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The Impact Life Experience Has On Leadership Development

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THE IMPACT LIFE EXPERIENCE HAS ON LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

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Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Tawyna G. Daniels under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University School of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

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Dedication

Through this process, there has been someone who continued to encourage and support me, someone who continued to help give me strength, and someone who continues to love me. I dedicate this work to my greatest inspiration, my husband. You are patient and understanding, and you have impacted my life more than you know. I love you.

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"*God never said that the journey would be easy, but He did say the arrival would be worthwhile.*" **Max Lucado**

Completion of my doctoral dissertation was possible thanks to many.

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Abstract

THE IMPACT LIFE EXPERIENCE HAS ON LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT.

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The purpose of this qualitative study was to address the problem of ineffective leadership by focusing on the impact life experiences have on leadership development. Participants in this qualitative study were educational leaders (principals) located in a central North Carolina school district. The researcher sought to study how select leaders' life experiences impacted their leadership development, identify common themes that influenced select leaders, use the results to address the need for effective leadership in educational environments, and use the results to bring awareness of the importance of leadership development through experiential learning. Qualitative data in this study revealed that that life experiences are vital in developing a leader's growth, and findings in the study are consistent with research that our "life experiences and our response to them are of critical importance in how leaders are formed and the kind of leaders we become" (Ambler, 2012, para. 6). As a result of this research, educational systems, companies, and/or organizations seeking effective leaders may find this study beneficial when seeking and developing leaders.

Keywords: experiences, experiential learning, leadership, leadership development

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Over the years, leadership and leadership development have been discussed and/or studied in many ways. Some studies sought to determine how a leader is truly developed, while others focused on the nature of a leader (Anthony, 2011; Bennis, 2003; Eriksen, 2009; McCall, 2004; Shamir, Dayan-Horesh, & Adler, 2005). Anthony (2011) mentioned that Greek philosopher Aristotle believed that leaders are naturally born, not developed. Aristotle's belief that leaders are naturally born is evident in the Great Man theory (Anthony, 2011). Like Aristotle, the Great Man theory that became popular by Thomas Carle during the mid-1840s rests on the belief that powerful men are born with an innate charisma to be great (Anthony, 2011). On the contrary, Kouzes and Posner (2003) believed that although there are great leaders who exist, people can learn to be great by following five practices. Collins (2001) believed similarly. Collins argued that greatness is more a choice: "Greatness is not a function of circumstance. Greatness, it turns out, is largely a matter of conscious choice" (p. 11). The researcher sees validity in all perspectives; and today, as more organizations are forming and more schools are built, the need for great leadership is evident (Lytle, 2013). Furthermore, to further investigate the need for and the nature of an effective leader, one may want to investigate the lives of leaders and determine what made them great.

Topic

This study focused on the impact life experiences have on leadership development. This researcher sought to study how select leaders' life experiences impacted their leadership development, identify common themes that influenced select leaders, and use the results to address the need for effective leadership in educational

environments.

The research problem. There is a problem in attracting and developing good and effective educational leaders, and the need for better leaders is increasing as more schools are built throughout our nation (Lytle, 2013). Recent studies determined that the current conditions in education require extraordinary school leadership and that 25% of a school's performance is due to its leadership (Lytle, 2013). Moreover, as schools grow and have more freedom as to how they are governed, the role of the educational leader changes; and Schleicher (2012) ascertained that developing educational leaders "requires providing access to appropriate professional development throughout their careers" (p. 13). Appropriate professional development is extremely important due to the problem of ineffective leadership in schools. Lytle (2013) agreed and further suggested that developing effective leaders should be top priority for any organization.

To address the problem of ineffective leadership in schools, the researcher sought to interview current leaders in education. Using purposeful sampling, the researcher selected 10 educational leaders for personal interviews. During the personal interview, the educational leaders rated themselves on how effective they believe they are as leaders.

Consequently, as baseline information to better address and understand the research problem of ineffective leadership, the researcher gathered specific information (2016-2017 North Carolina School Report Cards, 2016-2017 School Climate Surveys, and a 2016-2017 Student Survey that asks students specifically about the climate of the school they attend) from 30 schools in central North Carolina. The baseline information gathered reflects that six of 30 schools that received a grade of A have teachers who are

overall satisfied with administration and the climate and culture of the schools where they work. Consequently, additional baseline information revealed that the student surveys that were applicable to some of those specific schools rate these schools as positive locations to attend. On the other hand, using baseline information like the 2016-2017 North Carolina School Report Cards and School Climate Surveys (n.d.), schools with lower scores of C and D have a staff that is not satisfied with the leadership and climate of their schools.

Furthermore, there is a common trend noted with the highly successful schools (schools with an overall A grade) as compared with schools with lower grades; the common trend is that schools with a higher grade have a stronger administration presence. Therefore, this baseline information indicates that highly effective leadership is important when it comes to improving and maintaining the success of an organization (North Carolina School Report Cards, School Climate Surveys, n.d.). Branch, Hanushek, and Rivkin (2013) concurred. Branch et al. believed that the key to a successful school is an effective leader; and as the researcher continued this study, the baseline information gathered proved helpful when determining other outcomes of respective leaders.

Background and justification. To better address the research problem of ineffective leadership, Schleicher (2012) ascertained that current leaders need continued support and leadership development. Educational leaders discussed in this study are highly effective educational leaders in their respective district. They also are leaders who receive continued support and have received different types of leadership development during their educational careers. For further research and to better understand the research problem of ineffective leadership, the researcher contacted select leaders

because of their leadership status within their district. Although there are currently 183

educational leaders within their district, in the upcoming 2018-2019 school year, there

will be a total of 187 principals. Table 1 describes the demographics of the 187

educational leaders.

Table 1

Demographics of District Educational Leaders

Ethnicity	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
African American	12	26	38
American Indian or Alaskan		2	2
Asian	1		1
Caucasian	61	79	140
Hispanic or Latino	1	3	4
Multi-Racial	1	1	2
Grand Total	76	111	187

Table 1 reflects the centrally located school district with its diverse population of

educational leaders. The demographics of the 187 educational leaders within the district

are 12 African American male principals, 26 African American female principals, two

American Indian or Alaskan female principals, one Asian male principal, 79 Caucasian

female principals, 61 Caucasian male principals, one male Hispanic or Latino principal,

three Hispanic or Latino female principals, one male Multi-Racial principal, and one

female Multi-Racial principal. Based on the table, the district does not have any

American Indian Alaskan male educational leader representation, nor does it reflect any

Asian female representation. As with many educational institutions, the female

population of leaders exceeds that of males; there are a total of 111 females compared to

76 males. Table 2 highlights leader demographics.

Table 2

Demographic Percentages of District Educational Leaders

Percentage of principals with advanced degrees	21.6%
Percentage of principals with 0-3 years of experience	30.7%
Percentage of principals with 4-10 years of experience	45.5%
Percentage of principals with 10 + years of experience	23.9%

Table 2 highlights the demographics of the educational leaders. There are noticeable differences in the percentages. Of the current 183 principals, 21.6% of them have advanced degrees. The 21.6% of leaders represent educational leaders with advanced degrees of 6 years or higher. The years of experience for the principals also range in number: 30.7% have 0-3 years of experience, 45.5% have 4-10 years of experience, and 23.9% have 10 plus years of experience. Additionally, the district where the selected leaders work has over 19,000 employees and over 180 schools; the district is in central North Carolina, with a student enrollment for the 2017-2018 school year of 160,429. By the year 2020, an additional 8,000 students are expected to enroll. Tables 3 and 4 highlight district facts on schools and district facts on employees.

Table 3

District Facts on Schools

Total number of schools	183
Traditional schools	131
Year-round-modified schedule schools	52
Elementary schools	113
Middle schools	36
High schools	29
Alternative schools	5
Academies (K-8, 6-12)	3
Mobile/modular classrooms	1,056

The district facts are that there are 183 schools. In order to accommodate the

needs of the school district, students, and parents, 131 of the 183 schools are traditional

schools operating on a traditional schedule, and 52 are year-round schools that operate on

a year-round or modified schedule. Also, the district has 113 elementary schools, 36

middle schools, and 29 high schools. Moreover, there are five alternative schools, three

academies (K-8, 6-12), and 1,056 mobile or modular classrooms. Table 4 displays

additional district facts that reflect employee percentages.

Table 4

District Facts on Employees

Total number of employees	19,213
Total number of teachers	10,359
Percent of teachers with advanced degrees	47.5%
National Board-certified teachers	1,452

Based on the number of schools, the mass student enrollment, and the number of

employees, facts reflect that the school district where the leaders work is one of the

largest in the state.

Consequently, Kouzes and Posner (2006) believed that leaders should create

alignment around key values and discuss values with a shared enthusiasm. The

researcher was optimistic that select leaders in this study would speak candidly of

previous experiences and different types of leadership development received and how the

experiences and leadership development enabled them to be better leaders. Moreover,

Kouzes and Posner (2003) believed that leaders can receive leadership development

through a set program. Other research suggests that experiential learning is the best way

to develop true leadership capability (McCall, 2004). Kouzes and Posner (2003) believed

that leadership is developed through five practices of exemplary leadership by (a)

modeling the way, (b) inspiring a shared vision, (c) challenging the process, (d) enabling

others to act, and (e) encouraging the heart. Modeling the way encompasses the theory of

leading by example where leaders create standards of excellence and then set examples

for others to follow. Modeling the way allows leaders to set short-term goals so others

can accomplish small victories while trying to reach the ultimate objective. Inspiring a

shared vision brings others into one's own aspirations; therefore, inspiring a shared vision

ignites a stronger force behind the vision. Moreover, leaders who challenge the process

seek new and creative ways to improve a company or organization and enabling others to

act empowers them. Furthermore, the last practice of exemplary leadership, encouraging

the heart, celebrates the accomplishment of others (Kouzes & Posner, 2003). May (2017)

suggested that commitment, risk-taking, planning, and communication skills are needed

for leadership development to make a great leader because these are highly important

skills for a leader to possess. Schleicher (2012) noted all initial developmental leadership

programs have common characteristics:

> 1) a comprehensive and coherent curriculum that is aligned with state and
>
> professional standards, particularly the Interstate School Leaders' Licensure
>
> Consortium Standards, that emphasize instructional leadership, 2) a philosophy
>
> and curriculum that emphasizes instructional leadership and school improvement,
>
> 3) an active, student-centered instruction that integrates theory and practice and
>
> stimulates reflection, 4) instructional strategies that include problem-based
>
> learning, action research, field-based projects, journal writing, and portfolios that
>
> feature substantial use of feedback and assessment by peers, faculty, and the
>
> candidates, 5) faculty who are knowledgeable in their subject areas, including

both university professors and practitioners experienced in school administration,

6) social and professional support in the form of a cohort structure and formalized

mentoring and advising by expert principals, 7) vigorous, targeted recruitment and

selection to seek out expert teachers with leadership potential, and 8) well-

designed and supervised administrative internships that allow candidates to

engage in leadership responsibilities for substantial periods of time under the

guidance of expert veterans. (p. 23)

On the other hand, McCall (2004, 2010) was adamant with the belief that

experiential learning is the best way to develop a leader's capabilities. McCall (2010)

explained that the ideology of experiential learning should be put into practice more

often. Ambler (2012) agreed. Ambler ascertained that "leaders' life experiences create

the personal capacity that they need to lead" (para. 1) and that "our experiences shape us

and make us" (para. 1). Ambler further noted that our "life experiences and our response

to them are of critical importance in how leaders are formed and the kind of leaders

we become" (para. 6). Furthermore, Ambler continued by suggesting that leaders should

be mindful of how they respond to life experiences; he implied that responding poorly to

a bad experience leads to a foundation that is not stable but responding well to a bad

experience leads to learning and growth. Shamir et al. (2005) agreed; the authors

suggested that leadership, specifically authentic leadership, rests on the meanings a leader

attaches to his or her life experiences. Shamir et al. continued by suggesting one's life

story provides the major source of information that is used to base judgments.

Interestingly, Avolio and Gardner (2005) further agreed that one's life experience

impacts leadership development. Avolio and Gardner noted that our environment

promotes lifelong learning; and achieving leadership, specifically authentic leadership, is very complex. Additionally, Avolio and Gardner adamantly agreed that leadership development cannot be achieved through a set program.

Nonetheless, whether leaders receive development through a set program or experiential learning, recent studies still determine that the current conditions in education require extraordinary school leadership and that 25% of a school's performance is due to its leadership (Branch et al., 2013; Lytle, 2013). Branch et al.'s (2013) research provided new evidence on the importance of school leadership as it pertains to student achievement. Branch et al.'s study indicated that highly effective leaders raise the achievement level; and educational leaders who are ineffective lower achievement. To better address the research problem of ineffective leadership, the researcher focused on the impact one's life experience has on leadership development. By researching and reviewing historical data and personally interviewing selected leaders (educational leaders who have been impacted by life experience), this study ultimately deduced the impact of life experiences on leadership development.

Audience

Educational systems, companies, and/or organizations seeking effective leaders may find this study beneficial when seeking and developing leaders. Educational systems can use the information when seeking positions ranging from support staff to teachers to administrators. Moreover, companies and organizations may find the information useful for any potential leadership position.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to address the problem of ineffective

leadership by focusing on the impact life experiences have on leadership development. The researcher sought to study how select leaders' life experiences impacted their leadership development, identify common themes that influenced select leaders, and use the results to address the need for effective leadership in educational environments. Ultimately, the results may also bring awareness of the importance of leadership development through experiential learning. Specific research suggests that experiential learning is the best way to develop true leadership capability (McCall, 2004). Furthermore, to better prepare leaders, billions of dollars in grants have been created that emphasize the improvement and training of educational leaders; both the Wallace Foundation and the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation have also invested in educational leader training programs (Hechinger Report, 2011). Eriksen (2009) suggested that one's core values and experiences enable one to be an effective authentic leader.

This study focused on the importance of experiential learning to develop leaders. By researching and reviewing historical data and personally interviewing selected leaders, this study ultimately determined the impact experiential learning or life experience has on one's leadership development.

Research Question

What life experience(s) impact leadership development?

Definition of Terms

The terms leadership development and experiences are mentioned throughout this study. The definition of these terms among others are listed below.

Authentic leadership.

Those who are deeply aware of how they think and behave and are perceived by

others as being aware of their own and others' values/moral perspectives, knowledge, and strengths; aware of the context in which they operate; and who are confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient, and of high moral character. (Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans, & May 2004, p. 4)

Commitment. "Resolve and perseverance-driving every aspect of the organization toward a singular unified purpose" (May, 2017, para. 2).

Communication skills. Able to speak and write persuasively; skills that "incite others to work toward the stated goal in line with the path the leader has chosen" (May, 2017, para. 2).

Effective planner. To "orchestrate a high-level plan that drives everyone toward the unified goal" (May, 2017, para. 2).

Exemplary leadership. Based on the LPI–Leadership Practices Inventory, exemplary leadership is when leaders model the way (lead by example by setting short-term goals, so others may receive small victories while achieving a shared objective), inspire a shared vision (ignite a strong force behind a vison), challenge the process (seek new ways to improve), enable others to act (empower individuals), and encourage the heart (celebrate accomplishments; Kouzes & Posner, 2003).

Experiences. Events that occur in one's life that impact one's intellectual growth; "our experiences shape us and make us" (Ambler, 2012, para. 1).

Experiential learning. The process of learning through experience; more specifically defined as "learning through reflection on doing" (Felicia, 2011, p. 1003).

Leader/leadership. One who establishes and shares a clear vision that others may be willing to follow and provides the information, knowledge, and methods needed

to realize the vision (Gardner, 1993).

Leadership development. "A systematic approach to expanding the performance capability of individuals in leadership" (May, 2017, para. 1).

Level 1 leader. Highly capable, makes good productive contributions through knowledge and skills, and has good work habits (Collins, 2001).

Level 2 leader. Highly capable, makes good productive contributions through knowledge and skills, has good work habits, and contributes capabilities to a group objective (Collins, 2001).

Level 3 leader. Highly capable, makes good productive contributions through knowledge and skills, has good work habits, contributes capabilities to a group objective, and is more competent when it comes to managing and organizing people and resources (Collins, 2001).

Level 4 leader. Highly capable, makes good productive contributions through knowledge and skills, has good work habits, contributes capabilities to a group objective, is more competent when it comes to managing and organizing people and resources, and takes commitment to a higher level that creates higher performance standards (Collins, 2001).

Level 5 leader. According to Collins (2001), the greatest leader of all levels of leadership; a level 5 leader is highly capable, makes good productive contributions through knowledge and skills, has good work habits, contributes capabilities to a group objective, is more competent when it comes to managing and organizing people and resources, takes commitment to a higher level that creates higher performance standards, and "builds greatness through a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional

will" (Collins, 2001, p. 20).

Motivator/motivating. Being able to encourage contributions from the entire organization and inspire employees at all levels to achieve not only their personal best, but the best for the organization (May, 2017).

Risk-taker. Breaking conventions to achieve a goal; "developing new products and services to establish marketplace dominance (and possibly even create a unique market)" (May, 2017, para. 2).

Summary

This chapter began by focusing on the concept of whether a leader is born with talents that make them great or if those talents can be gained through leadership development. The chapter also mentioned what research says regarding leadership development. Research suggested that there are set programs that can prepare leaders for their craft; however, other research suggested that experiential learning is the best way to develop leaders. The chapter highlighted aspects of both. The researcher sees validity in all perspectives; and as more organizations are forming and more schools are built, the need for great leadership is apparent (Lytle, 2013). Furthermore, to further investigate the need for and the nature of an effective leader, the researcher investigated stories from the lives of leaders. The researcher studied how select leaders' life experiences impacted their leadership development, identified common themes that influenced select leaders to become effective leaders, and used the results to address the need for effective leadership in educational environments. Chapter 2 of this dissertation consists of reviews of related literature. Additional chapters outline the methodology, analyze the data, and draw conclusions from the data.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to address the problem of ineffective leadership by focusing on the impact life experiences have on leadership development. The researcher sought to study how select leaders' life experiences impacted their leadership development, identify common themes that influenced select leaders, and use the results to address the need for effective leadership in educational environments. The purpose in this chapter is to provide a theoretical framework for research surrounding leadership development through experiential learning. The chapter focuses on theoretical reviews of literature surrounding Kouzes and Posner's (2003) five practices of exemplary leadership and theoretical reviews on leadership development, and the chapter ultimately uses the reviews of literature to emphasis how experiential learning or life experiences may impact leadership development.

Restatement of the Problem

There is a problem in attracting and developing good and effective educational leaders, and the need for better leaders is increasing as more schools are built throughout our nation (Lytle, 2013). The need for extraordinary school leadership is something that is not new to education. In the early 1980s, *A Nation at Risk* warned Americans that schools were in need; they were failing at high rates (Hechinger Report, 2011). To try to combat the problem, many types of reform have been used, from creating smaller classes to creating smaller schools; however, research still emphasized the importance of effective school leadership to improve outcomes (Hechinger Report, 2011). Branch et al. (2013) concurred with the notion of the importance of school leadership to improve

schools; the authors believed that the key to a successful school is an effective leader. Branch et al. noted that "the role of principals in fostering student learning is an important facet of education policy…. Strong leadership is viewed as especially important for revitalization of failing schools" (para. 26). Gareis and Tschannen-Moran (2004) stated that "good principals are at the center of good schools and that without good principal's leadership, schools cannot succeed" (p. 573). Also, Wahlstrom and Louis (2008) described the leadership of the principal as a key factor in the support of student achievement. Branch et al. provided additional evidence on the importance of school leadership as it relates to student achievement. Branch et al. indicated that highly effective leaders raised the achievement level of an average student in school between 2 and 7 months of learning in a single school year; however, educational leaders who are ineffective lower achievement by the same amount.

Collins (2001) discussed ways to achieve effective leadership. Collins used a bus as an analogy to describe organizations. Collins said that great organizations and leaders who become great understand certain truths:

First if you begin with who rather than what, you can more easily adapt to a changing world. If people join the bus primarily because of where it is going, what happens if you get ten miles down the road and you need to change direction? You've got a problem, but if people are on the bus because of who else is on the bus, then it is much easier to change direction … if we have to change direction to be more successful, then fine with me. Second, if you have the right people on the bus, the problem of how to motivate and manage people largely goes away. The right people don't need to be tightly managed or fired up; they

will be self-motivated by the inner drive to produce the best results…. Third, if

you have the wrong people, it doesn't matter whether you discover the right

direction; you still won't have a great company. Great people without great

vision is irrelevant. (p. 42)

Collins continued to discuss leadership by categorizing leaders into five categories.

Collins suggested that the level 1 leader is highly capable, makes good productive

contributions through knowledge and skills, and has good work habits. Collins went on

to mention that a level 2 leader has the attributes of a level 1 leader, but that a level 2

leader works well and contributes capabilities to a group objective. Levels 3 and 4 go up

in the chain of leaders because those types of leaders have all the attributes of levels 1

and 2 leaders, but a level 3 leader is a more competent manager when it comes to

organizing people and resources, and a level 4 leader takes commitment to a higher level

and creates higher performance standards (Collins, 2001). However, Collins noted that

the level 5 leader, who embodies all the characteristics of levels 1-4 leaders, is the

greatest leader of all levels, because a level 5 leader "builds greatness through a

paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will" (p. 20). Kouzes and Posner

(2003) believed that although there are great leaders who exist, people can learn to be

great by following five practices.

Theoretical Review of the Five Practices of an Exemplary Leader

Kouzes and Posner (2003) agreed that people can learn to be great by following

five practices of exemplary leadership. The five practices of exemplary leadership are

modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, challenging the process, enabling others to

act, and encouraging the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2003).

Modeling the way. Kouzes and Posner (2002) ascertained that a leader who models the way uses his or her voice to share their unique vision rather than the ideas or vision of others; these leaders demonstrate a strong work ethic while modeling a commitment to mission, vision, and goals and they set examples for others. Krisbergh (2019) suggested that in addition to parents, teachers, and coaches, leaders are perceived as positive role models whose behaviors people often emulate; and by modeling the way, leaders inspire others to strive and develop without any direct instruction. Furthermore, Mugavin (2018) suggested that modeling the way is to authentically embrace and display one's values to those around and that there are two critical aspects of how a leader should model the way. Those aspects are to be clear about one's values and the organization's values so others can see "why you do what you do" and show one's values in how one talks and acts; this establishes credibility and authenticity as a leader (Mugavin, 2018, para. 3). In addition, Whitaker, Whitaker, and Lumpa (2009) believed that "modeling a vision is the most important thing a leader can do every day" (Helms, 2012, p. 26). On the other hand, Sergiovanni (1981) noted that what a leader "stands for is more important than what the leader does or how he/she behaves" (Helms, 2012, p. 26).

Inspiring a shared vision. *How to Inspire a Shared Vision* (2018) mentioned that having the ability to inspire a shared vision is a critical leadership ability and that the only way to lead effectively is to be able to have that attribute (para. 2). Goewey (2012) noted that exceptional leaders use their power and energy to motivate and inspire others: "They work long hours and sometimes endure personal sacrifice to inspire those around them to do the same in the name of a shared vision" (p. 35). Helms (2012) suggested that vision can be underestimated, and a vision is necessary to inspire others because "without

vision, the organization has no direction" (p. 28). Sousa (2003) maintained that becoming a visionary leader is a process that does take time and reflection and that one must connect with others to be a visionary leader. Moreover, research notes that key elements need to be prevalent for there to be a shared vision. For example, a vison should be desirable, realistic, achievable, understood, and accepted by employees. Furthermore, when creating a vision, it is important to remember the wording used and be conscious that when a vison is created, it should be created to benefit all who are involved (Fischer, 2015). If some are not aligned with the vision and certain components are not clear, the vison can be criticized or deferred; "visions often die at the hands of critics" ("Protecting the Vision," 2001, paras. 4 and 5).

Challenging the process. Through Kouzes and Posner's (2002) research, the authors found that when one is asked about what one considers their personal best, one automatically thinks of a challenge. Kouzes and Posner (2002) further believed that challenges help leaders know who they are and leaders should not have any fear when it comes to taking chances to improve organizations. Goewey (2012) agreed; the author noted that effective leaders take risks, encourage employees to take risks, and set higher expectations than what is already established. Helms (2012) said, "exemplary leaders are those associated with challenging the status quo" (p. 32). Brubaker and Coble (2005) even suggested that leaders learn more from taking risks verses learning from personal achievements. Pierce (2014) noted that if one wants to achieve a life one dreams, one must take "positive, calculated risks" (para. 1). "It is absolutely necessary to take chances to achieve anything great in life" (Pierce, 2014, para. 1).

Pierce (2014) also noted the benefits of taking risks. Pierce listed six benefits:

1. Taking risks opens you up to new challenges and opportunities. Push yourself to learn a new skill, such as public speaking, which comes in handy as a business owner.

2. Taking risks empowers you to establish new limits in your mind. We all have boundaries or a comfort zone where we'd like to stay, and many have misconstrued visions of what we think we deserve or are capable of accomplishing. When you take risks, you can eradicate that thinking, establish new boundaries, improve your outlook on life and your ability to achieve on high levels.

3. Taking risks can cause you to become more creative. When you put yourself out on a limb, with a no-excuse approach, your natural problem-solving skills kick in and you're open to new ideas and are willing to try something new.

4. Taking risks can result in a positive outcome. Not every life step can be carefully planned out. You'll never know if you can succeed unless you venture out into new territory. Is there a risk involved to do something totally new? Sure. But the reward is there too. When you give it your best shot and put all that you can into achieving the goal, you are more likely to make it happen.

5. Taking risks help you to clearly define what you really want. Calculated risks are taken with careful thought. Yet the fact that you are taking a risk pushes you to make things work. Surely you will first have to determine if the reward is something you really want enough to take the chance. If it is, then move ahead and don't look back.

6. Once you have become accustomed to taking risks, you break free from the

average way of living and thinking. Instead of fighting to stay safe you gain

the momentum and confidence needed to welcome new opportunities in your

career or business. Risks build your self-confidence and self-respect,

empowering you to feel stronger and more confident in taking on new

endeavors. When you are open to new challenges you position yourself to

profit a whole lot more than you would just staying the same. (para. 3)

Furthermore, Pierce noted that although one may be entering paths that are unknown, one

must take the challenge and trust one's own instinct because something great may come

from it.

Enabling others to act. Helms (2012) agreed with the belief of Kouzes and

Posner (2002) that "leaders make it possible for others to do good work" (p. 35). Novak

(2018) said that "enabling others to act is the behavior of a confident leader" (para. 1).

Novak further noted that confident leaders see and understand the strength and potential

that their employees possess and feel confident in enabling them to take control.

Additionally, Novak suggested that enabling others to act only happens when certain

conditions are prevalent for employees; and only when an employee is fully prepared,

will enabling be successful. For example, an employee must understand expectations

clearly, have the skills and ability to meet the expectations established, and know when to

call on the leader for help.

Ark (2015) ascertained that what organizations need is also aligned with Kouzes

and Posner's (2002) belief on enabling others to act. Ark gave 10 good work tips for

enabling others to act:

1. Shared agenda. Perhaps the single most important enabling action is to get people on the same–what Kouzes and Posner call inspiring a shared vision. Harlem principal Andrew Malone creates a shared agenda with using one short phrase to represent each of his broadest goals. He calls these user-friendly statements Vision Rocks – which are short enough to recall and consult at any time – to bridge vision and action. Malone's vision for Harlem Success Academy is *Focus, Effort, Enthusiasm.* He can share the 3 second, 3 minutes, or 3-minute version with compelling clarity. Malone said, the Vision Rocks approach has been a game-changer, "I can actually use these portable, flexible, simple statements to guide multiple aspects my everyday work." When I was a superintendent and chamber board members, the phrased "a great place to live, learn, work, and play" captured a sense of purpose and vision for community leaders.

2. Shared goals and measurement system. Jeff Edmondson and Greg Landsman pioneered approaches to developing successful community wide initiatives, what they call collective impact. "The work of collective impact requires communities to use data all the time, as often as it is available, to improve and refine how we work each and every day." Working groups set specific targets for improvement. A shared agenda and a common measurement system "helps everyone know where and how to focus," said George Tang, Education Texas, "In Dallas, a simple, digestible scorecard has been developed to show how 800,000 students are progressing toward key indicators."

3. Productive collaboration. Jason Lange of Bloomboard, a leader in talent

development software, holds a fast paced weekly "standup" meeting where progress is celebrated, and plans are quickly reviewed. Matt Candler and Katie Beck of hold regular team standups with onsite team members 4.0 Schools and robots (virtual team members). Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley gained national attention as mayor Baltimore where he applied the same sort of fast, frequent, results-focused, data- driven meetings. Keeping folks in the loop and encouraging collaboration increases productive action. The Frameworks Institute says when people can see the system of education and the need to coordinate its different parts for the good of the whole, they become more expansive in their thinking about how and where reform might take place.

4. Capacity to act. Some districts decentralize everything because they don't know what to do or because they think they can afford to invest in capacity building. In contrast, Fulton County (Atlanta) has identified four leaders in every school that become Vanguard Teachers–a connected, supported, and empowered crew. After self-assessing readiness, Fulton school gets a timeline for blended learning design support. In the charter district, schools have lots of autonomy but there's a common goal framework, a well-constructed internal marketplace of services, and a lot of collaboration and support. Don't assume people know what to do or how to do it. Take the time to assess readiness and provide learning and support opportunities for productive action.

5. Aligned incentives. School districts and colleges have relatively weak

incentives to improve but education leaders appear to get fired over failed reform efforts. Little upside + lots of perceived downside = paralysis. A national network of school districts, the League of Innovative Schools, creates incentives for districts to join and accelerate their progress-curated product pilots, research participation, and grant opportunities. The question for organization is do people get rewarded for taking initiative or penalized for taking action? The key is aligning recognition, compensation, and other incentive systems with shared goals.

6. Productive diversity. Health care CEO Paul Alofs, said "Great cultures are built on a diversity of background, experience, and interests. These differences generate energy, which is critical to any enterprise." Universities pay attention to diversity during the admissions process to provide a richer learning experience. Protests of police brutality are recent reminders that public services need to be conscious of diversity in hiring to develop a workforce that is effective in meeting constituent needs.

7. Productive collisions. Alofs notes that "In cutting-edge research and academic buildings, architects try to promote as much interaction as possible. They design spaces where people from different disciplines will come together, whether in workspace or in common leisure space. Their reasoning is simple: it is this interaction that helps breed revolutionary ideas." Zappos CEO Tony Hsieh is obsessed with this idea of productive collisions and incorporated it into the design of Downtown Project.

8. Continuous communication. "One thing that I learned from Rocketship

[Education] is that if you can get parents engaged with their children, you can make a lot more progress," said co-founder John Danner. He added that "transparency and convenient communication are crucial, because parents are extremely busy, and if engagement takes too much work, many parents won't have the time to do it." Frameworks Institute suggests "Unframed conversations about education blame parents, teachers and/or students." Aligned action requires framing conversation–not in terms of crisis or blame, but in ways that inform, inspire, and invite.

9. Investment. Social impact consultants John Kania and Mark Kramer suggest that successful community wide initiatives require "backbone support organizations."

10. Encourage the heart. For economies, positive sentiment is the best economic development. It's discouraging for citizens and investors to see carping, corruption, and chaos, e.g., congress. (paras. 6-28)

Although Ark suggested those are 10 tips or ways aligned with enabling others to increase their impact, Ark further agreed with Kouzes and Posner (2002) when Kouzes and Posner (2002) ascertained that inspiration is key to great leadership. However, Ark suggested that Max Dupree summarized it better when he said a top priority of a leader is to have a clear definition of reality, and the last priority is saying "thank you" (para. 4).

Encouraging the heart. Kouzes and Posner (2006) mentioned that people need to feel connected to one another because greatness is not achieved alone. "Encouraging the Heart is the leadership practice that connects us with one another" (Kouzes & Posner, 2006, Introduction, xii). "Encouraging the Heart validates that everyone is

collaboratively working and in 'this' together" (Kouzes & Posner, 2006, Introduction, xii). Additionally, Kouzes and Posner (2006) believed that

> When leaders commend individuals for achieving the values or goals of the
> organization, they give them courage, inspiring them to experience their own
> ability to deliver – even when pressure is on. When we recognize women and
> men for their contributions, we expand their awareness of their value to the
> organization and to their coworkers. (Introduction, xii)

Kouzes and Posner (2006) further believed that there is a human need to be appreciated and acknowledged for who we are and our efforts. Schilder (2018) agreed.

Schilder (2018) suggested that encouragement goes very far when keeping people motivated, and it is a very powerful impalpable reward that all leaders have the power to do. Schilder added that some leaders may think high functioning people may not need encouragement; this is wrong – "everyone needs encouragement and recognition" (para. 2). Encouragement and kindness can go a long way, and research found that managers who treated employees with kindness, respect, and fairness received much better performance (Al-Baradie, 2014; Kouzes & Posner, 1995). Baker and O'Malley (2008) concurred; the authors suggested that kindness does positively affect profit, and successful leaders accomplish much more with encouragement rather than aggression. Kerrigan (2018) noted six commitments the best leaders can make that encourage the heart. Kerrigan said that leaders should always give praise for a job well done, let it be known the confidence that the leader has in the employees' abilities, make sure to always recognize employee contributions, publicly praise the ones who exemplify a commitment to shared values, tell the stories of encouragement about the good works of others, and

get personally involved by celebrating the accomplishments of others.

Ultimately, Posner (2017) summarized the five practices of exemplary leadership best when he said,

> The Five Practices framework is not an accident of a special moment in history. It has passed the test of time. Although the context of leadership has changed dramatically over the years, the content of leadership has not changed much at all. The fundamental behaviors and actions of leaders have remained essentially the same, and they are as relevant today as they were when we began our study of exemplary leadership. The truth of each individual Personal-Best Leadership Experience, multiplied thousands of times and substantiated empirically by millions of respondents and hundreds of scholars, establishes The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership as an operating system for leaders everywhere. (para. 7)

All in all, the need for exemplary and extraordinary leaders is something that is not new to education (Lytle, 2013); however, developing our leaders and filling our educational organizations with leaders who practice The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership may address the need for effective leaders and address the problem of ineffective leadership in educational environments.

Theoretical Review of Leadership Development

Over the years, leadership and leadership development have been discussed and/or studied in many ways. Some studies sought to determine how a leader is truly developed, while others focused on the nature of a leader (Anthony, 2011; Bennis, 2003; Eriksen, 2009; McCall, 2004; Shamir et al., 2005). Anthony (2011) mentioned that Greek philosopher Aristotle believed that leaders are naturally born, not developed.

Aristotle's belief that leaders are naturally born is evident in the Great Man theory (Anthony, 2011). Like Aristotle, the Great Man theory that became popular by Thomas Carle during the mid-1840s rests on the belief that powerful men are born with an innate charisma to be great natural leaders (Anthony, 2011). As noted, Kouzes and Posner (2003) believed that although there are great leaders who exist, people can learn to be great by following five practices. Furthermore, to better understand leadership development, one may need to know how leadership and/or leadership development is defined.

In literature, definitions for leadership or leadership development vary. According to May (2017), *Business Dictionary* defines leadership development as "a systematic approach to expanding the performance capability of individuals in leadership" (para. 1) and that leadership development is "not achieved through a single stage or step but rather through a journey" (para. 1). Shead (2018) noted Edwin H. Friedman defined leadership as "a capacity to define oneself to others in a way that clarifies and expands a vision of the future" (para. 50). Valenzuela (2007) defined leadership as the ability to develop and communicate a vision to a group, and the group ultimately makes the vison a reality. Valenzuela noted that there are set characteristics prominent in leadership. Figure 1 illustrates Valenzuela's Key Elements of Leadership.

Figure 1. *Elements of Leadership.*

Figure 1 also notes that leadership is a process of interaction that involves leaders and followers negotiating influence that is multidirectional. Furthermore, the illustration notes that leadership has both organizational and individual goals, defined by context and constructive change (Valenzuela, 2007).

Like Valenzuela (2007), Bennis (2003) defined leadership as the capacity to translate vision into reality. Ledlow and Coppola (2011) agreed. Ledlow and Coppola defined leadership as articulating visions, embodying values, and creating the environment within which things can be accomplished. Ledlow and Coppola continued

in their definition of leadership by suggesting leaders should understand one's role and the role one plays in effective leadership and leadership development. Ledlow and Coppola wrote,

> Today, leaders in a variety of organizations must understand the role and the importance of effective leadership, leadership development, and succession planning in achieving organizational success. Unfortunately, leadership and leadership development do not confine themselves to a single "checklist," comprehensive model, or flow chart. Xenophon wrote *Anabasis,* which served as a guide to Alexander the Great during his conquests. Restated in modern terms, Xenophon's key idea was that leaders guide their people (their army) to success by demonstrating courage and modeling "leadership." A key characteristic of a leader, from Xenophon's perspective was horsemanship; being a great horseman was critical to role-modeling leadership. In the warfare of the time, horses were essential, and mastery of horsemanship was a valuable leader attribute. (p. 60)

On the same note, Davis (2003) noted the importance of leaders and/or leadership. Davis suggested that leadership involves taking an organization in a new direction, being creative, initializing new programs, solving problems, improving quality, and building new organizational structures; however, Eddy and VanDerLinden (2006) suggested to truly understand leadership and/or leadership development, one must rely "upon the spectrum of various leadership theories purported over time and across disciplines" (p. 4).

Transactional and transformational leadership. To understand leadership, some theorists focused on the relationship leaders had with their followers (Burns 1978; Maxwell, 1993; Rost, 1991). The relationship between a leader and the followers is

known as transactional or transformational leadership (Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006).

Transactional leadership involves one person taking initiative to contact another for an

exchange of something valued, whereas transformational leadership involves the

compliance of followers; however, both transactional and transformational leadership

have a basis of a shared association between the leader and the followers. Interestingly,

other leadership styles exist, but most leaders have attributes of both transactional and

transformational characteristics (Burns, 1978; Eddy & VanDerLinden, 2006; Meers,

2009; Oelofse, 2007).

Oelofse (2007) noted that while transactional leaders are disciplined by negative

feedback, disciplinary actions, and accusations, they motivate their followers with praise,

rewards, and promises. Though it is noted that employees can be motivated by praise,

rewards, and promises, unintended consequences may happen if employees perceive the

promises of a transactional leader as coercive or manipulative (Bass, 1985; Oelofse,

2007). Also, the negative perception of a transactional leader could ultimately result in

the leader developing a stigma of being a failure. An example of a reason that a

transactional leader may be perceived as a failure is if there is a lack of resources to stand

behind what a leader previously promised (Oelofse, 2007). Also, some organizational

policies and procedures leave some leaders with little to say regarding pay increases,

promotions, and incentives; and this could be perceived as negative by followers

(Oelofse, 2007). In an additional review, Aalateeg (2017) mentioned that depending on

the employee's performance, transactional leaders can have both negative and positive

exchanges. Antonakis and House (2002, 2014) suggested that once exchanges have been

complete between the transactional leaders and employees, there is no need for further

interactions unless it is contingent on a reward being introduced or if the employee's

performance changes. According to Bass (1990), transactional leaders reach the mutual

desired goals that are established with employees by following five steps:

1. Involve the employee in the clarification of the objective and what is expected

    from the employee.

2. Explain what the employee should do to meet the expectations.

3. Explain how the employee's performance will be evaluated.

4. Provide feedback to the employee as it pertains to meeting the expectation.

5. After the previous steps have been met, finally, the supervisor/leader should

    allocate rewards based on attaining the set goals.

Although transactional leaders can coerce their employees through incentives and

rewards, transformational leadership has a much greater impact (Hautala, 2005).

Transformational leadership takes leadership beyond individual goals to creating

objectives that are for the good of the group; transformational leaders are considered

agents of change and are admired, so often employees emulate the leader's behaviors

(Aalateeg, 2017; Das, 2012; Oelofse, 2007). Additionally, Das (2012) added that the idea

that transformational leaders create a culture that embraces change is consistent with past

research. According to Kuhnert and Lewis (1987), transformational leaders hold

independent values and can carry these values out despite competing loyalties while

evaluating their own performance. They often can transform followers to their way of

thinking and can integrate their values into their employees. Bass (1985) noted that the

strong commitment followers have for leaders and leaders' values causes the influence

that the leaders have to transcend through an entire organization. Moreover,

transformational leaders show a deep concern for their followers and seek to develop those who are motivated by high internal values, and transformational leaders understand that their actions may impact their followers who are more attached to their leader's mission (Avolio & Yammarino, 2002). According to other literature reviews, transformational leadership has four components: charisma or idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass, 1985; Das, 2012). Figure 2 illustrates the four components by focusing on the follower's reactions to the transformational leader's behavior.
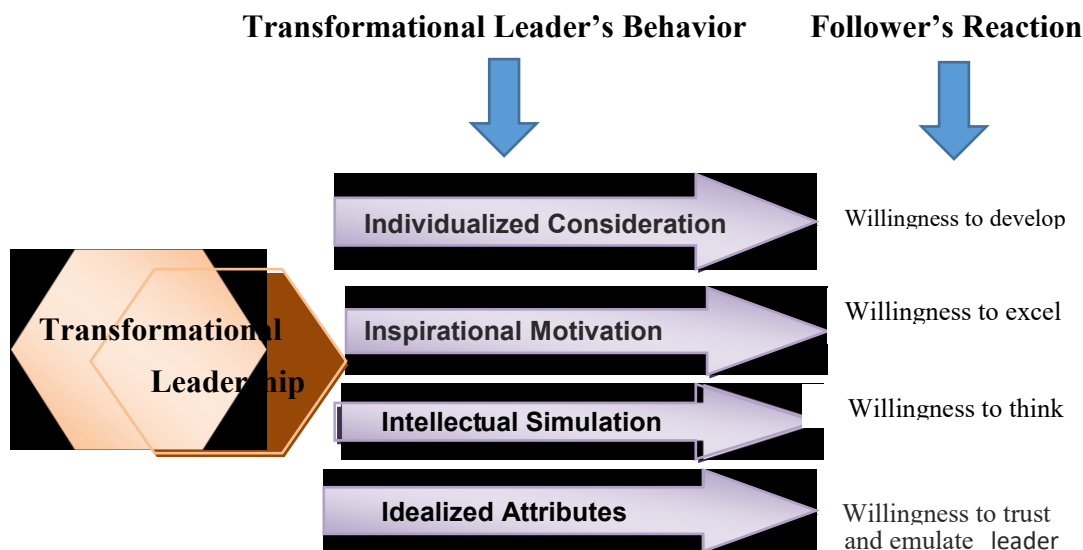
Transformational Leader's Behavior   **Follower's Reaction**

Individualized Consideration — Willingness to develop

Transformational Leadership

Inspirational Motivation — Willingness to excel

Intellectual Simulation — Willingness to think

Idealized Attributes — Willingness to trust and emulate leader

Figure 2. Follower's Reaction to Transformational Leader's Behavior (Das, 2012).

Consequently, Northouse (2001) noted that in 39 literature studies on transformational leadership, transformational leaders were more effective leaders who have better work outcomes; therefore, it may be better for leaders to lead by the transformational approach (Das, 2012).

Last, the researcher previously noted that there are other leadership styles; however, transactional and transformational leadership are leadership styles that are prominent in all groups of leadership (Becker, 2018).

Life Experience Impacting Leadership

Meers (2009) suggested that Robert Kegan introduced the world to his idea of development; Kegan (1982) noted that leadership development is an active but gradual process that involves individuals developing an awareness of how he/she reacts and/or is

affected by their environment. Kegan's idea of development brought a new awareness to leadership development, and there was a shift from the traditional theories of development. Some older or traditional leadership approaches focused more on a set of behaviors that leaders had to have in order to be successful; the approaches really did not focus on the leader-follower's emotional relationship (Meers, 2009). According to Goleman (1995), it is important for leaders to have a good understanding of the different types of emotional intelligence such as self-awareness, social awareness, and social management. Based on that understanding, the way leaders internalize their experiences may make a difference in how a leader interacts in his/her environment (Meers, 2009). Bandura (1977) noted that people learn from one another whether it be learned behavior from observation or modeled behavior, and ultimately the behavior becomes motivation or environmental influence. Ambler (2012) ascertained that "leaders' life experiences create the personal capacity that they need to lead" (para.1) and that "our experiences shape us and make us" (para. 1). Like Kegan, Ambler believed that leadership development is not only gained through a set stage or program but through experiences in one's life. Moreover, McCall (2004, 2010) was adamant with the belief that experiential learning is the best way to develop a leader's capabilities. McCall (2010) explained that the ideology of experiential learning should be put into practice more often. McCall (2010) further ascertained that organizations should integrate situational/experiential learning into everyday business practices. McCall (2010) continued by suggesting that for the ideology of experiential learning to be effective, leaders should constantly reflect on previous situations and, from that reflection, use more effective tactics. In another literature review, Avolio and Gardner (2005) discussed developing leaders authentically

by focusing on the environment and organizational conditions that promote lifelong learning. Avolio and Gardner further disagreed with the idea that leadership development can be achieved through a discrete program. Shamir et al. (2005) even conducted a study on experiences that impact leadership development. Like the researcher's study, Shamir et al. sought to find common themes that impacted leaders' development. Shamir et al.'s focus was on personal life stories of leaders that may provide some awareness of how experiences may affect a leader's leadership development. Through the stories of the leaders, Shamir et al.'s findings supported the idea that life experiences are essential in developing a leader's growth. Shamir et al. also found certain themes in conducting their study. A theme noted was that leadership was a natural development. Additionally, Shamir et al. found that some leaders' leadership capacity was increased based on difficult experiences that the leaders encountered. Shamir et al. also noted in the study that the leaders studied felt it important to note that learning from experience is essential to personal leadership growth. Meers (2009) commented on Shamier et al.'s (2005) study, saying,

> Leaders also are seen as the managers of meaning and one powerful way a leader can shape meaning is to utilize the power of stories, often their own. These stories can provide avenues for communicating a vision or an inspiring message that will in turn influence followers to strive harder or align more with the stated vision, etc. of the leader. The final argument put forth by the researchers for the importance of leaders' life-stories is that often these stories help shape the self-perception of the leaders. By relating stories in which the leader demonstrated leadership traits or abilities, the leader not only influences followers to view them

as a leader but in turn promotes their own self confidence in their leadership

ability. (p. 27)

Meers (2009) also noted that the importance of learning from personal experiences and reflection has become a part of some executive leadership education programs. For instance, one of the best known instructors in the field of leadership is Ronald Heifetz of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University; he developed and uses extensively in his courses the methodology that students bring their experiences to class and become their own case studies (Meers, 2009; Parks, 2005). Allowing those student leaders to share and reflect on their most significant leadership successes and failures enables the student leaders to extract meaning from their experiences and utilize this learning for future use (Meers, 2009; Parks, 2005). Therefore, one could imply from Meers's and Shamir et al.'s (2005) studies, Avolio and Gardner's (2005) literature review, *Business Dictionary's* definition that leadership development is "a systematic approach to expanding the performance capability of individuals in leadership" (May, 2017, para.1) and that leadership development is "not achieved through a single stage or step but rather through a journey" (May, 2017, para. 1), Kegan's (1982) idea of leadership development, Ambler's (2012) insight, and McCall's (2010) suggestions that leadership development is a process that can be impacted by experiences one encounters.

Consequently, the researcher supports the research that experiential learning or experiencing an impactful circumstance is the best way to develop a leader. The researcher further believes that to address the need for effective leaders, companies or organizations should use the same research as a basis to develop employees, rather than

rely solely on a set program designed for leadership development; however, based on the limited studies on experiences that impact leadership development, there is a need for further research in this area. The researcher hopes that through this current study, more information on experiences that impact leadership development will be available.

Summary

The review of literature in this chapter focused on theoretical reviews surrounding Kouzes and Posner's (2003) five practices of exemplary leadership. The chapter also provided a theoretical review of literature on leadership development and ultimately used the reviews of literature to emphasize how life experiences may impact leadership development. Research revealed that educational leaders who practice the five practices of exemplary leadership are more effective leaders. Additional research revealed that though there are different styles and different ways to develop a leader, most leaders have qualities of both transactional and transformational leadership. Ultimately, research revealed that experiential learning or experiences can positively impact a leader's developmental process.

As this study continues, the researcher provides additional research on the impact life experiences have on leadership development. The following chapter gives a description of the methodology used in this study by giving detailed descriptions of the participants; providing a description of the research design, instruments, data collection, and procedures; and describing the data analysis that was used in this study. The researcher also discusses the limitations to this study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to address the problem of ineffective leadership by focusing on the impact life experiences have on leadership development. The researcher sought to study how select leaders' life experiences impacted their leadership development, identify common themes that influenced select leaders, and use the results to address the need for effective leadership in educational environments. In this chapter, the researcher provides a description of the methodology used in this study; gives detailed descriptions of the participants mentioned; provides a description of the research design, instruments, data collection and procedures; and describes the data analysis that was used in this study. To conclude this chapter, the researcher discusses the limitations to this study. Consequently, during this research study, the researcher also sought to answer the question, "What life experience(s) impact leadership development?"

Participants

Participants in this qualitative study were educational leaders (principals) located in a central North Carolina school district. According to the central North Carolina school district's facts and North Carolina School Report Card data, there were 183 principals within this central North Carolina school district; in the 2018-2019 school year, there will be a total of 187 principals. The years of experience for the principals ranged in number: 30.7% had 0-3 years of experience, 45.5% had 4-10 years of experience, and 23.9% had 10 plus years of experience. For this study, the researcher used purposeful sampling to select educators who have had impactful life experiences that have affected them as educational leaders. Patton (2002) noted that purposeful sampling is widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases.

Purposeful sampling may also involve identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals who are particularly knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Clark, 2011). Based on the purposeful sampling method, 10 of the 187 target educators met the criteria for selection and those 10 are the accessible target group. The researcher received a 60% response rate from the 10 accessible target educators. A 50% to 60% response rate was five to six educators needed for participation in this study; that participating amount was needed for a successful study. The researcher received a 60% response rate (six participants).

Research Design

After receiving IRB approval, the researcher completed a qualitative study by using narrative research to determine the impact life experience has on leadership development. Interviews were used to answer the research question. During the interviews, principals rated themselves on how effective they believe they are as leaders. Moreover, the interviews allowed the principals the opportunity to tell their stories by discussing experiences in their lives that they feel impacted them as educational leaders.

Instrumentation

After obtaining IRB approval and permission to conduct research (see Appendix A), the researcher used personal interview observations as forms of data collection.

Personal interviews. To test the validity of the personal interviews, triangulation was used. According to Heaton (2004), data collection can be obtained using a variety of methods. The personal interview gave the researcher more insight into how the participants felt about their life experiences. As the researcher interviewed the participants, the researcher observed the participants as they answered the questions and

payed close attention to gestures, inferences, etc. as participants responded. The researcher allowed the participants to verbally respond and elaborate more on their responses. For example, the researcher asked participants to rate themselves 1-10, with 10 being the highest on how effective they feel they are as leaders. Then the researcher asked why the participants gave themselves the rating and how the participants felt about their overall rating or response. Most importantly, during the interview, the participants were given the opportunity to tell the researcher about a personal experience or experiences that affected them as leaders. Getting different perspectives from multiple interviewees allowed the researcher not only a means to validate the research, but it allowed the researcher the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the research topic. Guion (2002) agreed; Guion suggested that triangulation can deepen a researcher's understandings while establishing validity and credibility. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2000) suggested that interviews serve as a way for participants to get involved and talk about their views. Cohen et al. further suggested that interviews are a way for interviewees to discuss their interpretation: "It is their expression from their point of view" (p. 267). Cohen et al. also said that an interview "is not simply concerned with collecting data about life: it is part of life itself, its human embeddedness is inescapable" (p. 267).

Prior to the start of the interview, participants were asked to reveal their gender, years of experience in leadership, and how they rate themselves as leaders (on a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the highest). Other example interview questions included the following:

1. Who or what has been your greatest inspiration? Why?

2. Describe a time that you were faced with a challenge or a huge obstacle?

3. How did you overcome the obstacle or challenge, and did it affect your leadership development in any way? If so, how?

4. As a leader, do you feel your key leadership development came more from life experiences or coursework, trainings, workshops etc.… Why?

5. Tell me about an experience in your life that you feel has affected you as a leader.

Ultimately, when the researcher reviewed the data, the researcher had the data needed to answer the research study question.

Procedures

To successfully conduct this study, the researcher needed IRB approval from Gardner-Webb University, approval to conduct research from the district where the educational leaders in this study were employed (see Appendix A), and consent from the participants (see Appendix B). Upon IRB approval, approval from the district where the research occurred, and consent by the participants, the researcher began the research process.

The researcher used a qualitative research design to conduct research. Though qualitative methods have been used for centuries, sociologist Earl Babbie (2014) suggested that anthropologists made qualitative field research methods well known in the 19th century through their observations. In using a qualitative research design, the researcher was able to question and interview the participants to better capture the stories and experiences that have impacted their leadership development.

Moreover, after gaining approval and consent from all parties (see Appendices A

and B), the researcher used purposeful sampling to select 10 leaders for the study. In this study, the researcher sought to interview educational leaders who have had life experiences that have impacted their leadership development. The participants were contacted via email and in person with the invitation to participate/consent. By using purposeful sampling, the researcher received 60% participation (six participants). The researcher had incentives (10% to 50% off local stores) to offer participants, but none were used. After collecting and confirming all participants' consents, the researcher scheduled and conducted personal interviews with each candidate (the initial interviews were 20-30-minute interview times and were conducted in a 2- to 3-week time frame). During the personal interviews, the participants had the opportunity to discuss in detail the experiences in their lives that they feel impacted them as educational leaders. Two additional interview times were scheduled in the following 2-3 weeks to ensure participants had ample time to expand and share their life experiences.

Data Collection

After obtaining consent (see Appendix B), the data collection occurred within a 4- to 6-week period. The researcher forwarded an invitation/consent form to principals to participate in the study. The researcher introduced the purpose of the research and informed the leaders that they were chosen based on their leadership positions in the district and that the researcher was interested in life experiences that have impacted them as educational leaders. The principals received an email and verbal confirmation of when their scheduled interviews were. The initial interview occurred within 1 week after receiving confirmation consent to participate. Principals received a verbal and email reminder 24 to 48 hours prior to the scheduled interview. The questions were designed

for participants to elaborate on their leadership development by addressing how life experiences have impacted them as leaders. Additionally, after the initial interview, the participants were reminded of the two remaining interview sessions that were scheduled in the following weeks (each of the participants were interviewed two to three different times within a 3- to 6-week period). During the interview process, the researcher collected data by recording the participants' responses as they were asked to elaborate more on personal experiences that have impacted their leadership development. Due to the confidentiality, the researcher collected all data using participant numbers without using participant names and kept the notes, interview transcriptions, and any other identifying participant information in a locked file cabinet in the personal possession of the researcher. After transcribing the data, all information was erased after the research study was complete. Although the researcher realized that the experiences would vary, the researcher was optimistic to find common themes in participant answers and experiences.

Data Analysis

The interviews were conducted by each participant receiving a number (e.g., Participant 1, 2, 3). Additionally, interview responses were analyzed through a coding process. Due to some questions being open-ended questions, the researcher looked for specific patterns or themes noted in the responses given (e.g., repeating pattern of wordage used among participants or similar stories reported by participants). Using the coding method allowed the researcher to better analyze and better determine common themes in the qualitative data.

Delimitations

Due to the 187 principals and their locations within the central North Carolina district, the researcher opted to do purposeful sampling to select 10 principals for this study. In this research study, the researcher focused only on the principals willing to share life experiences that have impacted the participants' (principals') leadership development.

Limitations

A limitation of this study was that more research was apparent on developing effective leaders through a set program, and extensive research existed on characteristics of effective leaders, rather than the deficiency in research on life experiences that impact leadership development. Although it has been noted in this study that some authors believed that life experiences do play a pivotal role in the authenticity and effectiveness of a leader, few studies were found. One study that was found is a study completed by Meers (2009). Meers completed a study on how effective leaders learn from life. Meers experienced some challenges in completing his study. Like Meers, the researcher experienced some challenges as well. For instance, the researcher gained some demographic baseline information on the central North Carolina educational leaders (ethnicity, gender, advanced degrees, principals who were nominated for principal of the year noted on district's website). The information regarding the participants was interesting and intriguing; however, as this study continued, there were many impactful experiences shared by leaders that varied in nature. Initially, the researcher was concerned about the variation of experiences; ultimately, all participants disclosed specific life experiences that changed who they have become as educational leaders. The

researcher sought a common trend in the life experience or life experiences of educational leaders. Moreover, all leaders mentioned in this study suggested that specific life experiences changed them as leaders, which supports Ambler's (2012) claim that was described in Warren Bennis's (2003) book *On Becoming a Leader*. In referencing Bennis, Ambler mentioned that "Leaders, whatever their field, are made up as much of their experiences as their skills" (para. 7) and that leaders use their experiences rather than being used by them.

Summary

In this chapter, the researcher mentioned the purpose of this study was to address the problem of ineffective leadership. By focusing on the impact life experiences have on leadership development and studying how select leaders' life experiences impacted their leadership development, the researcher sought to identify common themes that influenced select leaders to become effective leaders and used the results to address the need for effective leadership in educational environments. This chapter also described the methodology used, discussed the demographics of the educational leaders in this study, and described the research design of using a qualitative technique as a method of collecting data. The chapter also covered the instruments, procedures, data collections, and data analysis used. In the final sections of this chapter, the researcher discusses the delimitations and limitations. A delimitation that was noted was that the researcher chose to use purposeful sampling to help narrow down the educational leaders used in the study. A limitation is that there is more research on developing effective leaders through a set program and extensive research on characteristics of effective leaders, but there is a deficiency in research on life experiences that impact leadership development. Moreover,

after IRB approval and consent to conduct research, the researcher concluded the final chapters of this study by focusing on the results and summarizing the findings of the research study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to address the problem of ineffective leadership by focusing on the impact life experiences have on leadership development. The researcher sought to study how select leaders' life experiences impacted their leadership development, identify common themes that influenced select leaders, and use the results to address the need for effective leadership in educational environments. In this chapter, the researcher provided results of the qualitative data that reveal the answer to the research question, "What life experience(s) impact leadership development?"

Participants

After IRB approval, school district approval to conduct research (see Appendix A), and participant consent forms were signed (see Appendix B), the researcher began data collection. Using a qualitative research design, the researcher was able to question and interview the participants to better capture the stories and experiences that have impacted their leadership development. The researcher used purposeful sampling to contact 10 educational leaders located in a central North Carolina school district. At least a 50% to 60% response rate (five to six participants) was needed for a successful study. The researcher received a 60% response rate from the 10 accessible target educators. Table 5 details the demographics of the participants used in this study.

Table 5

Demographics of Participants Used in the Study

Total Number of Participants	Gender		Range of Leadership Experience
	Male	Female	
6	4	2	4-18 years

Although, the researcher contacted 10 participants for the study, six participants agreed to be interviewed and have their data used for the study. Table 5 reflects a total of six participants interviewed. The gender of the participants was four male participants and two female participants. All six participants represent different school-level leadership. One participant was an elementary leader, one participant was a middle school leader, and four participants were high school leaders. The participants' leadership experience ranged from 4-18 years of leadership experience.

The Interviews

After collecting and confirming all participants' consent (see Appendix B), the researcher scheduled and conducted personal interviews with each candidate. The time of the initial interviews ranged from slightly below 20 minutes to slightly over 30 minutes and were conducted in a 2- to 3-week time frame. Due to scheduling conflicts, two interviews were done via phone and four interviews were face to face, although all interviews were audio recorded for accuracy. Two subsequent interviews were scheduled with participants as needed following the initial interviews. During the personal interviews, the participants had the opportunity to discuss in detail the experiences in their lives that they feel impacted them as educational leaders. At the beginning of the interview process, participants were asked to reveal their gender, years of experience in leadership, and how they rate themselves as leaders (on a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the highest). Participants were also given the opportunity to discuss why they rated themselves as they did. In order to provide anonymity, the participants were given participant numbers (e.g., Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3). When reporting data results, the six participants are noted as Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3,

etc. Upon completion of the interviews, the researcher transcribed the audio recordings of the interviews for accuracy to better determine common themes. The researcher looked for patterns in responses given, such as repeating pattern of wordage and common experiences. Table 6 notes the participants' years of leadership experience and how the participants rated themselves as leaders.

Table 6

Participant Personal Leadership Rating

Participants	Gender		Years of Leadership Experience	Personal Leadership Rating
	Male	Female		
Participant 1	x		12	8.5
Participant 2	x		4.5	7
Participant 3	x		7	7.5
Participant 4		x	4	6/7
Participant 5		x	18	7
Participant 6	x		5	6

At the beginning of the interview process, participants were asked to reveal their gender and years of experience in leadership and personally rate themselves as leaders (on a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the highest). Participant 1, a male participant who had been in leadership for 12 years, rated himself as an 8.5 of a 10 rating. When Participant 1 was questioned as to why he rated himself as an 8.5, Participant 1 stated, "There are some things that I know that I need to sharpen, but you … get in a situation where you get comfortable and you enjoy what you're doing, [so] you lean on your strengths." Participant 2, a male participant who had been in leadership for 4.5 years, rated himself as a 7. When the researcher asked Participant 2 why he rated himself as a 7, Participate 2 explained, "I am always looking at ways to grow and improve, and [I am] more experienced [now] than [I was my] first year, but [I am] still new to a leadership role."

Participant 3, who has been in a leadership role for 7 years, rated his leadership as a 7.5, saying, "Right now, I rate myself … a 7.5, I feel that there's always room to grow. I always challenge myself to do more and be more, [because] more experience builds your confidence." Participant 4 rated her leadership at a 6/7; she had been in her leadership role for 4 years. When asked why she rated herself as a 6 initially then a quick 7, Participant 4 said,

> This is an area that I really struggle in because I am very critical on myself, [I am torn between a 6 or a 7], not because I don't have confidence in what I am doing, but I am not where I want to be.

When asked how she rates her leadership, Participant 5, a female participant in a leadership role for 18 years, said a 7. Participant 5 said the reason for the rating was, "I think the number can fluctuate depending on the job, if you had asked me that as an AP, I would have said a nine."

Participant 6, a male participant in his leadership role for 5 years, rated his leadership as a 6. He suggested than when one is in education, there is room for growth and "[Based on what we do daily], there are very few times that a leader achieves a level 10."

Interview Question Results

After establishing how the participants rated themselves as leaders, the researcher asked the participants the following interview questions:

1. Who or what has been your greatest inspiration? Why?

2. Describe a time that you were faced with a challenge or a huge obstacle?

3. How did you overcome the obstacle or challenge, and did it affect your

leadership development in any way? If so, how?

4. As a leader, do you feel your key leadership development came more from life experiences or coursework, trainings, workshops etc.… Why?

5. Tell me about an experience in your life that you feel has affected you as a leader.

Results–Interview Question 1. When the researcher asked participants, "who or what has been your greatest inspiration, and why," Participant 1 discussed his high school basketball coach, who also happened to be his high school physical education teacher. Participant 1 also said his initial supervising principal was an inspiration. Participant 1 alluded to the fact that although his basketball coach may be an inspiration, he did not admire some of his tactics.

Participant 1 said,

"[There are many] things that I felt he should have done as a coach and a teacher [that] he didn't do." Participant 1 continued by suggesting that based on his coach's position, he could have been more encouraging, understanding, and serve as a mentor to many young men whose fathers were absent from their lives: "[Be a mentor to young men, especially many young men] who didn't have fathers, [he should have taken] that opportunity by the horn [to] mentor [us]." Participant 1 continued by discussing how he knew if he was ever a coach, he would ensure he would be better than his high school coach and take advantage of opportunities to mentor and show compassion to students and players.

Participant 1 also said that when he became a teacher, he was inspired by his principal: "My first principal … was very instrumental in having me see things from a

different lens; [seeing things from a different lens allowed me to see] what potential I had."

Participant 2 said his greatest inspiration was his father:

[I am] lucky, my dad was my greatest inspiration, simply [by the way] he lived life, he was a lifelong educator, he was a coach, and he was a well-respected individual. He stayed at the same school for over 30 years, coached for 30 years, and was able to make an impact on [many people]. [As] a young boy, I can always remember either being at football practice or at work with him. Our entire life growing up as kids, my dad would wake-up at 3:30, do a paper route, exercise, teach all day, coach all night, and then be there for us at practices, games, or whatever he needed to be for family.

Like Participant 2, Participant 3's greatest inspiration was his father. Participant 3 explained,

My father has been a role model as a parent, raising me to be best that I can be, challenging me to take advantage of what life offers, [and teaching me] how to be an upstanding man. [My father worked] a full-time job and worked as a pastor, [but] he never negated his family. I take a lot of the things I learned from him and modeled that for my family and my professional life.

Participant 4's greatest inspiration was a parent as well; however, like Participant 1, Participant 4 was raised in a single parent household. Participant 4 said,

[My mom is my greatest inspiration] because my father … left when we were young, and I am the oldest of four. So, my mom … raised four kids on her own. She … worked three and four different jobs while we were going through school,

and at the same time, she [worked] her way through nursing school. She did what she had to do, to get where she wanted to be, and … get in a better place for herself and us. I have always been very proud of [her work ethic and her ability to face many challenges]. I have always carried that with me.

Participant 5 said her greatest inspiration was her internship supervisor, who was also her department chair who hired her. Participant 5 said of her experience,

I have been lucky to have a lot of great people mentor [and] tutor me throughout my career; I've been very lucky in that since. My internship supervisor had a wealth of knowledge. I think inspiration comes from a lot of different places and in a lot of different forms…. So, for work ethic and attention to detail … I think that my … first supervisor was probably one of the best people; I got lucky, she was hard …, but she really inspired me to do more and be great.

Participant 6, like Participants 2, 3, and 4, credits parents as his greatest inspiration; however, like Participant 1, Participant 6 also mentioned teachers in his response. Participant 6 answered,

When I think about inspirations … throughout my life, I … look at different aspects of my life and … I would have to [say] you're inspired by the people who raised you; [I am inspired by] my mother and father. They continue to be a very important part of my life. My grandparents … have [also] been an inspiration; our family has always been close. We had a relatively stable and normal family, they encouraged me…. They instilled [the importance of education in my older two sisters and me]. While my mom finished [school at] a community college, my dad never went to college, so I think that [college was] very important for

them to instill in us…. As a high school student, I [also] had some very inspiring teachers, I attribute them to inspiring me.

Theme in participant responses to Question 1: Authority figures. Based on the responses given to the first question, the researcher was able to transcribe and review the data in order to determine a common theme. After review, the results as noted in Table 7 revealed that all six participants were inspired by authority figures (e.g., parent, teacher, coach, or supervisor). As the researcher continued to review the participant responses to other questions, other themes were noted.

Results–Interview Questions 2 and 3: Describe a time that you were faced with a challenge or a huge obstacle. How did you overcome the obstacle or challenge, and did it affect your leadership in any way? Participant 1 initially began to discuss finishing high school but not necessarily knowing the path he wanted to take beyond high school. Participant 1 spoke of the challenge of being at a crossroads of working two jobs in the 2 years following high school but still unsure of the direction to take in life. Participant 1 answered,

 I was out of high school; I had a job, I had two jobs, but I had no direction. I didn't know what to do, I had been out of high school … a couple of years, I was working for Red Lobster and working for UPS. My only ambition was when I turn 21, I'm [going to drive] the trucks for UPS, that's good money, but [I thought it was] rough. I even considered joining the armed forces. I didn't know what to do. [A year passes and] a guy approached [a friend and me] playing basketball and [suggested] that we needed to be in school, I let him know we already finished school, we're working, we're ok. The guy said no, I'm talking about

college. We [ignored] him, but the guy [continued to try to talk to us], so we [eventually] talked to him, and [ultimately] he took us out to [a local] college. We met a coach at the college and played for him, *and we both got scholarships* [emphasis added].

The researcher suggested to Participant 1 that for him to be offered an instant athletic scholarship after being out of high school for 2 years, that he and his friend had to be good players. Participant 1 replied, "Well, we were better than average, and the guy took a chance on us. It paid off; it was life changing."

Participant 2 said a challenge or obstacle that he had to overcome was in his initial 2 years of leadership that humbled him quickly: "My first year as an administrator, I started at a different district, and I had full intentions [of remaining there]." Participant 2 continued his story:

[At the end of my first year in leadership], I was approached by district leadership [with an opportunity to interview for a head principal's position. Although it was my first year in leadership, I decided] I am going to interview, and if I don't get it, it's a good experience. Well … *I got the job* [emphasis added]. I became a principal in my second year in leadership. [Shortly thereafter], there was a significant turnover at the central office level, and…. The person that hired me as principal, was let go by the school board. [Surprisingly], I [was informed] in the end of my second year, that [my role as principal] no longer required a principal's title, and I was going to be … a director of the alternative program [instead of the principal]. Now a director in some districts … may be a promotion, but for the district I was in, it was not, it was … a demotion. [I was told] it was for financial

purposes. So, having to process that [was difficult]. [Becoming a head principal quickly, really increased] my confidence, [I assumed that I was] going to keep moving … up, but [receiving a demotion] humbled me quick. At the same time, it helped me look at leadership, look at this role, and look at how things operate from top to bottom significantly different. I became not so naive quickly as to what can happen. I continued in the director's position, but at the same time, I began to seek other opportunities in another district.

The researcher asked Participant 2 if he became bitter toward the educational system. Participant 2 replied,

No, I was bitter towards the actual person, because I [understand] from a fiscal [perspective] why the decision was made. However, I felt that the decision was made [giving no value to the program]. If I was in that person's shoes, I may have done the same thing … I don't know what the district's [funding] was…. However, the way it was communicated to me, and how it was handled, really irritated me. What I learned from that situation is that it's important even in difficult situations … to do your very best to think about the human involved. I know I've been wronged before, but it is important to remember to be considerate of others when handling tough situations.

Participant 3 said an obstacle he had to overcome was a rumor of a threat to the school. In discussing the threat, Participant 3 mentioned valuable lessons learned:

[In] dealing with [a threat to the school], [I] battled with making sure [I] handled the situation, [I] addressed the student that [was] involved with the threat, and at the same time, [I had to] make sure everybody [was] safe. When parents,

students, and faculty members [were improperly informed of the] threat, even

though it wasn't true, it caused a lot of tension and it caused a lot of fear on

campus. It was to the point we had to have [many] meetings with parents, central

office, and provide letters to the school community. I learned when looking back

… it is important to be transparent, [and] make sure that there's open

communication around everybody to prevent people from being uncertain.

When the researcher asked Participant 4 to describe a time when she was faced

with a challenge or a huge obstacle, how did she overcome the obstacle or challenge, and

did it affect her leadership in any way, like Participant 2, Participant 4's obstacle or

challenge occurred in her initial 2 years of leadership. Participant 4 responded,

I was working with a principal and [there was an issue, but] I really could not

identify what the issue was, I knew within about 2 months that we were going to

have a tough time together. There were some things [occurring that were]

unethical. He was my boss, and he was asking me to do things that were

unethical, … I chose not to participate …, that bothered him because it was an

order from him, and I refused it. Our relationship [got significantly worse]. The

[people in the school where I worked] did not know me, [and] I was a stranger to

the area. By my second year there, I made every effort to show that I was there

for the good of the students. So, I kept doing whatever I could do to try to make

things better. The principal had gotten to the point where he basically ignored

me, didn't invite me to any of the administrative meetings, would have the door

locked and closed, and tell people that I should not go in … I just kept doing what

I could do, [I received] support from some of the [people] from central office in

the district and did what I thought was [right] for the good of the students.

Although it was hard for me, and it was … a learning experience for me, it taught

me what not to do as a leader. That [is] why I lead now the way I do.

The researcher asked Participant 4 what was meant by "that is why you lead the way you

do." Participant 4 explained,

So, I think one of the biggest pieces is [being aware that there may be times

when] we [may not] necessarily get along with [everyone], and obviously as

leaders there are going to be people … you [may] have some challenges [with], so

listening is one of the big pieces that I try to fit in every day. [I try to] build on

whatever small pieces[I] can. It can be very easy to lock myself in a space and

not interact, but I am not going to grow [by isolating myself], and I'm not going

to help others grow that way [either].

When asking Participant 5 to "describe a time that you were faced with a

challenge or a huge obstacle. How did you overcome the obstacle or challenge, and did it

affect your leadership in any way," Participant 5's response was,

This is going to sound [like self-pity], but finding advancement as a female, [and]

maybe [a] not so young leader, was a huge obstacle for me in this district; [it was

also] a confidence buster. When I was an AP, I [felt] like I did a great job, I had

the respect of my leadership team, I had the respect of my staff …, and I think

that years, and that's no understatement, of applying and not getting anything, not

being given reasons why, was a real huge obstacle. [When I ask myself] how did

I overcome that? I relied on the continued support of my leadership team to

reinforce the fact that it wasn't necessarily all me, but that was hard, because that

was … many years [of applying].

Participant 6 discussed his obstacle or challenge:

> I think a challenge … was when I was given the opportunity to move from a role of a high school administrator to elementary. There were both obstacles and challenges … considering … it was a move [where I had no] previous experience in an elementary setting. I felt that it was a great opportunity, but I did know that it was going to challenge me in ways that I had not experienced … I did feel that I had enough experiences in [handling] difficult situations, [and] I [felt] that I would be somewhat successful, but I did not know what I was getting into. The way that I was able to overcome or learn …, was to learn from the people I was around. Within the elementary education world, it is very specific, but nothing was thrown at me [that] felt overwhelming.

Theme in participant responses to Question 2: Negative experience.

Questions 2 and 3 coincide with each other so in reviewing the qualitative data results, the researcher looked for commonalities for both responses. The responses to the questions did vary, which made it a little difficult for the researcher to determine an initial theme for Question 2; however, with careful review, the researcher noticed that all six participants had a negative experience, and uncertainty was prominent in all the responses. Uncertainty can affect one's confidence. Participants 2 and 5 specifically said that their confidence had changed based on their obstacle. Although all six participants had a negative experience, the experience and how the participants overcame the experience had a positive impact on their leadership development.

Theme in participant responses to Question 3: Positive impact/intellectual growth. All six participants' responses reflected that through the experience of their obstacle or challenge, it was a positive learning experience that added to their intellectual growth (e.g., Participant 1, "It paid off, it was life changing"; Participant 2, "I learned from that situation is that it's important even in difficult situations to … think about the human involved …, it is important to remember that when handling tough situations"; Participant 3, "I learned when looking back … that it is important to be transparent [and] make sure that there's open communication around everybody to prevent people from being uncertain"; Participant 4, "it was … a learning experience for me, it taught me what not to do as a leader. That [is] why I lead now the way I do"; Participant 5, ["When I ask myself] how did I overcome that? I relied on the continued support of my leadership team to reinforce the fact that it wasn't necessarily all me"; Participant 6, "The way that I was able to overcome or learn …, was to learn from the people I was around").

Results–Interview Question 4. When asking participants, "As a leader, do you feel your key leadership development came more from life experiences or coursework, trainings, workshops etc.… Why," all six participants discussed the importance of coursework but unanimously agreed that life experience is the key to leadership development. For example, Participant 1 replied, "You [have] to get the coursework, you [have] to know what's going on, curriculum, instruction, policies, you [have] to know all of that …, but experience is the best teacher."

Participant 2 said,

I feel that coursework and workshops and continuing to be exposed to new theories, content … is very important. However, I do think that life experiences

and the role that you serve is the best way that your leadership can be developed.

I'm not going to take something from a book and be able to apply it immediately. When asking Participant 3, as a leader, did he feel his key leadership development came more from life experiences or coursework, trainings, workshops etc.… Why, Participant 3 responded,

> Life experience is what I would refer to first when I think of my leadership and how I developed as a leader. Relationships really matter to me, it's one of my biggest priorities. I learned that [relationships matter] from my father. A lot of things that I have done in leadership is because of what I experienced. The coursework and training … enhance, [and helps to] give you ideas, [but you still] have to implement those [ideas]. It takes life experiences to see whether [the ideas] work.

As all other participants prior, Participant 4 suggested that her key development as a leader came more from life experience; however, she spoke metaphorically in her answer:

> What [I thought of when you asked] was a sculptor of a chunk of clay, so you [have] your basic form when you're starting …, I am not an artist by any means, so if I [offend] the art world, I apologize, but you take that block of clay and you start forming the basic of what you're trying to be. I really feel like that basic block of who I am and why I am who I am is [a result of] my life experiences. That's not to discount information that you get from coursework, that just … adds that detail to that clay block.

> Participant 5's response to the interview question was that the lessons one learns

from experience cannot be taught in a class or by training:

> I really do think its life experiences, I really do. It's difficult to recreate the scenarios that happen in a school, the scenarios that happen with parents and kids, and other adults that can really prepare you for how to react, how to resolve, how to move past the things that happen in day to day life. Staff development provides a frame of how you want to create a product or change something, but I think in terms of raw leadership, … I don't know if that's a teachable thing in the confines of a classroom or training.

Participate 6 said,

> The experiences that you gain … are the ones that stick with you. I believe it is important to receive specific trainings and workshops, but that only takes place in a smaller setting. [As a leader], when things are happening all at once, you are required to make very quick decisions; those are the ones that prepare you for future events or future decisions. I think that experiencing things in the moment is the best way to prepare a person.

Theme in participant responses to Question 4: Experiential learning. Upon review of the data results, the researcher determined the prevalent theme found in every participant's response was experiential learning (e.g., Participant 1, "Experience is the best teacher"; Participant 2, "I do think that life experiences and the role that you serve is the best way that your leadership can be developed"; Participant 3, "Life experience is what I would refer to first when I think of my leadership and how I developed as a leader"; Participant 4, "I really feel like that basic block of who I am and why I am who I am is [a result of] my life experiences"; Participant 5, "I really do think its life

experiences"; Participant 6, "The experiences that you gain … are the ones that stick with you. I think that experiencing things in the moment is the best way to prepare a person").

Results–Interview Question 5. Interview Question 5 allowed the participants to discuss an experience or experiences in detail that they felt affected them as leaders. All participants shared stories from their lives that affected their leadership development. Participant 1 shared a story of an experience with a coach when Participant 1 was a teenager.

Participant 1 described an event that happened when he was late for basketball tryouts. The tryouts were during the summer and his mom normally took him; but this particular day, his mom was not home to take him, so he decided to jog the 2 to 3 miles to try to make it on time. Participant 1 continued,

> I finally get there, and the gym doors are closed and locked, so I knocked on the
> door, and I said to myself, I know they're in there, I can hear the whistle blow and
> the balls bouncing. Then the head coach opens the door, this is the guy that I
> revered, he was like a historical figure; I wanted to play for this guy. So, I began
> to explain to him what happened, he said *sorry son and closed the door* [emphasis
> added].

The way Participant 1 described the experience was as though the coach abruptly closed the door and did not even give him a chance to explain the story. Participant 1 explained he was young and really did not fully understand what just happened, so he decided to return the next day for the following day of tryouts. Participate 1 explained what happened the following day:

> So, I show up for practice the next day, and the assistant coach says, hey Coach

Bell wants to talk to you, so I sat down, and the coach says, I don't think you can

make this varsity team. He did not give me any explanation or feedback. I did

finish practice that day, but then I transferred and went to another school, but that

experience stood out to me, because I would not do a young man like that. You

never know how much influence you have on a person or how much they look up

to you. I know he had a job to do and a team to run, but he showed no

compassion. That's one experience that happen, and I said if I ever become a

coach, I will never do somebody like that. That's what ultimately led me into

coaching.

Previous responses revealed that Participant 1 received a basketball scholarship to

college 2 years after he completed high school, and he went on to become a physical

education teacher, an athletic director, leading coach in that area, and now an

administrator.

Like Participant 1, Participant 2 described an experience that impacted him in

high school as well. Participant 2 said the experience really steered him in the direction

that he is in today:

I grew up in a family of educators, my mom was a school psychologist, my dad's

a teacher, his twin brother was a teacher, my brother … is a teacher. I think

education was in my blood. Out of college, I was a special education teacher.

That was also in part to a young man I mentored when I was in high school; he

had Asperger syndrome. I didn't just mentor him when we were in high school, I

mentored him so much, we would hang out outside of school. [The experience of

mentoring a person with Asperger's] really helped me understand how you're

supposed to treat people, no matter what someone is going through or what their disability may be. That's why I chose the path I chose in education.

Participant 2 discussed another experience that happen to him in college where he took a leadership role that helped give him the foundation for his leadership today. When asking Participant 3 to discuss an experience or experiences in detail that he felt affected him as a leader, Participant 3 discussed his role as a father and how it impacts his leadership:

> Having kids has impacted me; with a 2-year-old, and a 9-month-old, it's taught me how to prioritize. It [has] taught me [to] make sure I maintain my family values and who I am as a person, it [has] also taught me to be myself, and not try to fit some formula, but to be me. I think people respect you as a leader when you know who you are.

Participant 4 spoke briefly on experience that she mentioned in a previous response but continued with an experience in high school that affected her leadership today:

> I [have already] told you about a former principal that I worked with that was [a] huge [impact on] my leadership, but you know we grow from the negative. On the positive end, I [got] into a little bit of trouble in high school, just a little bit. So, I was in the principal's office and I was [different then than I am now]; I would sit quiet and say yes mam, no sir, and [the principal] could [tell that about me]. So, he started telling a story and draws this squiggly line; it looked like a hill-up and down, it was a roller coaster. So, he starts talking about this roller coaster, sometimes it's down here, sometimes it's at the top, and everything is

great, and you're all excited about what's coming because you got the steep part of the roller coaster [ride approaching], but sometimes down at the bottom [it can be] scary. So, he kept going through … talking about life with this roller coaster. So that man, Mr. Dollard, he was my high school principal, [he showed] how much he cared about people, he was always supportive, always shaking hands, always around the building, being visible at all the events. To me, that is the person I guess I am aiming to be as a leader. Even sitting there, when I was in trouble, and I was going to get it … worse when I got home, but sitting with him, I knew I was in trouble, but I didn't feel trouble. Those are the two [experiences], because those [experiences] were … big deals in my life. I feel like [my high school principal and my former supervising principal] have really guided what I try to do; [I] just really try to identify the things that affect people positively.

Participant 5 described experiences from childhood that affected her leadership development. Participant 5 discussed the responsibility that she had as a child and how she had to become self-reliant:

I had an extraordinary childhood, weird childhood, which forced me … to be an adult sooner than I probably should have been, in the sense that I was responsible for my rearing. The things that were happening in my parent's life, not that they didn't love me …; they depended on me to be self-reliant and resilient to move past all the things that were happening. So, I had experiences with being self-reliant and being able to survive [at an early age]. I think that experience helped me to be more focused in what I wanted to do as a career, [and] helped me be more focused in where my strengths lie…. When you learn those skills to work

through adult situations, you have a much broader ability to speak to people that you might not be comfortable with, and get things done for yourself; I think that [my childhood experience] really helped me.

When the researcher asked Participant 6 to discuss an experience in his life that he feels has affected him as a leader, he explained,

I think 2016 and the election of our current president has had a profound impact on me and the way that I view leadership. [Being a leader, one must be cognizant of] the way that you interact with people and the way that you treat people. There are certain ways to … interact, and I feel like unfortunately, [the president] is lacking in certain areas. [That is] political, but I feel like [the president's style of leadership] tiers down to what we do for children in education. That's so important for us to lay a foundation for lifelong learning. As adults, we must set the example for what we want our youth to turn into, and [know] they are going to ultimately be citizens and productive people within our community. I hope … the way that I interact with people [in] a positive way, … allows others to want to be the same way.

Prior to ending all the interviews, the researcher thanked the participants and allowed all participants to add anything to the interview the participants felt was important that may add to the research topic. Participant 6 did not add any final comments; however, Participant 1 added,

I think that for people getting into the profession, you have to be who you are, you can't try to be like someone else. [It is fine] to pull out positive attributes from [others] and try to incorporate that into your [style], but you have to be [true to

who you are]. Also, you can learn some things from a book, but experience is the

best teacher.

Participant 2 said,

> The title of the research [is extremely important]. Unless you go through some
>
> type of experience, it's going to be very hard to develop leadership. I think you
>
> can have some natural things about you, like you can [speak] well, you [have
>
> good] time management, some of that [you are] born with, but I do think to
>
> become a good leader, you do have to go through some experiences, and I do
>
> think you have to go through some uncomfortable experiences.

Participant 3's final statement was,

> I think the best thing that I do is I just keep notes, I journal, and reflect on
>
> experiences that I go through. Being able to reflect on things helps me as I grow in
>
> leadership. Reflecting and keeping up with what happens in your life helps a great
>
> deal.

> The researcher asked Participant 4 if there was anything she would like to add

about the impact life experience or experiences have on leadership development, and

Participant 4 replied,

> I think it's vital for us to take those experiences, no matter where we came from,
>
> if we were super privileged, great, but have [an] understanding that [privilege] is
>
> what I'm coming from and understand that not everybody had [privilege]. So,
>
> before passing … judgment, and saying you know better…, [understand] some of
>
> us don't. Recognize biases that we have from our past experiences, … but then
>
> [ask yourself] how do we move around [those biases]? It's [by forming]

relationships, and that's what we are all created from are the relationships that we had, and those impact why we do what we do, and why we make the choices we make.

Participant 5 had final thoughts:

I think that life experiences don't necessarily always get credit they should. When you're looking at potential candidates or potential aptitude in [people, ask them about their life experiences], I know that those experiences sometimes are personal and not really things people … want to be forthcoming about, but I do think that it's worth giving them the option.

When the researcher asked Participant 6 for final comments, Participant 6 expressed gratitude for the interview but had no final comments.

Theme in participant responses to Question 5. Unlike previous participant responses, the data revealed that only five of the six participants had similar responses when participants elaborated on an experience in their life that has affected them as leaders. The common theme of the five participants was childhood/adolescent experiences (e.g., Participant 1, adolescent; Participant 2, adolescent; Participant 3, having children; Participant 4, adolescent; Participant 5, childhood; Participant 6, non-childhood/adolescent experience).

Summary of Emerging Themes

Based on participant responses to the interview questions, the researcher was able to transcribe and review the data in order to determine common themes. Five themes emerged. One common theme was authority figures; all six participants were inspired by authority figures (e.g., parent, teacher, coach, or supervisor). Second, all six participants

described negative experiences when discussing challenges or obstacles the participants encountered; therefore, the theme negative experience emerged. An additional noted theme was intellectual growth; all six participants had a negative experience that had a positive impact on their leadership development. In continuing to analyze the participant responses, the researcher determined two additional themes. All six participants responded that their key leadership development came from experiences rather than trainings or workshops; the theme of experiential learning emerged from the data. In determining the last theme, the researcher noticed five of the six participants interviewed responded that a childhood/adolescent experience affected them as leaders.

Table 7 reflects questions asked in the interview that ultimately determined the common response themes identified.

Table 7

Interview Questions and Noted Themes

Interview Questions	Common Participant Response-Theme
1. Who or what has been your greatest inspiration? Why?	Authority Figure-Parent/Teacher/Coach/Supervisor
2. Describe a time that you were faced with a challenge or a huge obstacle?	Negative Experience
3. How did you overcome the obstacle or challenge, and did it affect your leadership development in any way? If so, how?	Positive Impact/Intellectual Growth
4. As a leader, do you feel your key leadership development came more from life experiences or coursework, trainings, workshops etc.… Why?	Experiential Learning
5. Tell me about an experience in your life that you feel has affected you as a leader.	Childhood/Adolescent/Experience

Table 7 reflects the five questions asked during the interview and the common themes derived from the participant responses. Of the responses to Question 1, the theme of authority figures emerged: Four participants stated that a parent was their greatest inspiration, one participant said a former supervisor, and one participant said a former coach and supervisor were their greatest inspirations. According to the responses to Questions 2 and 3, negative experiences and positive impact/intellectual growth emerged; all six participants answered they experienced negative experiences, and all six participants were impacted positively and grew intellectually from those negative experiences. Also, the common participant theme reflected in Table 7 for Question 4 was experiential learning; all six participants unanimously agreed that their key leadership

development came more from life experience than coursework or trainings. Moreover, as noted in Table 7, the common theme for Question 5 was childhood/adolescent experience; only five participant responses of the six were childhood/adolescent experiences, and one participant described a non-childhood/adolescent experience. Ultimately, when the researcher reviewed the data, the researcher had the data needed to answer the research study question, "What life experience(s) impact leadership development?"

Summary

This chapter provided a description of findings for this qualitative study. In interviewing six participants, the researcher sought to study how select leaders' life experiences impacted their leadership development, identify common themes that influenced select leaders, and use the results to address the need for effective leadership in educational environments. The results of the qualitative data provided the framework needed to analyze and answer the research question. In Chapter 5, the final chapter, the researcher answers the research question; summarizes the findings and conclusions of the research study; makes recommendations for educational systems, companies, or organizations and recommendations for further research; and gives limitations to the study.

Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to address the problem of ineffective leadership by focusing on the impact life experiences have on leadership development. The researcher sought to study how select leaders' life experiences impacted their leadership development, identify common themes that influenced select leaders, and use the results to address the need for effective leadership in educational environments. Six educational leaders in a centrally located North Carolina school district participated in this study. The participants were interviewed and given the opportunity to tell their stories by discussing experiences in their lives that they feel impacted them as educational leaders. In this chapter, the researcher answers the research question, "What life experience(s) impact leadership development?"

In addition, this chapter summarizes the findings and conclusions; makes recommendations for educational systems, companies, or organizations and recommendations for further research; and gives limitations to the study.

Summary of Findings

In this study, educational leaders shared their experiences that have impacted their leadership development, and research revealed the benefits of those experiences. The research question sought to determine what life experience(s) impact leadership development. The researcher devised a personal leadership rating scale and five interview questions in order to draw better conclusions to the research study question. The findings and conclusions are presented based on the personal leadership response findings and the five common themes identified when the researcher interviewed the research participants and analyzed the data. There were four male participants and two

female participants. One participant was an elementary leader, one participant was a middle school leader, and four participants were high school leaders. The participants' leadership experience ranged from 4 to 18 years.

Findings related to personal leadership rating. The findings of the study did not reveal a common theme noted when the six participants were asked to rate their personal leadership on a scale of 1-10; however, data did determine the average personal leadership rating of all six participants was a 7 (6 the lowest and 8.5 the highest). Data revealed that there was no correlation between the participant's leadership position level (e.g., elementary, middle, high) and the years of experience, compared to how the participants rated their leadership. Data did however determine one small similarity with the female participants' leadership rating. Interestingly, of the two female participants, one had the most years and the other had the least years in leadership (18 years in leadership and 4 years in leadership), and their personal leadership rating was comparatively the same. There was no previous research in this study to support the findings in this area; however, participant response data suggested that personal leadership ratings can fluctuate depending on the job and that the personal ratings reflected the participants' desire to allow room for personal growth.

Findings related to the five emerged themes. The findings of this study determined five themes were prevalent when participants were interviewed regarding the impact life experiences had on their leadership. The five themes are presented in the order of how the themes emerged during the analysis of research. Data reflected the emergence of the themes, authority figures, negative experiences, intellectual growth, experiential learning, and childhood/adolescent experiences. Apart from the themes

negative experience and childhood/adolescent experiences, data reflected themes were

consistent among all six participants regarding gender, years of experience, and

leadership levels. Table 8 reflects the study's findings and supporting research.

Table 8

Findings of Study Supported by Research

Findings	Supporting Research
1. Findings determined the consistency of the theme authority figures as a factor in impacting leadership.	Bandura (1977), Krisbergh (2019), McCall (2010)
2. Findings in this study determined consistency of the theme negative experiences as a factor that increases a leader's capacity.	Shamir et al. (2005), Kouzes and Posner (2002, 2006), Ark (2015)
3. Findings determined the consistency of the theme intellectual growth, and data indicate learning from past experiences promotes intellectual growth.	Shamir et al. (2005), Meers (2009), Parks (2005)
4. Findings determined the consistency of the theme experiential learning and data concluded that experiential learning better prepared the participants in this study for their leadership roles.	Ambler (2012), Avolio and Gardner (2005), McCall (2004, 2010)
5. Findings determined the consistency of the theme childhood/adolescent experiences as factors that impacted five of the six leaders' leadership development.	Krisbergh (2019), Goleman (1995), Meers (2009)
Unintentional findings determined in this study:	
6. Findings determined with two of the six participants that age and gender are influences regarding advancement in leadership.	Not supported by research in this study
7. Findings determined in five of six participants that recognition and support are valued and needed throughout a leader's career.	Kouzes and Posner (2002, 2006), and Ark (2015)

Theme 1: Authority figures. Findings as reflected in Table 8 determined the consistency of the theme authority figures as a factor impacting the participants' leadership. Research supports the thematic significance of the data that authority figures add depth to human development and life experiences (Bandura, 1977; Krisbergh, 2019). Data determined that participants' experiences were consistent with the theme because all participants' leadership was impacted by persons of authority during childhood/ adolescent years and adulthood. Literature supports the data that our experiences in life impact our leadership development and that parents, teachers, and leaders are examples of people who are influential in human development (Bandura, 1977; Krisbergh, 2019; McCall, 2010). Bandura (1977) noted that people learn from one another whether it be learned behavior from observation or modeled behavior, and ultimately the behavior becomes motivation or environmental influence.

Theme 2: Negative experience. More findings determined consistency of the theme negative experiences as a factor that increases a leader's capacity, and research supports the data. Shamir et al. (2005) found that a leader's leadership capacity increases based on difficult experiences the leader encounters. Kouzes and Posner (2002) agreed. Kouzes and Posner (2002) believed that challenges help leaders know who they are; and in the study, all six participants suggested that they became better leaders through the negative experiences. Although data determined the consistency of the theme negative experience, data determined additional inconsistent themes among participants. Though not supported by research in this study, data determined two correlations between two female high school leaders. Data determined age and gender are influences regarding advancement in leadership. Also, data supported by research

determined in five of the six participants that recognition and support are valued and

needed throughout a leader's career. Kouzes and Posner (2002, 2006) and Ark (2015)

believed that there is a human need to be appreciated and acknowledged for who we are

and our efforts and that inspiration is key to great leadership. In addition to gender and

age as factors with two participants regarding advancement in leadership, data

determined that there was no correlation between the participant's gender, leadership

position level (e.g., elementary, middle, high), and the years of experience regarding

additional found data as it relates to the value of recognition and support needed

throughout a leader's career.

Theme 3: Intellectual growth. Findings determined the consistency of the

theme intellectual growth, and data are supported by research that indicates learning from

past experiences promotes intellectual growth. Based on Shamir et al.'s (2005) research,

learning from experience is important for personal growth; and according to Meers

(2009), learning from personal experiences and reflection has become a part of some

executive leadership education programs. Meers noted that one of the best known

instructors in the field of leadership is Ronald Heifetz of the Kennedy School of

Government at Harvard University; Heifetz developed and uses extensively in his courses

the methodology that students bring their experiences to class and become their own case

studies (Meers, 2009; Parks, 2005). Allowing those student leaders to share and reflect

on their most significant successes and failures enables the student leaders to extract

meaning from their experiences and utilize this learning for future use (Meers, 2009;

Parks, 2005).

Theme 4: Experiential learning. Furthermore, findings in this study determined the consistency of the theme experiential learning, and data determined that experiential learning better prepared leaders for their leadership roles. Data are supported by research that experiential learning is the best way to develop any leader's capabilities. Ambler (2012) believed that leadership development is not only gained through a set stage or program but through experiences in one's life. Additionally, Avolio and Gardner (2005) discussed developing leaders authentically by focusing on the environment and organizational conditions that promote lifelong learning, and Avolio and Gardner further disagreed with the idea that leadership development can be achieved through a discrete program. Moreover, McCall (2004, 2010) was adamant with the belief that experiential learning is the best way to develop a leader's capabilities. McCall (2010) explained that the ideology of experiential learning should be put into practice more often. McCall (2010) further ascertained that organizations should integrate situational/experiential learning into everyday business practices.

Theme 5: Childhood/adolescent experience. Further findings determined the consistency of the theme childhood/adolescent experiences among five of the six participants. Data determined there was no direct correlation regarding the theme as it pertains to five of the six participants' gender, years of experience, and leadership levels. Additional findings are supported by research that childhood/adolescent experiences are factors that impact leadership development. Krisbergh (2019) noted that figures in our lives who are influential add depth to human development and our life experiences; and according to Goleman (1995), it is important for leaders to have a good understanding of the different types of emotional intelligence such as self-awareness, social awareness, and

social management. Based on the understanding of the different types of emotional intelligences, the way leaders internalize their experiences may make a difference in how a leader interacts in his/her environment (Meers, 2009). Furthermore, it was noted the common theme prevalent with five participants was childhood/adolescent experiences, but all six participants discussed experiences that have impacted their leadership, and all six participants expressed an awareness of how those experiences impacted them.

Conclusions

The goal of this qualitative study was to examine how life experience impacts leadership development. During the study, the researcher used purposeful sampling to select 10 educational leaders (principals) from a centrally located North Carolina school district. Although, the researcher contacted 10 participants for the study, six participants agreed to be interviewed and have their data used for the study. There were four male participants and two female participants. One participant was an elementary leader, one participant was a middle school leader, and four participants were high school leaders. The participants' leadership experience ranged from 4 to 18 years. Using a qualitative research design, the researcher was able to question and interview the participants to better capture the stories and experiences that impacted the participants' leadership development. The researcher devised five interview questions in order to draw better conclusions to the research study question, "what life experience(s) impact leadership development?" Upon review of the six participants' responses, five common themes emerged, and the researcher had the data needed to answer the research question. Research supported the data that concluded life experiences are vital to leadership development; and life experiences, particularly experiences that one may consider

difficult, promote intellectual growth (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Shamir et al., 2005).

Experiences' impact on leadership development. As a result of this study, the researcher was able to draw conclusions that paint a written picture of the participants and further explain what their experiences meant to their leadership development. The researcher found that during the interview process, many of the participant responses mirrored that of research. For instance, participants in this study were all inspired by people who played key roles in their past. The participants credited those people for who they are as educational leaders, further supporting the findings of Kouzes and Posner (2002) that inspiration is key to great leadership. Krisbergh (2019) noted that figures in our lives who are influential add depth to human development and our life experiences, and Kouzes and Posner (2002) suggested that a leader who models the way uses his/her voice to share their unique vision rather than the ideas or vision of others; these leaders demonstrate a strong work ethic while modeling a commitment to mission, vision, and goals; they set good examples for others. Furthermore, through the participants sharing their stories, the participants were able to reminisce on challenging circumstances; and those experiences revealed uncertainty for the participants, but the obstacles or challenges allowed the participants to learn and grow. Interestingly, research notes that challenges bring out the best in leaders. For example, through Kouzes and Posner's (2002) research, it was discovered that when one is asked about what one considers their personal best, one automatically thinks of a challenge. Furthermore, Kouzes and Posner (2002) believed that experiencing challenges is helpful for leaders, because challenges help leaders become more aware of who they are as leaders. Participants in the study expressed that their challenges did strengthen their leadership; but during the time of the

challenge, it was difficult. To overcome the obstacle, some participants said they worked through the challenge by reinforcement from others, and other participants said they got through their obstacle by personal reflection. This researcher believes that to overcome any obstacle or challenge, one must have adequate support and a level of self-awareness to reflect on the experience. According to Goleman (1995), it is important for leaders to have a good understanding of the different types of emotional intelligence such as self-awareness, social awareness, and social management. Based on that understanding, the way leaders internalize their experiences makes a difference in how they respond. Ambler (2012) noted that our "life experiences and our response to them are of critical importance in how leaders are formed and the kind of leaders we become" (para. 6). Furthermore, Ambler continued by suggesting that leaders should be mindful of how they respond to life experiences; he implied responding well to a bad experience leads to learning and growth. Shamir et al. (2005) agreed. Based on Shamir et al.'s research, learning from experience is important for personal growth.

The data from this study correlated with research that our life experiences help shape our morals and values; and as a leader, the same morals and values ultimately define one's leadership and how one leads (Ambler, 2012; Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Bennis, 2003). All participants in this study discussed the impact of past experiences affecting them as leaders; whether it be inspirations that affected their style of leadership or difficult situations that improved their leadership development, those experiences impacted who they are and made a positive difference in their development as a leader. Therefore, data were consistent with Shamier et al.'s (2005) research that it is important for leaders to understand the impact of experiences and take time to reflect and embrace

experiences, whether they are good or bad, and use the experiences to enhance their

leadership. Also, based on the data from this study, experiencing some misfortunes in

life may catapult a leader into better leadership (Goleman, 1995; Kouzes & Posner,

2002).

Experiences' impact on the educational setting. Consequently, like the

researcher, all the participants in the study are proponents for experiential learning. The

researcher found that when all participants were asked if they felt their key leadership

development came more from life experiences or coursework, trainings, workshops, etc.,

the participants unanimously said their life experiences. To gain a better understanding

of the participants' unanimous answer, one must understand the role of an educational

leader and the impact their role has in an educational setting.

Research emphasizes the importance of effective school leadership to improve

outcomes (Hechinger Report, 2011). Branch et al. (2013) concurred; the authors believed

that the key to a successful school is an effective leader. Moreover, Wahlstrom and

Louis (2008) described the leadership of the principal as a key factor in the support of

student achievement. Additional research concurs. Gareis and Tschannen-Moran (2004)

stated that "good principals are at the center of good schools and that without good

principal's leadership, schools cannot succeed" (p. 573). Furthermore, Branch et al.

provided additional evidence on the importance of school leadership as it relates to

student achievement. Branch et al. indicated that highly effective leaders raise the

achievement level; however, educational leaders who are ineffective lower achievement.

Therefore, the role of an educational leader is very important to student achievement, and

it is equally important for educational leaders to receive effective leadership

development. Research suggests that experiential learning is the best way to develop true

leadership capability (McCall, 2004, 2010).

As previously noted, McCall (2010) explained that the ideology of experiential

learning should be put into practice more often. Interestingly, Avolio and Gardner (2005)

noted that one's life experience impacts leadership development and our environment

promotes lifelong learning. Avolio and Gardner adamantly agreed that leadership

development cannot be achieved through a set program. Shamir et al. (2005) even

suggested that one's life story or experiences provide the major source of information

that is used to base judgments.

Additionally, the researcher found further support of the research through

responses given by the educational leaders used in the study. For instance, although the

participants' years in educational leadership ranged from 4 to 18 years, the participants

share similar life experiences. The participants suggested that those life experiences

helped mold them into the educational leaders they are today. The researcher was

intrigued by all experiences and stories shared and could personally relate to many of the

stories. Three of the six participants discussed unfair treatment in their leadership where

their value may have been overlooked or discounted. Participants 2, 4, and 5 discussed

the impact that those experiences had on their leadership. Five of six participants

discussed children, childhood, or adolescent experiences that strengthened their

leadership. Participant 4 discussed growing up in a single parent household, being the

oldest of four, seeing her mom work multiple jobs while putting herself through school,

and still being able to care for her siblings and her. Participant 4 suggested those

experiences stay with you and affect the way she leads. Comparatively, Participant 5

discussed the responsibilities that she had as a child and how she had to become self-reliant very young. Participant 5 credits those childhood experiences to her strength in leadership today. Moreover, Participant 3 discussed how his childhood experiences watching his father impact his role as a school principal and noted that experiencing fatherhood himself made him a better leader; he tries to model a standard for the staff and students. Furthermore, based on the data, the researcher agrees with other research that there is power in sharing life experiences and that experiences create the core values needed for one to be an effective authentic leader (Eriksen, 2009; Meers, 2009). Meers (2009) commented on the importance of a leader's life experiences and how those experiences can not only impact the leader but can also influence others:

> Leaders also are seen as the managers of meaning and one powerful way a leader can shape meaning is to utilize the power of stories, often their own. These stories can provide avenues for communicating a vision or an inspiring message that will in turn influence followers to strive harder or align more with the stated vision, etc. of the leader. The final argument put forth by the researchers for the importance of leaders" life-stories is that often these stories help shape the self-perception of the leaders. By relating stories in which the leader demonstrated leadership traits or abilities, the leader not only influences followers to view them as a leader but in turn promotes their own self confidence in their leadership ability. (p. 27)

In addition to the participants sharing experiences that affected them as leaders, some of the participants gave final comments on life experiences that impact leadership development. From those final comments, the researcher found more validation of the

importance of experiential leaning: McCall's (2004, 2010) belief that experiential

learning is the best way to develop a leader's capabilities; and Shamir et al.'s (2005)

suggestion that leadership, specifically authentic leadership, rests on the meanings that a

leader attaches to his or her life experiences.

Furthermore, based on the study's findings, McCall's (2010) ideology of

experiential learning should be put into practice more often. Educational environments

should use staff development opportunities for experiential learning. For example, more

staff development workshops should be designed that emphasize sharing best practices

by sharing life experiences. Sometimes one can work years with someone and never

share life experiences that have impacted them. Based on the findings of the study, if

districts or companies create or develop more workshops surrounding sharing life

experiences, it would increase the capacity of employees by motivating others to be better

(Eriksen, 2009; Meers, 2009). Also, if educational districts use experiential learning and

equity to truly see a leader's leadership capability, the need for effective leadership will

be addressed because "good principals are at the center of good schools … without [a]

good principal's leadership, schools cannot succeed" (Gareis & Tschannen-Moran, 2004,

p. 573).

Concluding statement. In summary, findings in the study are consistent with

research that our "life experiences and our response to them are of critical importance in

how leaders are formed and the kind of leaders we become" (Ambler, 2012, para. 6). In

researching the topic and interviewing educational leaders, the researcher sought to study

how select leaders' life experiences impacted their leadership development. Educational

leaders shared stories of their experiences that have impacted their leadership

development, and the data revealed the benefits of those experiences. Research by McCall (2004, 2010) suggested that experiential learning is the best way to develop true leadership capability which is consistent with the findings in this study. Based on the data, the research agrees that experiential learning or experiencing an impactful circumstance is the best way to develop a leader.

Moreover, our life experiences help shape our morals and values; and as leaders, the same morals and values ultimately define one's leadership (Ambler, 2012; Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Bennis, 2003). Additionally, for leaders to overcome difficult experiences, leaders should take time to reflect, embrace the experiences, and use experiences to enhance their leadership, because experiencing some misfortunes in life catapults you into better leadership (Goleman, 1995). Therefore, as a result of the data, it was determined and concluded that life experiences are vital to leadership development; because life experiences, particularly experiences one may consider difficult, promote intellectual growth (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Shamir et al., 2005).

Recommendations for Educational Systems, Companies, or Organizations

As a result of this research, educational systems seeking effective leaders may find this study beneficial to the process of seeking and developing leaders. Educational systems can use the information for leadership positions ranging from support staff, to teachers, to administrators on all levels. Moreover, companies and organizations may find the information useful for any potential leadership positions.

It is recommended that during the interview process, educational districts, companies, and/or organizations seeking quality leadership candidates give candidates the opportunity to discuss a life experience that impacted their leadership. In listening to

the experience, a potential employer could determine if the candidate is the right candidate for the position. One could obtain more information from that one question than from asking several questions. Eriksen (2009) and Meers (2009) both commented on the importance of a leader's life experience and how those experiences can not only impact the leader but also influence the lives of the people they are around. Furthermore, giving a candidate the opportunity to discuss an experience that may not necessarily pertain directly to a former employment position allows the potential employer to see the candidate for more than just former titles or positions held. Also, providing the candidate the opportunity to discuss experiences allows the potential employer the opportunity to see a candidate's morals and values, because our life experiences help shape our morals and values; and as a leader, the same morals and values ultimately define one's leadership and how one leads (Ambler, 2012; Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Bennis, 2003). Additionally, by allowing leadership candidates the opportunity to discuss a life experience that impacted them, it opens the door for a candidate to discuss an experience involving a challenge or obstacle. From the discussion, the potential employer may be able to better evaluate the candidate's leadership capacity. Shamir et al. (2005) believed that some leaders' leadership capacity increases based on difficult experiences the leader encounters.

Based on this study, it is also recommended that educational districts, companies, and/or organizations use equity in recommending or hiring leadership positions. During this study, participants discussed experiences where equity was not used. It is important for educational districts to be fair, just, and impartial. The goal of most educational districts is to increase student achievement. Research suggests one way to improve

student achievement is through school leadership. Branch et al.'s (2013) research

provides new evidence on the importance of school leadership as it pertains to student

achievement; their study indicated that highly effective leaders raise achievement levels.

Gareis and Tschannen-Moran (2004) stated that "good principals are at the center of good

schools and that without good principal's leadership, schools cannot succeed" (p. 573).

Furthermore, Helms (2012) and Kouzes and Posner (2002) agreed that good principals

are key for schools in raising student achievement. For instance, Helms sided with the

belief of Kouzes and Posner (2002) that "leaders make it possible for others to do good

work" (p. 35). So, as educational systems seek to raise student achievement, it is

important that the right leadership candidate be selected. Collins (2001) used the analogy

of a bus to describe organizations and companies selecting the right candidates for

leadership positions. Collins explained,

> First if you begin with who rather than what, you can more easily adapt to a
>
> changing world. If people join the bus primarily because of where it is going,
>
> what happens if you get ten miles down the road and you need to change
>
> direction? You've got a problem, but if people are on the bus because of who else
>
> is on the bus, then it is much easier to change direction … if we have to change
>
> direction to be more successful, then fine with me. Second, if you have the right
>
> people on the bus, the problem of how to motivate … goes away. The right
>
> people don't need to be tightly managed or fired up; they will be self-motivated
>
> by the inner drive to produce the best results.… Third, if you have the wrong
>
> people, it doesn't matter whether you discover the right direction; you still won't
>
> have a great company. (p. 42)

Therefore, as educational systems seek to raise student achievement and improve schools, it is important for the right candidates to be placed in leadership positions and for educational systems to use equity in recommending and hiring leadership positions (Ark 2015; Collins, 2001; Novak, 2018).

Furthermore, it is recommended that educational districts, companies, and/or organizations incorporate experiential learning opportunities. McCall (2010) suggested that organizations should integrate situational/experiential learning into everyday business practices. It is suggested that universities incorporate experiential learning practices into their education programs as they prepare future leaders. For instance, one of the best known instructors in the field of leadership is Ronald Heifetz of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University; he developed and uses extensively in his courses the methodology that students bring their experiences to class and become their own case studies (Meers, 2009; Parks, 2005). Allowing those student leaders to share and reflect on their most significant leadership successes and failures enables the student leaders to extract meaning from their experiences and utilize this learning for future use (Meers, 2009; Parks, 2005). It is also suggested that educational districts, companies, and/or organizations create staff development that focuses on the importance of experiential learning. For instance, organizations should create staff development opportunities that emphasize leaders discussing best practices by sharing life stories or experiences that have impacted their leadership. Meers (2009) ascertained the importance of a leader sharing his/her life experience:

> Leaders also are seen as the managers of meaning and one powerful way a leader
> can shape meaning is to utilize the power of stories, often their own. These

stories can provide avenues for communicating a vision or an inspiring message

that will in turn influence followers to strive harder or align more with the stated

vision. (p. 27)

Through sharing the stories or experiences, the leader not only influences others, but the

professional learning experience serves as self-reflection that helps promote the leaders'

self-confidence in their own leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; McCall, 2010; Meers,

2009).

In this study, participants discussed times in their leadership when their

confidence was broken that impacted them as leaders. Based on the data, it is further

recommended that educational districts improve their support programs they have for

educational leaders. For example, some educational districts may have mentoring

programs for principals or employee assistance programs that may benefit employees.

Districts should offer continued support for principals throughout their principalships.

Some programs are designed to only assist principals as they begin their leadership roles

(e.g., being assigned a temporary mentor); other programs may be available to assist

leaders during a one-time occurrence or have limited use (e.g., employee assistance

program that may be available on one or two occurrences). It is important for leaders to

know that they are continually valued and supported; therefore, districts should have

mentoring and employee assistant programs that are continuous throughout one's career.

Goewey (2012) noted that good leaders use their power and energy to motivate and

inspire others: "They work long hours and sometimes endure personal sacrifice to inspire

those around them" (p. 35). Leaders need to feel acknowledged, appreciated, and

supported. Kouzes and Posner (2002, 2006) and Ark (2015) believed that there is a

human need to be appreciated and acknowledged for who we are and our efforts and that inspiration is key to great leadership. Schilder (2018) suggested that encouragement goes very far when keeping people motivated and it is a very powerful impalpable reward. Schilder added that some may think that high functioning people may not need encouragement; this is wrong – "everyone needs encouragement and recognition" (para. 2). Kouzes and Posner (1995) and Al-Baradie (2014) found that employers who treated employees with kindness, respect, and fairness received much better performance. Furthermore, it is recommended that in conjunction with a continuous mentoring program for principals, districts should create anonymous climate surveys specifically designed for the educational leaders to rate their experiences with their mentors and rate their overall experiences within their districts. Research in this study does not address the benefits of companies or organizations using surveys; however, the use of anonymous surveys will not only improve the climate and culture of a district, but anonymous climate surveys specifically designed for employees in leadership roles will allow districts to get a more accurate reflection of the needs and the experiences of the educational leaders.

Last, based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that school districts work collaboratively within the school's community and within their schools to continuously offer mentoring programs that benefit the student population. Data from this study suggest that authority figures add depth to human development and life experiences. Krisbergh (2019) suggested that parents, coaches, teachers, and leaders are examples of figures who are influential in human development. Bandura (1977) noted that people learn from one another whether it be learned behavior from observation or

modeled behavior, and ultimately the behavior becomes motivation or environmental influence. So, as educational districts strive to increase graduation rates and improve student achievement, educational districts should ensure that schools have continuous, clearly communicated mentoring programs available for their student populations.

Recommendations for Further Research

In this study, educational leaders shared stories of their experiences that have impacted their leadership development, and research revealed the benefits of those experiences (Ambler, 2012). McCall (2004, 2010) suggested that experiential learning is the best way to develop true leadership capability. The findings of this study support the research that experiential learning or experiencing an impactful circumstance is the best way to develop a leader; to address the need for effective leaders, companies or organizations should use research-based leadership development as a basis to seek and develop employees (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Shamir et al., 2005); however, based on the limited studies on experiences that impact leadership development, there is a need for further research in this area. This study had a limited scope of six participants in a central North Carolina school district. To further advance the topic, other researchers should investigate experiences that impact a larger population. Investigating life experiences that impact larger populations of leaders may further validate the research that life experience or experiential learning is important for one's leadership development (Shamir et al., 2005). Also, the six participants for this study were elementary, middle, and high school leaders who range in years of leadership experience. It would be interesting to see a similar study that focuses on an elementary leader's life experience compared to that of a middle or high school leader's life experience or studies pertaining

to the impact one's gender or age has on leadership development. Other researchers may want to focus specifically on beginning leaders' life experiences compared to those of one who is more experienced to see how those experiences affected their leadership. Those studies may prove insightful and yield more results. Furthermore, the researcher hopes that through previous studies including Meers (2009), Shamir et al. (2005), and this current study, more information on experiences that impact leadership development will be available, additional research will be conducted on life experiences impacting leadership, and the results will bring awareness to the importance of leadership development through experiential learning.

Limitations

A limitation of this study was that more research was apparent on developing effective leaders through a set program, and extensive research existed on characteristics of effective leaders, rather than the deficiency in research on life experiences that impact leadership development. Although it has been noted in this study that some authors believe that life experiences do play a pivotal role in the authenticity and effectiveness of a leader, few studies were found. One of the studies found was a study completed by Meers (2009). Meers completed a study on how effective leaders learn from life. Meers experienced some challenges in completing his study. Like Meers, the researcher experienced some challenges as well. For instance, there were many impactful experiences shared by leaders that varied in nature. The researcher was concerned about the variation of experiences and thought it to be a challenge in determining common themes. Throughout the research process, all participants ultimately disclosed specific life experiences that changed who they have become as educational leaders, and the

researcher determined common trends in the life experience or life experiences of the educational leaders. Another limitation was that only six participants participated in this study. The limited number of participants limited the scope of research. It would be interesting to see this same study in a larger population to see if larger studies would yield similar results. Moreover, a final limitation was the researcher had a professional relationship with the participants which may have limited their candor in discussing certain life experiences. However, the leaders mentioned in this study suggested that life experiences changed them as leaders, which is supported by research. Ambler (2012) suggested in referencing Warren Bennis's (2003) book *On Becoming a Leader* that "leaders, whatever their field, are made up as much of their experiences as their skills" (para. 7) and that leaders use their experiences rather than being used by them.

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Appendix A

School District Permission to Conduct Research

01/30/2019

RE: **Project No.** ▉▉

Dear Tawyna Daniels:

Your request to conduct research in the ▉▉▉▉▉▉ Public School System has been approved. We wish you well in conducting your study, "The Impact Life Experience Has on Leadership Development."

Please share this approval letter with school staff as you request their participation. **They will make the final decision about whether to participate**.

Refer to your project number ▉▉▉▉ in further correspondence with us. We look forward to learning your results.

Please remember to send us a status report by August of each year (specifying whether you have completed data collection and when results will be available) AND a summary of your findings once the project is complete.

Let us know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

▉▉▉▉▉▉

▉▉▉▉▉▉

Performance Assessment Specialist
Data, Research and Accountability

▉▉▉▉▉▉

Appendix B

Invitation/Participant Consent Form

Gardner-Webb University IRB

Informed Consent Form

Title of Study
The Impact Life Experience has on Leadership Development

Researcher
Tawyna Daniels, Researcher, Gardner-Webb University Education Department

Purpose
The purpose of the research study is look closely at the impact life experience has on Leadership Development

Procedure

What you will do in the study:
The researcher will conduct an initial audio-recorded 20-30-minute interview. The interview will allow you (the participant) to discuss a life experience that has affected your (the participant) leadership development. One to two subsequent interviews should follow the initial interview to allow you (the participant) to further expand on life experiences that have impacted your leadership development. All interviews will occur within a 4 to 6-week period. You may skip any question or questions that you are not comfortable answering and you may withdraw participation at any time.

Time Required
It is anticipated that the study will require about__20-30__ minutes of your time per session. Two to three sessions are needed. The sessions will occur over a four to six-week period

Voluntary Participation
Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the research study at any time without penalty. You also have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason without penalty. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identified state.

Confidentiality
Information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your information will be assigned a *code number*. The list connecting your name to this code will be kept in a *locked file.* When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, this list will be destroyed. Your name will not be used in any report.

Anonymous Data
The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your data will
be anonymous which means your name will not be collected or linked to the data.

Risks
There is no known risk in this study.

Benefits
There are no direct benefits associated with participation in this study. The study may
help the researcher understand how life experiences may impact leadership development.
It is your choice whether to participate, you may also withdraw at any time without
affecting your relationship with the school or the researcher. The Institutional Review
Board at Gardner-Webb University has determined that participation in this study poses
minimal risk to participants.

Payment
You will receive no payment for participating in the study

Right to Withdraw from the Study
You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you choose
to withdraw from the study, your audio (or video) tape will be destroyed.

How to Withdraw from the Study:
- If you want to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher directly via
  email or by phone at ████████████████████████ or ████████████. If you
  choose to withdraw from the study during the interview sessions, please leave the
  room" or "tell the interviewer to stop the interview". There is no penalty for
  withdrawing.
- If you would like to withdraw after your materials have been submitted, please
  contact
  The researcher at ████████████ and ██████████████████████

If you have questions about the study, contact the following individuals.

Researcher's Name: Tawyna Daniels,
Education Department
Gardner-Webb University
Boiling Springs, NC 28017
Researcher Telephone Number: ████████████
Researcher Email Address: ██████████████████████

Faculty Advisor Name: ██████████████, ████████████████
Department: Education
Gardner-Webb University

Boiling Springs, NC 28017
Faculty Advisor Telephone Number ████████████
Faculty Advisor Email Address: ████████████████

If the research design of the study necessitates that its full scope is not explained prior to participation, it will be explained to you after completion of the study. If you have concerns about your rights or how you are being treated, or if you have questions, want more information, or have suggestions, please contact:

Dr. ████████████
Chair of the IRB
Gardner-Webb University
Boiling Springs, NC 28017
Telephone: ████████
Email: ████████████████

Voluntary Consent by Participant

I have read the information in this consent form and fully understand the contents of this document. I have had a chance to ask any questions concerning this study and they have been answered for me.

_____   I agree to participate in the interview session(s). I understand that this interview may be audio recorded for purposes of accuracy. The audio recording will be transcribed and destroyed.

_____   I do not agree to participate in the interview session(s)

_____   Date: _____

Participant Printed Name

_____   Date: _____

Participant Signature

You will receive a copy of this form for your records