities, and teach information literacy skills that are critical to success in the twenty-first century.

The question arose as to what extent did the Project LEAD students regard *themselves* as transformational leaders as they completed their program. Naturally, the month before the program ended was the opportune time to conduct a study to measure the transformational leadership potential of the Project LEAD students because they were about to graduate. The students were enthusiastic about their new careers. The skills they learned were still an intricate part of their mindset. This is when the data gathering from the potential graduates took place.

This study determined the self-perceived leadership potential of preservice school librarians who were teacher-leaders and participated in a leadership training program by examining their self-perceptions of their transformational leadership behaviors. This research also was designed to study the impact of an assortment of variables such as age, experience, school grades, mentor relationships, the type of community the participants were employed in, and prior degree levels on the dimensions of leadership behaviors.

## Research Questions

The following questions and related hypotheses guided the investigation.

RQ1: To what extent does leadership education facilitate the development of self-perceived transformational leadership behaviors in preservice school librarians who were teacher-leaders?

H1: The self-perceived transformational leadership behaviors in preservice school librarians who were teacher-leaders will differ from the norms.

RQ2: To what extent does the assessment of leadership potential at the beginning of the master's in library and information studies degree program focusing on leadership correlate to the self-perceived transformational leadership potential of preservice school librarians who were teacher-leaders?

H1: The self-perceived transformational leadership potential will be correlated with the scores on the assessment of leadership potential.

RQ 3: To what extent does the social context of each participant's circumstances impact the self-perceived transformational leadership potential of preservice school librarians who were teacher-leaders and participated in a master's in library and information studies degree program focusing on leadership?

H1: The social context of each participant's circumstances will have an impact on the self-perceived transformational leadership potential of preservice school librarians who were teacher-leaders and participated in a master's in library and information studies degree program focusing on leadership.

## Literature Review

### Theoretical Framework

School librarians have not been traditionally regarded as leaders by teachers (McCracken 2001), principals (Edwards 1989), or even school librarians themselves (Ishizuka, Minkel, and Lifer 2002; McCracken 2001) because of larger organizational dimensions and traditions in schools. Leadership can be defined many ways. For the purposes of this study, leadership is defined as the ability to create positive changes within an organization that benefit everyone within the organization (Kouzes and Posner 2007). Such leadership can be tailored to the particular personality of the leader, composition of the group to be led, or challenges the organization faces.

While leadership is important for established, stable organizations, it is often most needed when organizations experience turbulence. Organizational challenges require particular approaches to leadership that help members work together through times of change and remain committed to the organization's core mission and purpose. Schools are often in the midst of change brought on by myriad local, state, and national forces. Transformational leadership is an especially useful form of leadership for schools because it is rooted in organizational change.

### Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is a leadership approach that builds on the concept that leaders may bring about or guide change within an organization by engaging in unselfish behavior (Bass and

Bass 2008; Burns 2003; Posner and Kouzes 1994). Transformational leaders look beyond their personal needs and strive to achieve goals that are important to an organization as a whole. The end result of change guided by transformational leadership is an organization with members who are empowered, share a vision, and deliberately labor to achieve a common goal (Posner and Kouzes 1994).

Transformational leadership “assists a group of people to move from one stage of development to a higher one and in doing so [to] address and fulfill better a higher human need” (Couto 1995,102). This is because of the deep interest transformational leaders take in the well-being of their followers and the lasting effects of their leadership efforts (Bass 1990; Burns 2003). These exceptional leaders exhibit the willingness to take risks, the ability to create a shared vision, collaborate with followers and other leaders, model exceptional practices, and encourage the people around them (Bass and Bass 2008; Burns 2003; Posner and Kouzes 1994). These skills can be applied to a variety of settings, whether the leader works with one person, an organization, or an entire culture (Northouse 2004). Generally speaking, transformational leaders are able to challenge their followers and motivate them to achieve levels of success they originally did not think were possible (Bass and Bass 2008).

Transformational leadership can be applied to schools—the setting relevant to this study. Sheppard (2003) theorized that without sharing the leadership role, changes within a school will likely be short-lived because of competing priorities that can change the leadership focus. Transformational leadership is useful because it is a process for creating change within an organization. When seen as a process, this type of leadership becomes a behavior instead of a role and the need for formal distinctions between leaders and followers is less necessary (Uhl-Bien 2003). In fact, anyone can be a leader at any given time within in an organization as long as he or she is inspiring others to create change. Because dramatic reforms are often called for in educational environments, transformational leadership is well suited for schools.

This approach to leadership eliminates the need for principals, the formal leaders of the organization, to accept the entire weight of a school reform and distributes some of the leadership roles to others to share the vision for the change. Often, school leaders must bring about change within an institutional culture that does not lend itself to accelerated restructuring efforts (Cohen 2003). Leadership becomes transformational within schools when the leaders identify with the behaviors of the teachers they are leading (Sheppard 1996). These connections encourage teachers within schools to feel understood and to be more involved, creative, and committed. Commitment is a key factor in inspiring change within schools because the commitment of teachers makes it possible for reform efforts to be sustained even when a principal is replaced. An administrator with transformational leadership practices can establish commitment because the administrator shares the leadership role with others involved.

Training in transformational leadership components and assessment of strengths has been suggested for school leaders (Greenlee 2004). School librarians in particular can benefit from this training. They have the advantage of being able to work with one student, a parent, a class, a teacher, an entire school, or a community. The fact that school librarians are not always perceived to be leaders (Edwards 1989; Ishizuka Minkel and Lifer 2002; McCracken 2001) makes the practice of transformational leadership an efficient way to influence change within schools because it has the potential of empowering school librarians to create change movements without officially being identified as leaders.

Many variables have the potential to influence leadership development. Organizational culture (Conner 2006; Schein 2004); the availability of mentoring (Daresh 2004; Scandura and Williams 2004); the debate between learned versus innate leadership traits (Bass 1990; Copeland and Chance 1996; Feidler 2001; Kouzes and Posner 2007), experience (Bridges and Hallinger 1995; Herron and Major 2004; McGough 2003), educational level (Barbuto and others 2007; Laflin 2009), and age (Arsenault 2004; Huusko 2006; Oshagbemi 2004) reflect the circumstances that create unique social contexts for individuals. These variables are often externally constructed and outside an individual’s control. Nonetheless, research has demonstrated that they can play a pivotal role in the performance of any kind of leadership.

## Method

### Population

There were 30 students chosen for the Project LEAD program from 6 Florida counties. The Project LEAD directors, 2 FSU professors, assessed leadership potential by combining several applicant scores. These scores consisted of a leadership rubric completed by principals, points awarded on a sliding scale for grade point averages, points for answers on the application questions, and points for leadership essays. Details concerning each of these criteria can be found in **Figure 1**. Points also were given to achieve a diverse group according to gender, race, age, ethnicity, and the subject taught. The total of the possible points was 100. The final selection of Project LEAD students was made from the students with the highest scores.

**Figure 1. Assessment of Leadership Potential**

<u>Principal Rubric</u>	<u>Leadership Questions</u>	<u>GPA</u>	<u>Diversity</u>
<p>42 Points</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning and Preparation</li> <li>• The classroom environment</li> <li>• Instruction</li> <li>• Professional responsibilities</li> </ul>	<p>30 Points</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technology integration</li> <li>• Motivation for becoming a school librarian</li> <li>• Teaching reading</li> <li>• Prior collaboration with school librarians</li> <li>• Examples of teacher leadership</li> </ul>	<p>20 Points</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3.0-3.19</li> <li>• 3.20-3.49</li> <li>• 3.50-3.79</li> <li>• 3.80-4.0</li> </ul>	<p>8 Points</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age</li> <li>• Gender</li> <li>• Ethnicity</li> <li>• Subject Taught</li> </ul>

### Data Collection and Analysis

The research reported here uses a mixed-method design. A concurrent triangulation mixed-method design was chosen for this study because it was a purposive sample—the participants were chosen because they were all leaders. There was a concern that the statistical analysis might not be able to make distinctions between the participants. Therefore qualitative data was collected to provide an understanding of the similarities and differences within the population. A closed-ended quantitative survey would not have provided this specific information.

Two paper-based self-administered surveys were used to collect the majority of the data for this study. The Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI), aligned with the theoretical framework of transformational leadership (Abu-Tineh Khasawneh and A-Omari 2008; Brown and Posner 2001; Fields and Herold 1997; Hautala 2005; Ridgway 2001) was used as the primary data

collection instrument. The LPI has been shown to be valid and reliable instrument for measuring transformational leadership (Brown and Posner 2001; Fields and Herold 1997; Harris 1996; Hautala 2005; Ridgway 2001). The LPI assesses five dimensions of transformational leadership: Modeling the Way, Challenging the Process, Encouraging the Heart, Enabling Others to Act, and Inspiring a Shared Vision (Kouzes and Posner 2007). These areas align to the types of leadership school librarians are encouraged to practice and the areas emphasized in the Project LEAD program.

Adding to its suitability, the LPI has been used to evaluate leadership practices in a variety of contexts. For example, Joseph (2009) used the LPI to evaluate a principal preparation program. The LPI was used by Koh (2008) to compare the management skills of preservice teachers to their leadership skills. Suwandee (2009) evaluated the leadership behaviors of executives who participated in a leadership program. Laflin (2009) assessed the extent to which students participating in a graduate teacher program perceived themselves to be practicing effective leadership behaviors. Moniz (2008) studied the correlation between exemplary leadership behaviors and the relationship that protégés participating in a mentoring program had with their mentors. The inventory has also been accepted as an instrument that can help analyze the differences and similarities of leadership behaviors according to social contexts, such as years of experience (Hillman 2006).

A supplemental questionnaire, containing closed and open-ended questions, collected student perception data on what was learned during the program, demographics, and information about each student's social context. This information was enriched by pre-existing data about each respondent's school grade level (A, B, C, D or F) and poverty level (percentage of free and reduced lunch) collected from the Florida Department of Education website.

The qualitative data obtained from the open-ended questions were grouped into themes using the software Nvivo. The t-test was used to examine the difference between the study population's means and the national population norms reported by Kouzes and Posner (2003) for Research Question 1. Research Question 2 was analyzed by using the Spearman rank correlation coefficient to determine the relationship between the Project LEAD assessment, the LPI, and the LPI subscales. The chi-square test, Spearman rank correlation, and Pearson moment correlation coefficient were employed to determine the relationship between the LPI, LPI subscales, and social context variables in Research Question 3.

## Findings

The first significant finding of this study is that there were significant differences between the mean scores of the self-perceived leadership practices of the study population and the national population. The study population scored significantly higher on two LPI subscales—Modeling the Way,  $t(47.01) = 3.865$ ,  $p = 0.001$  (two-tailed) and Enabling Others to Act,  $t(49.39) = 2.610$ ,  $p = 0.014$  (two-tailed). The qualitative analysis further revealed that the participants learned skills in each of the five leadership dimensions identified by Kouzes and Posner (2007) as shown in **Figure 2**.

**Figure 2. Skills Learned in the Transformational Leadership Dimensions**

<u>Challenging</u>	<u>Enabling</u>	<u>Inspiring</u>	<u>Encouraging</u>	<u>Modeling</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborating</li> <li>• Using Technology</li> <li>• Sharing Knowledge</li> <li>• Using Research</li> <li>• Seeking New Perspectives</li> <li>• Networking</li> <li>• Volunteering</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborating</li> <li>• Sharing Knowledge</li> <li>• Promoting Diversity</li> <li>• Seeking New Perspectives</li> <li>• Networking</li> <li>• Leading</li> <li>• Mentoring</li> <li>• Risk-taking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborating</li> <li>• Using Technology</li> <li>• Sharing Knowledge</li> <li>• Using Research</li> <li>• Promoting Diversity</li> <li>• Modeling</li> <li>• Involving Stakeholders</li> <li>• Promoting the Big Picture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborating</li> <li>• Using Technology</li> <li>• Modeling</li> <li>• Networking</li> <li>• Recognizing and Celebrating</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborating</li> <li>• Using Technology</li> <li>• Sharing Knowledge</li> <li>• Using Research</li> <li>• Promoting Diversity</li> <li>• Modeling</li> <li>• Mentoring</li> <li>• Self-Educating</li> </ul>

This result substantiates that the leadership curriculum implemented for the study participants was a factor in the development of their leadership skills and supports previous research indicating leadership skills can be learned (Copeland and Chance 1996; Feidler 2001). The skills covered during the Project LEAD classes reflected roles typically expected of school librarians, such as promoting reading, collection development, providing reference and search assistance, assisting with technology, and collaborating with teachers (Edwards 1989; McCracken 2001). However, other skills, which might be considered more radical for school librarians, were also integrated throughout their coursework-building partnerships that exceed school boundaries, modeling innovative technology use, and serving as exemplary role models whose desire for lifelong learning is an inspiration to their school communities.

The Project LEAD courses served as a vehicle for transformational leadership training because they taught the students to alter the cultures in their school by going beyond the norms of what is expected of school librarians. By definition, transformational leadership may be practiced by any individual in an organization and occurs when they challenge norms by modeling behaviors that inspire, encourage, and enable others within an organization to make changes that benefit the entire organization (Kouzes and Posner 2007). Supporting this conclusion are the statements offered by the participants describing the skills they learned while enrolled in Project LEAD for each of the transformational leadership dimensions described Kouzes and Posner (2007). **Figure 3** is a graphical representation of all of the benefits of participating in Project LEAD reported by the students. For example, risk-taking skills was only cited one time making it the benefit mentioned the least, while collaborating skills were mentioned the most.

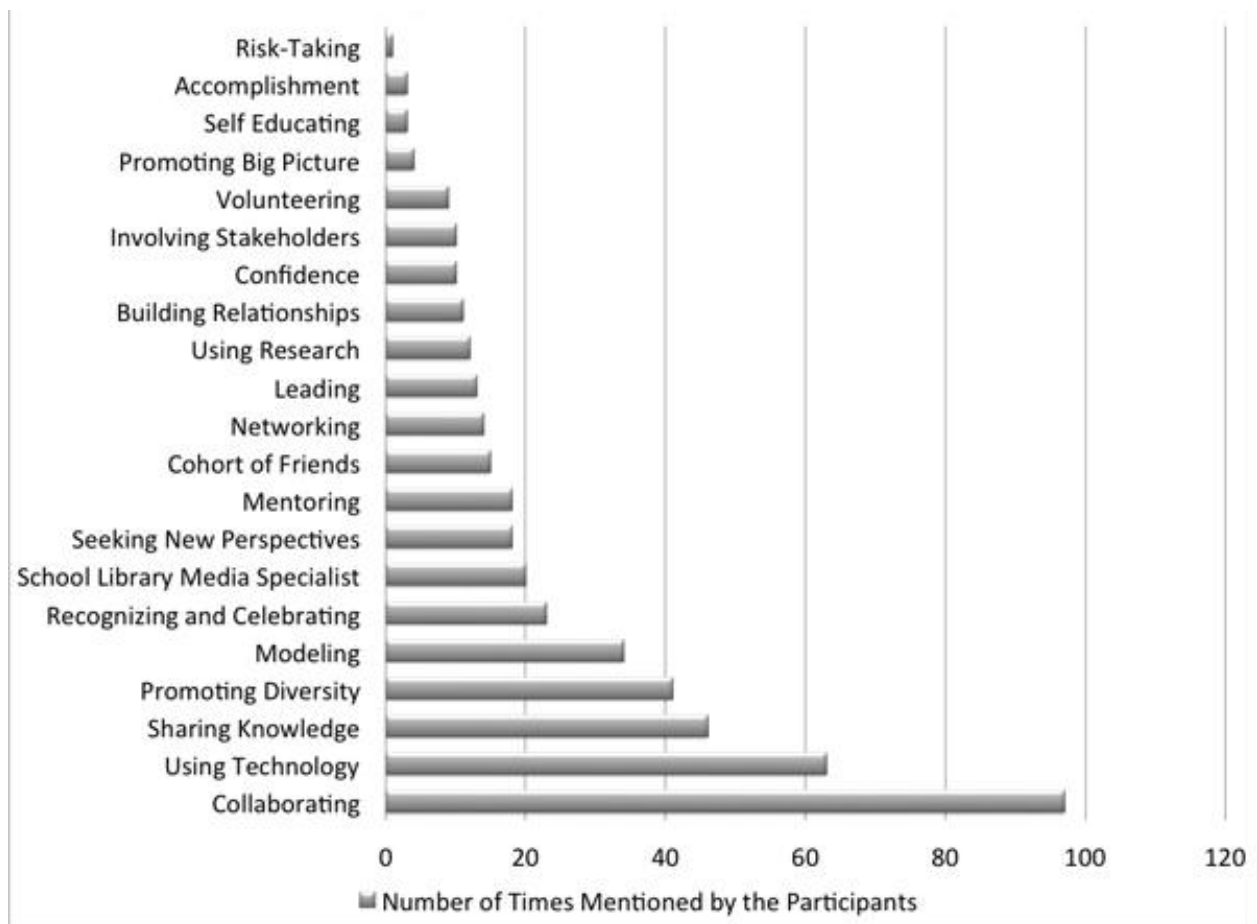
Although the assessment of leadership potential at the beginning of the program did not correlate to the overall self-perceived transformational leadership potential as measured on the LPI, there was a relationship with the LPI subscale for Enabling Others to Act. There are at least two conclusions that can be drawn from this finding. First, the Project LEAD directors did an excellent job of choosing participants who were teacher-leaders. Their assessments scores, when compared to their LPI scores, depicted the homogeneity of the group that was chosen. Next, the positive relationship with the Enabling Others to Act subscale provides evidence that the teachers who participated in Project LEAD were actually leaders. According to York-Barr and Duke (2004), “Teacher leadership reflects teacher agency through establishing relationships, breaking down barriers, and marshalling resources throughout the organization in an effort to improve students’ educational experiences and outcomes” (264). Crowther, Ferguson, and Hann (2008) further assert that teacher-leaders advance the quality of life within their communities by

creating ties between their schools and communities. Hence the purpose of the teaching profession is to provide students with the tools that enable them to be successful in the future. Therefore it is logical that the Project LEAD assessment designed to find teacher-leaders had a high correlation with the Enabling Others to Act subscale.

When considering the reliability of the Project LEAD assessment, given the high scores of the participants on the LPI and the positive relationship the assessment had with the Enabling Others to Act,  $r_s = .446$ ,  $n = 28$ ,  $p = .017$  LPI subscale, one can assume the assessment achieved its purpose. The Project LEAD directors were able to pinpoint a process appropriate for identifying candidates with strong leadership potential.

This study also uncovered significant relationships between the participants' self-perceived transformational leadership potential and the following social contextual variables: school poverty, GRE scores, mentor contact hours, mentor selection, and satisfaction with the mentors. Age, grade point averages, district support, school support, experience, school grades, school levels, community types, the type of contact the mentors had with the Project LEAD students, and the location of the mentors did not have a significant relationship with the LPI.

**Figure 3. Benefits of Project LEAD**





## School Poverty

Poverty levels within the participants' schools had a negative correlation with the LPI subscale Challenging the Process,  $r_s = .387$ ,  $n = 29$ ,  $p = .038$ . Students who worked in schools with higher poverty levels found themselves less likely to take risks. Perhaps they were less likely to take risks because of the school communities they work in. Their school populations typically need stability because of less funding and social circumstances.

While social circumstances might affect test scores, the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) is administered to students in grades three through twelve. Much of the school year is spent learning standards in preparation for the test. The test is used to determine whether students have made adequate yearly progress and their scores are perceived to be a direct reflection of each educator's ability to teach. Consequently, the participants in higher poverty level schools were probably less likely to take risks while preparing their students for the FCAT, which is used to partially determine school funding in Florida.

## Graduate Record Exam

GRE scores were negatively correlated to the participants' total LPI scores,  $r = .383$ ,  $n = 30$ ,  $p = .036$  and the LPI subscale for Encouraging the Heart,  $r = .490$ ,  $n = 30$ ,  $p = .006$ . The results of this study actually suggest that it is harder for people with high GRE scores to learn transformational leadership skills. Perhaps this occurred because the people with high GRE scores in Project LEAD already were confident that they were leaders and already have their own ideas of what leadership means thereby hindering their ability to be receptive to new ideas for leadership development.

## Mentor Variables

There were significant relationships with the variables mentor contact hours, mentor selection, and satisfaction with the mentors and the LPI. This affirms research citing the value of having good relationships with mentors (Daresh 2004; Kram 1985; Scandura and Williams 2004). More specifically, the amount of time the participants spent with their mentors was positively correlated to their total LPI scores,  $r_s = .492$ ,  $n = 30$ ,  $p = .014$  and the LPI subscales for Encouraging the Heart,  $r_s = .492$ ,  $n = 30$ ,  $p = .006$ , Enabling Others to Act,  $r_s = .426$ ,  $n = 30$ ,  $p = .019$ , and Modeling the Way,  $r_s = .508$ ,  $n = 30$ ,  $p = .004$ . The participants' satisfaction with their mentor was positively correlated to the LPI subscale for Encouraging the Heart,  $r_s = .431$ ,  $n = 30$ ,  $p = .018$ . Moreover, there was a relationship between mentor selection and the LPI subscale for Enabling Others to Act,  $c_2(1, N = 30) = 5.792$ ,  $p = .016$ . Those who chose their mentors had higher scores on the subscale.

## Satisfaction with Support

Other variables did not have a significant relationship with the LPI. For example, the satisfaction with support from the school district and support within the schools did not have a significant relationship with the LPI. Neither did grade point averages, school grades, school levels, or community types. Perhaps under normal circumstances when students are trying to complete a degree program on their own, these factors would have hindered the participants' LPI scores.

Self-efficacy, or the belief that one can accomplish a particular goal (McCormick 2001) seems to have played a significant role in what the students believed they were able to accomplish. Contrary to research that infers that negative cultures within schools can deter leadership

development (Leithwood and Jantzi 2008), the results of this study indicate support structures and self-efficacy can counteract these negative effects. The study participants had great willpower and a strong belief in their ability to complete the program. Their confidence seems to have manifested itself in their self-perceived leadership potential. It can be assumed that factors that normally hinder others are mere hurdles for people who deem themselves to be true leaders.

### **Age**

The findings of this study were also contrary to other studies regarding the effects of age on leadership. Age is seen as an indicator of competence (Kearney and Gerbert 2009). It has also been determined that people from different generations have different leadership styles (Arsenault 2004). The participants were between the ages of 25 and 61. However, each person included in this study, despite their age, was a part of Project LEAD because their administrator found them to be highly competent. Moreover, this group was quite similar in their leadership skills despite the different generations represented among them. Perhaps if this group had not participated in a rigorous selection process that actually was able to pinpoint exceptional leadership potential, there might have been a relationship between age and the LPI. Again, the results for this factor attest to the success of the selection process.

### **Experience**

The findings of this study concur with Miracle's (2001) research using the LPI. Years of experience were not a factor in the participants' leadership practices. Instead, the qualitative responses show the type of experiences of the Project LEAD students during the program made a dramatic difference in their leadership practices. This supports the findings of previous studies that suggest providing experiences beyond formal classroom settings can develop leadership skills (Thomas and Cheese 2005). During Project LEAD, specially designed experiences took the form of hands-on assignments in school libraries, interacting with mentors, volunteering at conferences, networking with highly acclaimed school library leaders, and interacting as a team within their county cohort.

## **Suggestions, Recommendations, and Implications**

The conclusions drawn from this study have yielded suggestions regarding professional development for teachers, the education of school librarians, and the design of distance learning programs. Several recommendations also are offered concerning mentoring and relationships between institutions of higher education and school district partners. Lastly, there are implications regarding self-efficacy and its role in transformational leadership development.

### **The LPI and School Librarians**

This study confirms that leadership skills can be taught. By their own admission, the transformational leadership skills that were taught to the preservice school librarians who participated in Project LEAD made a substantial difference in their schools even while they were still enrolled in the program. This implies that in the future school librarian programs can be tailored to pinpoint specific transformational leadership skills that may need to be addressed by individual students.

## The Project LEAD Assessment

The Project LEAD assessment was proven to be a viable tool for choosing teacher-leaders with exceptional potential for being school librarians who practice transformational leadership behaviors. This is important because positions in school libraries are often seen as easy positions for seasoned classroom teachers to gravitate to (Everhart 2002). Numerous studies have documented the positive impact of school librarians who are leaders (Scholastic 2008). Therefore the individuals who assume these positions should be dedicated to providing leadership and optimal programming to their school communities. Perhaps in the future, the Project LEAD assessment can be used to assess the strengths and weaknesses of teacher-leaders to personalize their educational experiences to assist them with their leadership development needs.

## Partnering with School Districts

The success of the Project LEAD program implies that partnerships between higher education institutions and school districts are a way to promote school reform. Still it must be recognized that the responses of the participants indicated that some school districts put in more effort to ensure the success of the program than others.

Verbal and written contracts with school districts are not enough to ensure that the districts offer continued support and monitor the mentors they provide. There needs to be specifications about how school districts will provide support. Furthermore, there is a need for consistent planned contact with district officials on a frequent basis if programs such as Project LEAD and school districts are expected to fully benefit from collaboration.

## Skill Reinforcement

While it is encouraging that some of the students mentioned skills that were atypical for school librarians, the frequencies of the reported skills reveal an important detail about the order of the program's coursework and the information retention rate of the students. Simply stated, the students mentioned skills taught in the last two semesters of their program the most. The frequencies of the skills reported by the students make it clear that skills should be reinforced periodically throughout degree programs so that students remember them. It is true that the Project LEAD students intermittently attended conferences and summer workshops to strengthen their knowledge of nontraditional school librarian roles. Despite this effort, many of them did not acknowledge the skills they learned for implementing these nontraditional roles. The lack of acknowledgement indicates that frequent mini-assessments, podcasts, or module slideshows might help students to retain the information throughout their degree programs.

## Risk-Taking

Though risk-taking is an element of the transformational leadership behavior Challenging the Process (Kouzes and Posner 2007), it was only directly mentioned by one Project LEAD student. This was surprising because it can be inferred that risk-taking as a transformational leadership skill was taught throughout the Project LEAD program. The students were encouraged to surpass the normal standards of what is commonly expected of school librarians to create vital connections for school community stakeholders.

Perhaps only one participant directly mentioned risk-taking because of the culture within schools. Today teachers are working in environments that stress accountability and stability. While classroom teachers may be less inclined to take risks, school librarians have more

flexibility. They are typically not responsible for a subject area. For this reason, it might be projected that the Project LEAD students will probably begin taking more risks after they become school librarians. Nevertheless, since risk-taking is at the heart of transformational leadership, this skill needs to be directly taught and reinforced.

## **Mentors**

Participants' responses concerning their mentors yielded rich information. First, mentors need to be trained. In the future, there should be workshops for mentors. In cases like Project LEAD when coursework is offered at a distance, it would be advantageous to create a forum for mentors to share their experiences and support each other. The participants' responses also pointed out that spending time with mentors is beneficial. Yet some of the mentors barely helped their students. Therefore it can be concluded that mentors who are interested in helping new school librarians should be recruited. This will help to ensure that mentors are highly qualified and committed to helping preservice school librarians.

## **The Power of Professional Development for Teachers**

Some respondents' comments attested to the fact that professional development truly can make a difference in the leadership behaviors of teachers and school reform. Sometimes all teachers need is a boost of confidence. Before Project LEAD, some participants were reluctant to share their opinions with their coworkers and administrators. The findings of this study show more of an emphasis needs to be placed on professional development in school districts that make teachers aware of their potential. It is true that teachers often received professional development throughout the year. While this type of professional development is helpful, this study demonstrates that sustained professional development, offered in a supportive environment, can make the difference between timid teachers and confident teachers who enjoy working in collaborative environments.

## **Cohorts for Distance Learning**

Findings from this study have implications for cohorts in distance education. Namely, some of the students mentioned that working and meeting specifically with the people in their county was extremely helpful to them when completing assignments. The meetings became an additional support network. During these meetings the participants developed a morale that enabled them to complete the program when they felt overwhelmed. The cohort afforded each participant with an instant network of innovative professionals to interact with after they completed the program.

## **Self-Efficacy**

Efficacy, or the belief one has the ability to achieve, is closely related to confidence in leadership skills (McCormick 2001). The Project LEAD students believed they could be leaders. They all applied for the program and were accepted because they believed they were leaders. During the program they did not allow the situations within their environments to hinder them from their goals. Despite the circumstances they were in such as not having a supportive mentor or teaching in a school with fewer resources, they continued to develop their leadership skills and finish the program. Once again, transformational leadership is an option for people who want to make changes within their organizations without having to be appointed leaders. Transformational leadership allows people to lead from any position as long as they desire to collaboratively orchestrate changes in beliefs, assumptions, and behaviors that benefit entire organizations.

## The AASL Guidelines

Project LEAD provided a needed link between theory, practice, and the AASL guidelines. The results of the qualitative and quantitative responses show that the students did indeed learn the AASL guidelines and how to implement the theory that serves as their basis. This implies that there should be a consistent curriculum that is taught by school librarian programs to teach preservice school librarians to implement the guidelines. The Project LEAD curriculum can serve as a preliminary model because the curriculum has been shown to be effective in producing school reform through school library leaders.

## Conclusion

The process used to identify the candidates for the Project LEAD program and to provide leadership training for the program participants was revolutionary in that it has never been attempted for school librarians before. As such, the program was not without its vulnerabilities. However, what this study found was that the project directors were successful in identifying candidates with great leadership potential. They were also successful in providing them with an education that enhanced their leadership skills and taught them how to connect the theory behind the AASL standards with professional practice.

Accordingly, the process used to develop and carry out this program can serve as a model for others who would like to create general teacher leadership programs or leadership programs for school librarians. This study substantiates that cohorts are a viable way to create a spirit of collaboration, improve the success rate of online students, and provide an excellent environment for teaching leadership skills. In this case, these findings can be considered applicable for those who would like to use cohorts or develop partnerships with companies or school districts as a means of educating leaders or online students.

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