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Teachers' Experiences of a District's Transformational Leadership Design Program:

A Qualitative Study

A Dissertation by

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Chapman University

Orange, CA

Donna Ford Attallah College of Educational Studies

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Education Leadership Studies

January 2021

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kris De Pedro".

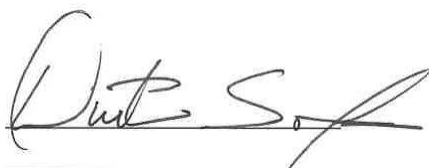
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Kris De Pedro, Ph.D., Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Whitney McIntyre Miller".

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Whitney McIntyre Miller, Ph.D.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dustin Saxton".

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Dustin Saxton, Ph.D.

January 2021

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A Qualitative Study

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It has been challenging but adventurous in pursuing my doctoral degree while working full time as a high school science teacher and completing the administrative credential program at Orange County Department of Education at the same time. As often, life throws you a curveball when least expected. Trying to finish up the paper and defense my dissertation study in the midst of the COVID pandemic was the third strike waiting to happen. The tension has been high in my personal and professional life with school closure, distance learning, and the school re-opening controversies.

Firstly, I want to share my sincere gratitude to the committee members, Dr. Pedro, Dr. McIntyre Miller, and Dr. Saxton. They have been supportive and caring for not only the academic but also the social-emotional needs of mine. Particularly, I want to thank my chair, Dr. Pedro, who guides me through this journey every step of the way and, most importantly, inspires me to become a better teacher and educational leader. I also owe a substantial debt of gratitude to an exceptional lady in my life, my mother, who raised me single-handedly with all her heart and soul, who gave me strength when I was weak and gave me hope when I was most desperate. My dearest mother, this one is for you. I love you, mom.

## ABSTRACT

Teachers' Experiences of a District's Transformational Leadership Design Program:

A Qualitative Study

by Jarit M. Unrau

Facing the rapidly changing 21<sup>st</sup>-century education, educational organizations strive for innovative ideas to continuously motivate their teachers to enhance student performance. iLead is a district's pioneering attempt to incorporate transformational leadership's essential elements, the four I's, *Inspirational Motivation*, *Idealized Influence*, *Intellectual Stimulation*, and *Individualized Consideration*, into its program design and implementation to develop a collaborative learning culture through teacher motivation and the focus on improving student achievement. The iLead program has drawn statewide attention by winning the 2020 California Golden Bell Awards recently. The annual awards promote excellence in education and recognize prominent California schools' and districts' programs and exemplary practices which respond to the evolving needs to improve student learning.

The purpose of the dissertation research is to explore the iLead teachers' experiences and identify their successes and challenges in becoming transformational leaders to support teaching and learning in 21<sup>st</sup>-century classrooms. It is an evaluation study using grounded theory methods. The grounded theory approach was utilized in the qualitative study to investigate the interview transcripts of iLead teachers and coaches provided by the district officials. The data analysis indicated the emergence of the four major themes: *the impetus of needs*, *the empowerment of collective autonomy and serendipity*, *the invincible coaching support*, and *the focus of progressive learning in the making of 21<sup>st</sup>-century leaders*. An impetus leadership model grounded on the above four themes was emanated through the iLead teachers' experiences. The

findings imply successes in continuity and sustainability by adopting a systemic organizational approach based on the four I's with a meaningful achievement accountability emphasis on progressive learning instead of the achievement outcomes to overcome the challenges in the incessantly accelerating 21<sup>st</sup>-century education.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	IV
ABSTRACT.....	V
LIST OF TABLES .....	X
LIST OF FIGURES .....	XI
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Background.....	2
Recent Educational Policy Change.....	3
NCLB.....	4
ESSA.....	4
State Assessments.....	5
Educational Problem.....	6
iLead Program Study .....	7
About the iLead program.....	7
Essential Transformational Leadership Terms .....	9
Significance and Summary .....	10
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	13
Introduction.....	13
Method .....	14
Theoretical Framework of Transformational Leadership.....	14
Definition of Transformational Leadership .....	15
Major Components of Transformational Leadership.....	15
Inspirational Motivation.....	16
Idealized Influence.....	18
Intellectual Stimulation.....	18
Individualized Consideration.....	19
Empirical Studies of Transformational Leadership .....	21
Transformational Leadership in 21 <sup>st</sup> -Century Education and Teacher Preparation.....	21
Transformational Leadership for Teacher Motivation.....	25
Transformational Leadership for Student Achievement.....	28
Research Gap .....	29
Conclusion .....	31
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY .....	33
Introduction.....	33
Purpose.....	34
Research Design.....	35
Dissertation Research Design .....	36
Future Possibility .....	38



Research Questions .....	38
Setting .....	39
Instrumentation .....	41
Data Collection .....	42
Data Analysis .....	42
Limitations .....	44
Access and Role .....	46
Reciprocity, Trust, and Rapport.....	47
Trustworthiness and Credibility.....	49
Validation.....	50
Democratic Validity.....	50
Outcome Validity.....	50
Process Validity .....	51
Catalytic Validity .....	52
Dialogic Validity.....	52
Expected Findings.....	53
Ethical Considerations .....	53
Summary.....	54
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS .....	56
Introduction.....	56
Sample Descriptions and Findings.....	57
Description of Sample.....	58
Findings through Grounded Theory Methodology with Nvivo.....	60
Themes.....	61
The Impetus of Needs .....	64
Disequilibrium of the Basic Needs for 21st Century Education.....	64
From Deficiency Needs to Growth Needs for Continuous Motivation .....	67
The Empowerment of Collective Autonomy and Serendipity.....	71
Designed Program for Teacher Empowerment.....	71
A Clear Shared Vision .....	72
Empowerment and Teacher Autonomy .....	73
Empowerment with Accountability for Collective Serendipity.....	75
Reflective Coaching Model with Collaboration and Self-Accountability.....	78
Reflective Progress Monitoring Coaching Model .....	78
Collective Autonomy and Collaboration .....	81
Collective Serendipity of Self-Accountability.....	85
The Invincible Coaching Support .....	87
Soft Skills for Individualized Support through Relationship Building.....	89
Individualized Consideration through a Responsive, Non- Judgmental Active Involvement .....	90
Inspirational Influence to Achieve Fulfillment and Shared Successes.....	94
Hard Skills of Best Practices through Data-Driven Decision Making Process .....	96
The Cycle of Effective Instruction.....	97

Time and Opportunities for Collaboration.....	99
The Focus on Progressive Learning in the Making of 21 <sup>st</sup> Century Leaders.....	103
Leadership Qualities .....	104
Communication and Collaboration .....	105
Creativity and Critical Thinking .....	107
Pathway of Building Leaders.....	110
Reflective Learning Pathway through Problem-Solving .....	111
Perseverance and Resilience of 21 <sup>st</sup> Century Leaders .....	113
Summary .....	116
Gains .....	117
Challenges in Bureaucracy, Competency, and Time .....	121
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION .....	125
Introduction.....	125
Summary and Discussion.....	126
A Systemic Organizational Approach .....	127
The Impetus Leadership Model .....	129
Motivation and Empowerment .....	131
Support and 21 <sup>st</sup> - Century Skills .....	133
Implications for Theory and Research .....	133
Four I's.....	134
Teacher Motivation and Student Achievement in 21 <sup>st</sup> -Century Education .....	136
Implications for Practices .....	137
Systematic Organizational Process for Continuity and Sustainability .....	137
Focus on Learning Growth as a Meaningful Accountability Approach.....	138
Limitations .....	140
Research Method Constraints .....	140
Organizational Influence.....	142
Recommendations for Future Research .....	143
iLead Multi-Year Research and Student Achievement Outcomes .....	143
iLead Design Program on Various Organizations .....	144
Conclusions.....	145
REFERENCES .....	148
APPENDICES .....	180

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Demographic Information and Teaching Experiences of iLead Teachers .....	59
Table 2: iLead Teachers Purchased Items Summary .....	60
Table 3: Four Themes with Main Concepts.....	61

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Grounded Theory Methodology .....	36
Figure 2: The Concept Map of iLead Teachers' Experiences through a Grounded Theory Approach.....	63
Figure 3: iLead Coaching Model: The Cycle of Effective Instruction .....	69
Figure 4: iLead Program Systemic Organizational Approach .....	128
Figure 5: The Impetus Leadership Model.....	131

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **Introduction**

The researcher is currently working in a district that serves around 27,000 students in Southern California (Education Data Partnership, 2018). The recent state test, Smarter Balanced Assessment, showed declining academic performance in most districts' schools (California School Dashboard, 2018). Besides, according to the district's 2017-18 end-of-year administrator survey, principals identified teacher motivation as the main area they needed to address to cultivate a positive learning environment for enhancing student achievement in the incoming school year (Annual Administrator Survey, 2018). The district decided to invest over \$150,000 in its innovative iLead program and invited the author, as a researcher, to conduct an evaluation study using the grounded theory methods last summer. The district's innovative idea was to integrate transformational leadership key elements into a teacher incentive program to increase teacher motivation and improve student achievement in the rapidly changing 21<sup>st</sup>-century education.

In return, the district has granted the researcher permission to use this study as his dissertation research to examine the teachers' experiences of a district's transformational leadership design program and explore the challenges and achievements due to the program's implementation. The researcher was both an insider as one of the iLead participating teachers and an outsider, an independent researcher to examine the teachers' experiences in this program. The research question of the study is: What are the experiences of the teachers in the iLead program? In what ways did the iLead program influence teachers through a transformational leadership designed approach? The study aims to serve as a viable research-based reference guide for future design and planning of the innovative educational program. In Chapter One, the

researcher will articulate the background and recent changes of the existing education, which lead to a prevalent motivation of an innovative approach such as iLead, to demonstrate educators' efforts to think creatively and critically for problem-solving. The researcher will also provide an overview of the iLead program and elucidate the research questions to elicit the schema of the literature review in Chapter Two as well as construe the antecedent of the research design and methodologies in Chapter Three.

### **Background**

The skills and competencies that our students need to participate fully and effectively in the rapidly evolving world are continually changing. According to Richard Riley (2007), former U.S. Secretary of Education, "We are currently preparing students for jobs that don't yet exist, using technology that hasn't yet been invented, in order to solve problems we don't even know are problems yet" (cited in Fisch & McLeod, 1:41). Schools serve an essential role in building the characters and developing the teleological understanding as well as the cognitive and intellectual capacity of the individual necessary to enhance the life of the individual and the community as a whole. In 21st century education, educators face unique challenges to help their students thrive and succeed in a technologically advanced global society. Students are expected to excel and equip themselves with the competencies and skills to compete globally.

Although the perspectives of globalization's influence on education may vary among scholars, few would argue its prevalent impact on intensifying the urgency for change and reform in 21<sup>st</sup>-century education (Bakhtiari, 2011; Jackson, 2016). According to Friedman (2014), the current education system is expected to bring the bottom to average so much faster now and bring the average to the global high to compete in the global market. Hargreaves (2012) shared in his interview with *Educational World*, "On the influential international PISA tests of

student achievement at age 15, however, the U.S. falls somewhere between 17th and 31st out of 65 countries, depending on the subject being tested. On United Nations measures of child well-being, the U.S. ranks next to last” (as cited in Rubin, 2012). Educators postulated an educational reform to advocate the purpose of schooling on student success by closing the achievement gap of the minority students and the average American students and others in many industrial countries that we considered collaborators and competitors (Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2011). Therefore, American education must respond to the urgent need for its policy reform due to globalization to enunciate and propagate the purpose of education to guide and espouse the indispensable changes necessary for student success in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Education.

### **Recent Educational Policy Change**

The Smarter Balanced Assessment was newly adopted by the state of California under the provision of the new law, Every Student Success Act (ESSA). The law was signed by President Obama in 2015 to replace the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act that has been implemented since 2002 (California Department of Education [CDE], 2017). The new state assessment is based on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English language arts and mathematics to measure student academic progress annually (CDE, 2018). California first administered the Smarter Balanced Assessment in 2015 after piloting the test in 2013 and field testing it in 2014 (Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, 2018). The Smarter Balanced Assessment is a summative computer adaptive exam with performance tasks aligned with the CCSS to track student progress toward mastering the state standards, emphasizing the development of 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills integrated into the subject content standards (CDE, 2018). Due to state assessment and curriculum changes, more than ever, school leaders need to search for ways to motivate and inspire teachers in facing the challenges to adequately prepare their

students not only for the new state testing but also the skills and competencies to compete in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century global society (Editorial Projects in Education, 2014).

## **NCLB**

Under NCLB, much credence was pending on the end of year summative assessment, which resulted in various punitive actions taken against both students and teachers (Dennis, 2017). Educational institutions were named and shamed by the requirement to mail out a notice to families in their communities as *Program Improvement* schools and made subject to sanctions when they failed to meet the unrealistic and counter-productive expectations under the prior law (Ladd, 2017). Afflerbach (2016) claimed, “Today, high-stakes tests act as both a determinant of what is valued in schools and the measure of that value” (p.36). ESSA attempts to issue further flexibility in local control funding to amplify autonomous progression and encourage the state to develop a meaningful and purposeful accountability system to apply multiple indicators, including a comprehensive assessment to measure overall student success effectively.

## **ESSA**

The signing of ESSA in 2015 by President Obama authorized the 50-year-old Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the nation’s national education law, and a lasting promise of equal opportunity for all students. In the previous version of the law, NCLB was enacted in 2002 and scheduled for a revision in 2007 (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). The prescribed regulations from the prior law became unworkable and challenging for states to meet the federal requirements. A reform was called to create a law to utilize a “smart and balanced approach” (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2015, para. 9) to catapult the educational focus and emphasis on preparing our students for college and career readiness (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).



In addition to setting the expectation of rigorous academic standards to prepare students for higher education and future employment, the new law also demanded the states to redirect resources to offer targeted assistance for improvement. It mainly focuses on the low performing at-risk schools with high dropout rates and achievement gaps. The new regulation empowered the local educational agencies in the decision-making and planning process by encouraging them to gather inputs from various stakeholders, including school staff, students, parents, and communal members. It encourages them to work collaboratively and strategically to develop customized solutions to solve the shared educational challenges in their communities (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

### **State Assessments**

The NCLB law sets specific performance goals for the overall and minority student subgroups to hold the schools and districts accountable for reaching the targeted proficient level. The prior California Standards Test (CST) was used as an accountability measurement tool to evaluate the academic performance to ensure “ALL” students achieve a proficient level in both English Language Arts and mathematics by the year 2013 (California Department of Education [CDE], 2009). The state of California newly adopted the summative Smarter Balanced Assessment under the provision of the new law, ESSA. The Smarter Balanced computer-adaptive assessment is based on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English language arts and mathematics to measure student academic progress annually. The Smarter Balanced Assessment System also includes two additional resource components of the interim assessments and the Digital Library to offer on-going instant data and instructional support to inform teaching and learning in the classroom (CDE, 2018).

## **Educational Problem**

California is among the 19 states in the U.S. working with the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21) to integrate and implement 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills through the adoption of CCSS in 2010. P21 is a national organization advocating the 4 C's, Communication, Creativity, Collaboration, and Critical Thinking, as the 21<sup>st</sup>-century competencies for educational reform to help prepare our students for the future to remain competitive in the global economy (CDE, 2019). The adoptions and changes of the new law, curriculum standards, and state assessment aim to rectify our educational system to bolster our students with the 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills imperative to excel and succeed in the highly competitive global market. The problem is that teachers find it rather challenging and lack the motivation to adapt to the fast-changing 21<sup>st</sup>-century learning environment (Rotherham & Willingham, 2009). Microsoft published a study regarding modern technology's impact on attention span (Salerni & Salerni, 2015). Its finding alarmed the public that the average human attention span had dropped from twelve seconds in 2000 to eight seconds in 2013, one second shorter than the attention span of a goldfish (McSpadden, 2015). As a result, educators nowadays are eager to pursue the knowledge and skillsets to prepare their students continuously. These digitally native millennial learners require different educational environments to stimulate their learning, for competing in the boundary-less global business world (Editorial Projects in Education, 2014). Educational leaders shall step out of their comfort zones and perform beyond their boundaries with ingenious ideas such as the iLead program to continuously motivate their teachers and ensure sufficient and high-quality education to thrive for the overall student success.

## **iLead Program Study**

According to the district's 2017-18 end of year administrator survey, 78% of the principals identified *teacher motivation* as the area to address to cultivate a positive educational environment to enhance student learning (Annual Administrator Survey, 2018). Additionally, the Smarter Balanced Assessment results showed declining academic performance in 35 out of 41 district's schools (California School Dashboard, 2018). The annual administrator survey (2018) also indicated an overwhelming concern from the principals on their state testing results. Eighty-seven percent of the principals urged additional district office support to address the low student achievement issue. The iLead program is an innovative proposal made by the Student Achievement Department in response to two highest-ranking areas of concern on the 2018 administrator annual survey results to increase teacher motivation and improve student achievement.

### **About the iLead Program**

The iLead teachers were funded \$3,000 to supplement any resources they identified to support the 21st-century skills learning, the four C's, *Communication, Collaboration, Creativity,* and *Critical Thinking* defined by the state (California Department of Education [CDE], 2018). Teachers who applied for the iLead grant also set a student achievement goal either in English Language Arts or mathematics based on the state assessment data to monitor its implementation of the iLead program's resources. The iLead teachers worked collaboratively with their coaches to address the academic needs of their students.

The iLead program's vision is to develop a collaborative culture to continuously focus on student achievement by implementing the essential transformational leadership components embedded in the program. The iLead grant will allow teachers to implement strategies, practices,

and technology to increase student performance. Through coaching support and professional development provided by various learning communities, the iLead teachers will continuously reflect on their practices to enhance student academic achievement.

The innovative iLead program aims to increase teacher motivation and improve student learning by incorporating Bass and Avolio's (1994) essential transformational leadership components into its program design and implementation (see Appendix A). Bass and Avolio's categorized the qualities of the transformational leadership style into the four I's: Inspirational Motivation (IM), Idealized Influence (II), Intellectual Stimulation (IS), and Individualized Consideration (IC). Prior literature reviews found that these transformational leadership characteristics, which focused on aligning all stakeholders from the psychological and interpersonal levels, were effective in motivating and empowering the team members to perform beyond their norms for more significant performance outcomes (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Fisher, 2009; Geier, 2016; Kramer, 2007; Menges et al., 2011).

The district hopes the iLead program can effectively incorporate essential transformational leadership components into its project design framework to increase teacher motivation and student achievement while facing the changes and challenges in 21<sup>st</sup>-century education. Based on prior studies, transformational leadership theory was commonly suggested to positively influence staff motivation to achieve higher performance outcomes (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Fisher, 2009; Geier, 2016; Kramer, 2007; Menges et al., 2011). The idea to include the major components of transformational leadership was presented as a pioneering approach to galvanize teachers to voluntarily participate in a district incentive program to focus on student achievement. Critical elements of transformational leadership were ingrained in the program's planning, design, practices, and various aspects. iLead promotes a vision shared by

motivating teachers to develop an inclusive and reflective learning culture of continuous improvement to increase student performance.

### **Essential Transformational Leadership Terms**

The design of the program is based on Bass and Avolio (1994) four significant components of transformational leadership, the four I's: Inspirational Motivation (IM), Idealized Influence (II), Intellectual Stimulation (IS), and Individualized Consideration (IC), which the researcher found them also substantially connected to Cashman's (2017) seven masteries of leadership. The inspirational motivation and Cashman's (2017) interpersonal master both aim at communicating the shared vision and behaviors for the members to model. Similar to Cashman's purpose mastery, the idealized influence is behaviors that ignite the emotions and instigate others to follow. Like Cashman's (2017) change mastery, intellectual stimulation focuses on innovation and the development of the stakeholders' problem-solving skills. Lastly, the individualized consideration echoes Cashman's (2017) personal mastery, which helps to provide support and encouragement to each of the individuals to maximize their potentials.

Since the iLead program's design was to embed Bass and Avolio's (1990) major transformational leadership elements, the four I's, into the design and practices of the program. A group of pilot teachers whose students had made exceptional growth in the 2017 state testing was invited to participate in the planning and designing stages of the program before the initial implementation in the 2018-19 school year. The district staff recruited teachers whose classes made the most growth for its grade level districtwide on the state testing in either English or Mathematics to help plan and design the iLead program. These teachers were purposefully chosen because of their spectacular student achievement results on the state testing, which aligned with the problem that the iLead program was designed to resolve. Teachers were brought

to design the program because the district intended to gather collective voices from its stakeholders to ensure an inclusive decision-making process for a shared vision. Working collaboratively with the researcher, the administrator of the student achievement department offered transformational leadership training to the three instructional specialists. They would work with the iLead teachers to broaden their knowledge of the leadership style's characteristics and behaviors while supporting their teachers in the classroom. Other practices and procedural components were also put in place to align the design integration between the iLead program and the essence of transformational leadership.

### **Significance and Summary**

Some scholars posit that the world we are living in is emerging geographically and economically due to the exponentially spreading social media and accelerating technology. Hargreaves and Shirley (2012) stated, “We are at a pivotal moment of world history. An immense crisis has come upon us, and our lives are being turned upside down” (p. 1). Friedman (2014) reminded us that we are living in a world where the average is over because of the increasing competition due to globalization. The crucial conceptual framework of Friedman’s flat-world thesis was criticized for its major error to assume the ten identified flatteners, such as outsourcing and offshoring, would rapidly spread out and interconnect to flatten the world (Jullens, 2013). Some scholars assume the globalization which resulted in easier access for American business executives nowadays to seek out the above-average cheap geniuses, which he arrogated to be the social and economic crisis in our time (Friedman, 2006). Others suggested that American students would need more skills to sustain a middle-class life (Cooper, 2014). In the exponential time of 21<sup>st</sup>-century education, teachers rely on educational leaders’ intentional effort to bolster and espouse the paradigm shift of their instructional practices and teaching

pedagogies to better prepare our students for the future (Nyamekye, 2017). Therefore, innovative programs, such as iLead, must be able to galvanize our teachers and empower them to cope with the changes necessary to meet the multi-dimensional demands of the global market. It should also encourage teacher leaders to become problem solvers to better prepare our students for confronting other competitors locally and around the world.

Although we live in an accelerating world, globalization generates a sense of urgency in our quest to evolve our educational changes in program, planning, and leadership to ensure that our students are prepared and ready to overcome any difficulties and succeed. The paradigm shift in teaching and learning is happening in front of us. Through the iLead program's findings, the researcher hopes to encourage and advocate our educators to embark on an inspiring, inclusive, and innovative mission to create educational programs for a robust educational system to motivate our teachers regardless of the obstacles ahead and procure an optimal student performance outcome.

iLead was designed based on the integral transformational leadership components. Chapter Two will discuss the conceptual framework with a review of research and methodological literature on transformational leadership, including the background, definition, and major domains of transformational leadership and its effects on teacher motivation and student achievement in 21st-century education. The researcher will detail the grounded theory methodology by explaining the research design choice to propose the research procedures and the instruments used for data collection in Chapter Three. He will also identify the research attributes and disclose the limitations and depict the discussion of the validation and ethical issues of the study. To develop an overarching theory is important for grounded theory. In Chapter Five, the researcher will discuss the *Impetus Leadership Model* based on Chapter Four's

findings using the grounded theory approaches. The four essential components of the model are *Motivation, Empowerment, Support, and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills*. The researcher suggests that the *Impetus Leadership Model* framework can provide a systematic approach to allow the organizations to plan and develop programs to enhance staff motivation and build leaders among all stakeholders. Therefore, it can result in optimal performance outcomes with sustainability based on theoretical implications and empirical applications. The researcher recommends a paramount consideration of the four elements while developing any organizational programs.



## **CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **Introduction**

Chapter Two aims to summarize the research and theory surrounding transformational leadership, teacher motivation, and student achievement. In addition, this chapter helps frame the dissertation's stance within the prior studies relevant to the research topic to develop a deeper understanding of the research questions. The research questions will address the gap in previous literature to rationalize the targeted project (Machi & McEvoy, 2016). The dissertation project's objectives entail a grounded theory study of teachers' experiences to explore further the challenges and successes of a district's transformational leadership program. A thorough literature review on the theoretical scheme and empirical investigation of transformational leadership become critical to support the dissertation study's conceptual framework to pursue future research inquiry and address current research literature disparities.

Chapter Two will first discuss the theoretical framework and the empirical evidence of the effects and applications of transformational leadership concerning 21st-century education, teacher motivation, and student achievement, which are the main focus of the iLead program for the dissertation study. The literature review synthesizes the research findings to offer comprehensive information, including exploring the critiques and identifying the areas of needs among the previous leadership style studies to contribute a dialectical and multifaceted perspective for designing an adequate qualitative grounded theory study. The literature review shall not only reason the claims to guide and justify the dissertation study but also help educators develop an effective, innovative educational program. As a result, the literature review unveiled a gap of teachers' transformational leadership experiences in a districtwide program, such as iLead, where teachers are challenged with becoming transformative leaders.

## **Method**

This literature review derives from more than 80 relevant research articles on various academic databases like EBSCO and Chapman Online Leatherby Libraries. The process was conducted through a systematic and synthesis method using key terms such as *Transformational Educational Leadership*, *Transformational Leadership*, and *Teacher Motivation*, *Student Achievement*, *Organizational Innovation*, *Future School Reformed*, *Principal Leadership*, and *21<sup>st</sup>-Century Education Transformation*. *Transformational Educational Leadership* generated more than 4,500 research studies on the Chapman Leatherby Libraries database. As further filtered with the keyword *21<sup>st</sup>-Century*, *Teacher Motivation*, and *Student Achievement* in the last two decades, 158 articles were selected for an initial review. The literature review study will first discuss the theoretical framework of transformational leadership, including the leadership style's definition and major elements. The researcher will then examine the impact of leadership style on teacher motivation and student achievement in 21<sup>st</sup> Century education.

### **Theoretical Framework of Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leadership is suggested as a leadership approach that creates values, positive changes, and prominent effects on the stakeholders and the organization (Kramer & Hays-Thomas, 2007; Marturano & Gosling, 2008). Burns (1978) defined a transformational leader as looking for potential motives in followers, seeking to satisfy higher needs, and engaging the followers entirely. Although his descriptive research focused mainly on political leaders, it was a foundation of other transformational leadership research that was more applicable to business or educational leaders (Stewart, 2008). Leithwood et al. (1994) stated that a school's transformational leadership “implies major changes in the form, nature, function, and/or potential of some phenomenon” (p. 7). It is the type of leadership that facilitates and

redefines others' visions and missions (Khatri et al., 2012). Transformational leaders impose a new commitment, reconstruct their actions to accomplish common goals, and adapt to the stakeholders, organization, and environment (McKnight, 2013). Further discussion of the definition and the essential elements of transformational leadership are critical to deepening the understanding and learning of the theoretical framework of the leadership style.

### **Definition of Transformational Leadership**

Burns (1978) introduced transformational leadership as a process where leaders and followers work together to advance a higher level of motivation and morality. His theory was later developed by Bernard M. Bass (1985), who further explained the psychological mechanisms of transformational leadership as a competency to authentically influence others' beliefs and perceptions to create value and positive achievement outcomes. Bass and Avolio (1994) advocated the transformational leadership theory to focus on the team members' exceeding optimistic performance due to the change of values and beliefs influenced by the leader. Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) explained transformational leadership as a process to develop and expand the constituency's fullest potential to adapt and commit to the organization's goals. Kouzes and Posner (2010) defined exceptional transformational leaders as capable of building the leader-follower trust to motivate and impact others and produce outcomes.

### **Major Components of Transformational Leadership**

Bass and Avolio (1994) category four areas of behaviors of a transformational leader: Inspirational Motivation (IM), Idealized Influence (II), Intellectual Stimulation (IS), and Individualized Consideration (IC). Inspirational motivation is the communication of the shared vision and behaviors for the members to model. The idealized influence is a set of behaviors that ignite the emotions and persuade others to follow. The intellectual stimulation focuses on

innovation and the development of the problem-solving skills of the stakeholders. Finally, individualized consideration helps provide support and encouragement for individuals to maximize their potentials (Bass & Avolio, 1994). The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) developed by Bass and Avolio (1990) asked the followers to rate their leaders based on the multifactor of the four I's, IM, II, IS, and IC. Bass and Avolio integrated the questionnaire to the interviews with the Henry R. Kravis Prize Leadership Award winners, which indicated a strong correlation between the four I's and transformational leadership styles. Since the four I's are the significant transformational leadership components, it is pivotal to focus on these four key elements. The goal is to explore their connections to the 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills, which are Communication, Collaboration, Critical Thinking, and Creativity (CDE, 2019), in order to relate the theoretical learning to a practical application in the current educational setting.

### **Inspirational Motivation**

Maslow (1943) explained the hierarchy of human needs with a five-tier pyramid model to explicate the satisfaction of the lower needs to progress to the higher ones. The five levels from the bottom up are physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. The first four are considered deficiency needs due to deprivation, and the top one is known as growth needs, which enhance motivation and sustainability when these needs are met. Based on Maslow's perspectives, motivation decreases when the lower needs were somehow satisfied. However, engagement and impulse increase and strengthen when growth needs are fulfilled (1970). In other words, the motivation decreases and eventually vanishes if the high needs are not addressed and entertained. However, Maslow clarified the hierarchy system's misunderstanding as a step-by-step process by stating it as "the false impression that a need must be satisfied 100 percent before the next need emerges" (1987, p. 69). Maslow's (1943) hierarchy

of needs theory perceives the lower-order needs as deficiency needs, basic needs originating from deprivation. Growth needs evolve from one's desire to actualize personal worth to fulfill their potentials. Maslow suggested these needs were ingrained as instincts to compose as the significant factors for motivation. However, the impetus reacts contrarily to the satisfaction of its needs. The motivation decreases with the fulfillment of the deficiency needs when adversely, it increases through the realization of growth needs.

In transformational leadership, inspirational motivation is to present a challenge while communicating meaning in work to create a shared vision for the followers (Bromley & Kirschner-Bromley, 2007). Communication, one of the 21<sup>st</sup> -century 4 C's skills, is a critical competency of transformational leadership's visionary aspect (Clavelle, 2012). The research found the strategized organizational communication can formulate a better student achievement outcome. (Cuadros et al., 2018). The transformational leader communicates effectively by articulating and transforming the vision as appealing and inspiring to his or her audience to persuade them to step out of their comfort zones and take actions to advance the group (Bass, 1985). A transformational leader also conveys a precise, comprehensive, relevant, and meaningful vision so that the team members feel encouraged, optimistic, and motivated to invest efforts and energies to go beyond their abilities to accomplish the goals (Kramer, 2007). Transformational leaders assist members in developing a deeper understanding of the purpose behind the action taken. Kouzes and Posner (2017) believe that the organization can better maximize its full potential when the leader can help all stakeholders understand and commit to the organization's vision. Transformational leaders focus on building team members' commitment by developing and communicating the common goals and involving all stakeholders in decision-making processes (Friedman, 2004). Elmore (2008) also advocated that

shared decision-making is an essential component of a transformational leadership style. That is, transformational leadership fosters communication to promote interpersonal relationships and shares decision-making processes to facilitate the transit of organizational practices and culture.

### **Idealized Influence**

Idealized influence describes when the leader encompasses the follower's behaviors to internally identify themselves with a sense of collective mission and vision of the leader and the organization (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Leaders and followers are orientated around the higher purposes of the individual and the organization as a whole (Maben & Cutright, 2008). The leader can evaluate the interests and energies of employees by generating an internal consensus and awareness of the purpose and mission of the organization, as Kevin Cashman (2017) defined leadership as an "authentic influence that creates values" (p.84). He propagated that one of the core purposes of leadership was to ignite *creativity*, the P21 skill, and the potential of the individual as a "high-performance intersection where our talents and our values come together. It is the value-creating, catalytic moment when our gifts make a difference" (p.61). A transformational leader works hard to inspire and influence their followers to associate their abilities and talents with the core values and connect their commitment to the core purpose (Sugrue, 1998). Yukl and Fleet (1992) claimed transformational leadership as an effective style to build a strong commitment to organizational changes in policies and strategies.

### **Intellectual Stimulation**

Transformational leaders work on stimulating the individual intellectually. They challenge the team to work collaboratively and embrace creativity and innovative ideas in transformational development to enhance their performance (Carmeli et al., 2014). Both collaboration and creativity are essential competencies advocated by P21 (CDE, 2019).

Collaboration helps to create a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the issues, while creativity embraces new ideas and encourages the individual to think critically for problem-solving (Fahey & Prusak, 1998). The leaders also influence fundamental changes in their employees' beliefs and attitudes of the organization by stimulating and altering the workers' perspectives and capabilities psychologically, mentally, and emotionally through a trusting relationship (Li et al., 2015). Lines et al. (2005) believed that the employees' trust in their leader's decisions helped build new knowledge and practices. Likewise, the leaders' trust with team members is also crucial in developing autonomy and sharing responsibility among group members. Doing so creates a culture of ownership and encourages the individual to take a personal interest in supporting the organization's vision as one of their own (Burke et al., 2007). Transformational leadership endorses teamwork, collaborative decision making, and problem-solving beyond organizational and bureaucratic constraints (Short & Greer, 1997). The above literature review suggests that transformational leadership can stimulate interests, critical thinking, and innovating ideas of the group members to work collaboratively and creatively for problem-solving in a trusting relationship and promote the capacity building of the P21 skills.

### **Individualized Consideration**

The individualized consideration aspect of transformational leadership emphasizes the essence of mentorship, self-development, and interpersonal relationship (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Transformational leaders facilitate and foster the learning of their team members to empower their members to achieve their targeted goals. It amplifies the individual's talents to strategically build and expand the capacity of all stakeholders to accomplish their mission toward the shared vision (Mulford, 2013). Research shows a strong correlation between the time invested in mentorship, professional development, and the knowledge gained, shared, and implemented

(Choi, 2003). Salavert (2015) discussed a five-step coaching cycle based on individual consideration: modeling, approximating, fading, self-directing, and generalizing, which suggested a critical and dynamic mentorship process to engage all learners to develop and master their skills. By utilizing this model, leaders can effectively progress and advance their skills and empower the team to achieve more. In education, Boberg and Bourgeois (2016) also concluded an integrated model of transformational leadership that focused on the capacity and commitment of the teachers on instructional practices and strengthened the teacher-student relationship to promote the emotional engagement of the students to enhance student learning.

In conclusion, transformational leaders identify the individual's needs and support the professional and personal growth of their employees (Kramer, 2007). Transformational leadership is not only work-centered as well as people-centered. A leader cannot lead if no one follows. The self-satisfactory and fulfillment of the employees through a robust relationship and leadership's support in professional and personal growth will positively impact the members' commitments to the effectiveness and success of organizational reform and transformation (Khasawneh et al., 2012; Maslow, 1943). Berkovich and Eyal (2017) propagated transformational leadership's capability to transform the followers' emotions, which suggested the transformation to meet the individual desires and develop a relationship to strengthen the organization. Transformational leaders are sensitive to the needs of the team members and have empathy for their staff. They are empathetic and emotionally charged (Menegazzo et al., 2015). To sum up, as P21 emphasizes the individual's skill development, transformational leadership values human capital. It focuses on the interpersonal relationship to provoke the changes and innovations needed for higher productivity and the success of both the organization and the stakeholders.



## **Empirical Studies of Transformational Leadership**

Empirical studies are significant for researchers to derive knowledge by observing, examining, and measuring the phenomena from the existing practices and actual experiences in addition to their theoretical beliefs (Bradford, 2017). Summarizing empirical studies is to discover the impacts of transformational leadership on organizational reform to influence teachers and students. The empirical studies will investigate the effects of transformational leadership style in 21<sup>st</sup>-century education, teacher motivation, and student achievement, the three main objectives of what the iLead program aims for.

### **Transformational Leadership in 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Education and Teacher Preparation**

The four C's presented by the 21st-century curriculum is needed for the innovations and skills to prepare our students for the increasingly complex and ever-changing world (Zimmerman, 2018). P21 defines the four C's, Communication, Collaboration, Creativity, and Critical Thinking as the critical competencies in 21<sup>st</sup>-century education (CDE, 2019). It is requisite to study if transformational leadership can promote and contribute to an educational environment that espouses these skills' development.

Research has shown that transformational leadership has a positive impact on educators, particularly school administrators. For instance, Ahmet (2015) surveyed 1,117 teachers working in both the public and private schools in Istanbul, Turkey, to investigate the transformational and transactional leadership styles of school principals in the aspect of educational administration. In this study, the researcher collected data using *Leadership Styles Scale* and analyzed it with *average, standard deviation, t-test, and one-way analysis of variance*. The result indicated a high level of positive feedback of the transformational leadership among the teachers, particularly in promoting collaboration, innovation, creativity, and critical thinking to support the learning and

growth of the individual. The study also found that the school principals' leadership characteristics significantly affect the trust, citizenship, and commitment of the faculty in the organization. The result concluded that the principals' transformational leadership was the driving force of the change and a determining factor of the success or failure of the school. Ahmet also suggested that continuous professional development, such as management training and seminars, was beneficial to enhancing effective transformational leadership. Aside from providing the individual's learning opportunity, transformational leaders should discuss leadership-related topics during regular staff meetings to increase communication and awareness among the staff members.

Moreover, research has shown that school principals play an influential role in organizational innovation and creativity. A study conducted by Hsiao and Chang (2011) researched 330 postsecondary school teachers to examine transformational leadership's influence on organization learning, innovation, and creativity. They utilized an empirical research practice to explore the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational learning, innovation, and creativity. Thirty-six postsecondary schools were selected using a stratified random sampling method. Thirty-two five-point scaled Likert-type survey questions were given to the participants, and the average variance extracted was used to assess convergent validity. The 32 items included the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Bass & Avolio, 1990), the measurement scale from Kale et al. (2000), and Friedman (2003). The result indicated organizational learning ignited innovation and creativity in the organization. School principals with a transformational leadership style nourish the environment to strengthen creative thinkers' capacity and provide resources that lead to innovation. The findings suggested that transformational leaders cultivated and embraced a culture of organizational learning to support

innovation and creativity to effectively help their staff in coping with changes in the organization.

Researchers have found the impact of transformational leadership on innovation in the public sector outside of the school context. For instance, Raj and Srivastava (2016) also studied organizational learning's mediating role in transformational leadership and innovativeness. They used a structured interview schedule through survey research on 321 participants from public organizations in India regarding the role of organizational learning in transformational leadership and innovativeness. The results confirmed that organizational learning was an essential factor in enhancing the organization's innovativeness through transformational leadership.

Transformational leadership facilitates organizational learning to increase organizational innovativeness's capability and potential to adapt to a changing environment. The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) developed by Bass and Avolio (1990) was used as the survey questions. The study concluded that transformational leadership was positively related to individual and organizational learning, which is a crucial mechanism to influence the organization's innovativeness through transformational leadership.

Researchers also found that transformation leaders acted as an accelerator to promote changes in the organization. Kazmi and Naaranoja (2015) studied how transformational leadership functions as a *Pied Piper* to drive organizational innovation effectively. Their qualitative study suggested that a successful transformational leader acted as a change leader to initiate the transformational process and was influenced by a strong sense of passion and the autonomy of a shared vision. A transformational leader also drives the team members to work collectively and creatively to progress and innovate as the *Pied Piper*, a famous mythological character who was used to symbolize the transformational leader as a driving force to lead his or

her followers to the destination. The researchers combined the open-ended devised questionnaires, informal interviews, and group discussions to receive feedback from the selected sample size of 35 representing groups in various geographical areas. The content focused on the impact of transformational leadership regarding caring, commitment, creativity, and confidence to support the process of collaboration and innovation at the workplace. The study also highlighted the essential elements of how transformational leaders could effectively lead their team through a change process. By initiating the change process, installing the sense of awareness, activating cognitive action and conscience, and finally engaging the audience's hearts, the *Pied Piper* effect eventually occurs. It became effective when a strong connection is established between the leaders and the followers, allowing the transformation from the old static and undesirable situation into the new one (Kazmi et al., 2006).

Leadership plays an integral part in preparing teachers for 21<sup>st</sup>-century education. Niess (2008) stated, "Tomorrow's teachers must be prepared to rethink, unlearn and relearn, change, revise, and adapt" (p.225). Thomas et al. (2013) examined the leadership role in college teacher preparation programs based on the technological pedagogical framework of TRACK, which stood for Technology, Pedagogy, and Content Knowledge. Thomas et al. studied educational leaders and members from the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education and the Innovation and Technology Committee to identify a blueprint for developing TRACK-ready teacher preparation programs. The three key leadership functions are: 1) Leaders must set direction by establishing a clear vision. 2) Leaders must empower and develop staff members to accomplish the vision. 3) Leaders must support the stakeholders' efforts toward the vision by redesigning and reshaping the organization. The three components are vital for motivating

members and amplifying the change process to ensure the successful implementation of an innovative teacher preparation program.

### **Transformational Leadership for Teacher Motivation**

Previous studies implied a strong correlation between transformational leadership and job satisfaction. Eliophotou-Menon and Ioannou (2016) reviewed mainly the recent advanced quantitative research studies regarding the connection between transformational leadership and teachers' motivation to enhance job satisfaction, commitment, and trust in both the educational leader and the institution to provide an overview of the relevant studies. They reviewed more than 300 related research articles. Among them, 53 documents were analyzed and discussed in their paper to conclude. Their findings implied the significance of implementing transformational leadership behaviors and practices at school to increase teacher performance effectiveness. Transformational leadership exhibited a positive influence on teacher motivation to increase the staff's job satisfaction, trust, and commitment. Eliophotou-Menon and Ioannou also suggested integrating instructional leadership with transformational leadership to complement each other and successfully affect student performance.

Researchers also compared various leadership styles on staff motivation and job satisfaction. Aburabl (2012) examined the impacts of transformational and transactional leadership styles on motivation, trust, and job satisfaction within the public and private higher educational institutions in Jordan. The researcher gathered the questionnaire data from a sample of over 700 participants and used the biographic data to form independent variables. Aburabl focused on the four following areas: *Intellectual Stimulation*, *Individual Consideration*, *Inspirational Motivation*, and *Idealized Behavior* to evaluate the impacts of transformational leadership. His findings showed that transformational leadership had a more substantial positive

influence on motivation and job satisfaction than transactional leadership did, particularly in the area of *Inspirational Motivation*, which Aburabl considered as an essential factor in teacher performance.

Scholars have widely studied the effects of principal leadership. Nazim (2016) investigated the impacts of the principals' transformational and transactional leadership style on staff motivation and job satisfaction of college teachers. The survey research method was utilized to investigate 215 teachers from 43 colleges of Punjab in Pakistan. He used the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire to measure a teacher's job satisfaction and motivation. Nazim analyzed the data using a Pearson r and t-test and found a significant correlation between principals' leadership style and an increase in teachers' job satisfaction. It further concluded a stronger positive influence of transformational leaders on a higher degree of job satisfaction and staff motivation. Nazim suggested that the leadership style of a principal should be taken into consideration during the recruitment of school administrators. According to his research, principals with transformational leadership styles were highly recommended for educational institutions to support, intellectually stimulate, and motivate teachers in facing the challenges of the exponentially accelerating 21<sup>st</sup>- century education.

Researchers also considered the principal's leadership critical to teacher motivation and overall work performance (Suwanto et al., 2018). The purpose of Hauserman and Stick's (2013) research was to examine and identify the essential principal leadership qualities that were influential to the motivation, job satisfaction, and work performance of the teachers. The researchers contacted a random sample of 135 public schools in Alberta, Canada. Seventy-seven of them agreed to participate in this project. Ten teachers were randomly selected from each school to rate their own principal using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Bass &

Avolio, 1990). The principals were categorized from low to high levels of transformational leadership style based on teachers' responses. Five teachers from each group were chosen for a qualitative study with an in-depth interview for both high and low levels of transformational leadership principals' categories. The objective was to determine the qualities of transformational leaders that were most desirable for teachers and their impact on the teachers' job satisfaction, motivation, and work performance. The result showed that teachers with highly transformational principals were able to provide much more concrete and specific descriptions of the four key elements of transformational leadership theory, *Idealized Influence, Individualized Consideration, Inspirational Motivation, and Intellectual Stimulation* (Bass & Avolio, 1994). They also gave a higher ranking of their principals when compared to the teachers from the lower level transformational principals' group. Overall, principals in the low level of transformational leadership qualities received a lower rating and had a marginal influence on enhancing teacher motivation and productivity than the other group. Based on teachers' feedback, distributed leadership, and team collaboration were extensively incorporated among the transformational leaders to motivate and engage the teachers to improve their practices continuously to accomplish a common goal.

To sum up, research studies examine the effects and influence of the leadership styles on motivation to develop a comprehensive understanding of the leadership qualities to increase the fulfillment and well-being of the staff members to improve leadership effectiveness (Naile & Selesho, 2014). Literature reviews on transformational leadership mostly assumed a direct correlation between transformational leaders' behaviors and practices and teacher motivation (Wiyono, 2018). Transformational leadership has a constructive influence on teacher motivation to increase job satisfaction, trust, and commitment to the leader and the organization

(Eliophotou-Menon & Ioannou, 2016). These are all critical factors for the overall teacher performance, which engender positive impacts on student learning and achievement outcomes (Han & Yin, 2016).

### **Transformational Leadership for Student Achievement**

The research strives to identify specific leadership practices that positively impact student achievement and educational reform. Principal leadership is dominant in developing school effectiveness and student achievement (Heck & Halling, 1999; Mazano et al., 2006). Bolkan and Goodboy (2009) concluded that transformational leadership was a significant predictor of student learning in U.S. classrooms.

Researchers compared the effects of various leadership styles on student performance. The study of Quin et al. (2015) compared various practices of transformational leadership. A quantitative research method was adopted to survey 92 teachers using the *Leadership Practices Inventory*, a 360-degree assessment tool developed by Kouzes and Posner (2010). The assessment was based on *The Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership* – model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart. Their findings revealed that the transformational leaders in high-performing schools consistently incorporated the five leadership steps, particularly on inspiring a shared vision and challenging the existing process to motivate the staff to strive for better student performance outcomes.

Researchers also conducted extensive literature reviews to draw references between the principals' leadership attributes and the student's learning outcomes. A meta-analysis design of a literature review conducted by Karadag et al. (2015) analyzed 57 research articles among 28,964 study subjects included in the sample group regarding the relationship between leadership style and student achievement. The results showed only a medium effect of the educational leaders on



student performance. Among all leadership styles investigated in this study, transformational leadership and distributive leadership styles were identified as the two leadership styles that demonstrated the most comprehensive positive results on student learning. They claimed that transformational leaders bolstered a shared vision to improve student achievement by transforming school culture and performing the collective duties regarding the coordination of the educational system to optimize its outcome (Karadag et al., 2015).

In summary, transformational leadership helped to establish a conventional bond between teachers and the management team. Such a connection led to a firm commitment with a shared vision and purpose for school reform for higher achievement (Khawary & Ali, 2015). In other words, transformational leadership helps to build trust and respect in an inclusive relationship that effectively facilitates the organizational improvements needed for student success.

### **Research Gap**

The literature review supports a research gap in teachers' transformational leadership experiences in a district-wide program, such as iLead, where teachers are challenged to become transformative leaders with skills and competencies needed to continuously strive for student success in the rapidly changing 21<sup>st</sup>-century education. A critique of the transformational leadership theoretical framework is its unclear definition and relationship of the four I's to the organization's pragmatic practices. The transformational leadership style looks for the characteristics and qualities of the individual leader instead of the pragmatic strategies and competencies required to directly contribute to the desired outcome (Bryman, 1992; Khatri, 2005). In education, although much research revealed that transformational leadership had an immense impact on teacher motivation and commitment to the leaders and the organizations, it

also discovered that the leadership style had a moderate influence on student learning and performance outcome (Quin, Deris, Bishchoff, & Johnson, 2015).

Ibrahim et al. (2014) investigated transformational leadership on teachers' commitment, motivation, teaching professional, and student learning. They conducted a quantitative survey of 1,014 teachers in 27 schools in Sarawak, Malasia. The results found that teacher commitment and motivation were positively related to the transformational leadership components of inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation. However, commitment and motivation were not a dominant factor in student learning. Their study advised school leaders to systematically acquire and internalize effective transformational leadership qualities toward changing teachers' attitudes of a growth mindset to strengthen their professional development commitment to enhancing student learning (Ibrahim et al., 2014).

It is also highly suggested that transformational leaders should further develop themselves as instructional leaders to support teaching and learning and improve student achievement (Shatzer & Brown, 2009). The purpose of Robinson's et al. (2008) research was to examine the relative impacts of various leadership styles on students' performance outcomes. It involved comparing the effects of transformational and instructional leadership on student achievement and a second evaluation of the five leadership dimensions, including goal setting, strategic resourcing, curriculum planning, professional development, and support on student learning. Their meta-analysis of 22 studies showed that instructional leadership had three to four times greater effect on student performance outcomes than the transformational leadership style. Both analyses concluded one essential answer, "the closer educational leaders get to the core business of teaching and learning, the more likely they are to have a positive impact on students' outcome" (Robinson et al., 2008, p. 664).

*Seven Strong Claims about Successful School Leadership* offers specific leadership guidelines and transformational leaders' practices to transform their leadership qualities into applicable use (Leithwood et al., 2008). Other leadership studies also suggested that applications such as professional learning communities, staff development, and instructional preparation support equip the transformational leaders in driving their missions and visions of positive student achievement outcomes (Crum et al., 2009; Leithwood et al., 2006).

### **Conclusion**

Burn (1978) explained that transformational leadership enhanced the followers' work performance and commitment by satisfying their needs and involving followers in the decision-making process. Bass and Avolio (1994) further identified inspirational motivation, idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration as the critical transformational leadership components. In this literature review, the researcher found theoretical and empirical evidence in various research studies demonstrating the efficacy of transformational leadership in supporting 21<sup>st</sup>-century education, teacher motivation, and student achievement. Transformational educational leaders motivate and enhance their staff's work satisfaction and performance by caring for their individual needs and providing opportunities for personal and professional growth. Leaders and stakeholders develop and nourish a shared vision and supportive culture. The trust and strong relationship between the transformational leaders and their staff contribute to a firm commitment and enormous synergy towards common goals and purposes. The focus on the core value of student achievement and performance outcomes can bridge transformational leadership practices, focusing on the instructional needs to improve student learning and performance outcomes.

In the era of the continually changing 21st-century education, the essence of transformational leadership is essential to guide the staff's performance towards student achievement. Hallinger (2005) described a transformational leadership with an instructional focus as an influential, guiding, and purpose-oriented culture architected to target mainly on students' academic results and provide strategies and programs compatible with the academic mission. However, the critique also revealed its concern about the applicable implementation of transformational leadership directly with teaching and learning. It was highly recommended to adhere to an instructional focus to connect and implement good teaching strategies and best practices for a more significant student achievement outcome. Karadag et al. (2015) recommended that transformational leaders expand their influence on aiming the instructional practices and staff professional development to achieve higher student academic success. All the above findings are essential information while examining the implementation of the iLead program from the teachers' perspectives through the qualitative study and identifying the challenges and accomplishments gained from the implementation of the iLead program. It also indicated a gap of teachers' transformational leadership experiences within a program through an actual district context, where the participants are challenged with becoming transformative leaders. The literature review chapter constructs the conceptual framework of the research study. It contributes to developing the research questions and methodology taken by a grounded theory dissertation study, which will be explicated in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

### **Introduction**

Facing challenges in a rapidly changing educational environment with our millennial learners' diverse demands in the exponential time of 21<sup>st</sup>-century education, districts and schools strive to seek out practical, innovative programs to improve teaching and learning to student achievement. From the literature review, a research gap was observant to indicate the data were often quantitatively analyzed to measure an educational program's impacts instead of being qualitatively examined to uncover the participants' perspectives. A qualitative study for this research can assist in augmenting and strengthening the design of the existing program. A qualitative study would also offer valuable insights in informing future programs by identifying the challenges and gains learned from the participants' experiences. In other words, this study aims to discover how elements of transformational leadership influence teachers in becoming transformational leaders in their own classrooms through a district context, such as the iLead program.

iLead, a program embedded with transformational leadership elements, presents a district's effort to rectify the identified issues of low teacher motivation and student achievement outcomes. It was partially due to recent California education law and policy changes and the adoption of new state curriculum standards and state assessments. Chapter Three will introduce the methodology of the qualitative study of the iLead program to examine, inquire, and discover the experiences of the iLead teachers and coaches through a one on one interview method. It will identify the research purpose, design, questions, participants, instrumentation of the proposed study, the data collection process, the analysis with its limitations, the validations of the expected findings, and a discussion of the potential ethical issues.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of the dissertation study is to explore the iLead teachers' experiences of a program embedded with transformational leadership and identify their challenges and successes in becoming transformational leaders to support teaching and learning in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century classroom. This dissertation research is part of the district's iLead action research project. The initial qualitative study aims to discover what can be learned from the iLead teachers' perspectives to develop a deeper understanding of the influences the program has on teachers. The qualitative data will be pivotal for enhancing the iLead program and beneficial and transferrable to other districts while struggling to effectively adapt or design programs to impact student performance outcomes. iLead manifests a district's innovative effort to face up to its challenges. The study also intends to guide designing future innovative programs to surmount the hurdles in the highly competitive modern education world.

In the 2017-18 school year, the district leadership team invited ten teachers who demonstrated the highest student academic gains on the 2017 Smarter Balanced state assessment to work collaboratively with three iLead coaches and a district administrator for the program. They planned and developed the iLead program for the districtwide rollout in the 2018-19 school year. These teachers and district student achievement staff met once a month to ensure the four I's: Inspirational Motivation (IM), Idealized Influence (II), Intellectual Stimulation (IS), and Individualized Consideration (IC), were evident in the designs, practices, and applications of the program. After several initial meetings focusing on deepening members' understanding of the essence of the researcher's transformational leadership style, the team composed an information sheet (see Appendix A) that aligned the substantial transformational leadership components to the pragmatic implementation of the iLead program. The purpose of the qualitative study is to

investigate the experiences of the iLead participants. It also intended to uncover how these transformational leadership elements are integrated into the iLead program from the participants' perspectives and discover the challenges and positive impacts on teachers as they become transformational leaders to encroach obstacles in their classrooms.

### **Research Design**

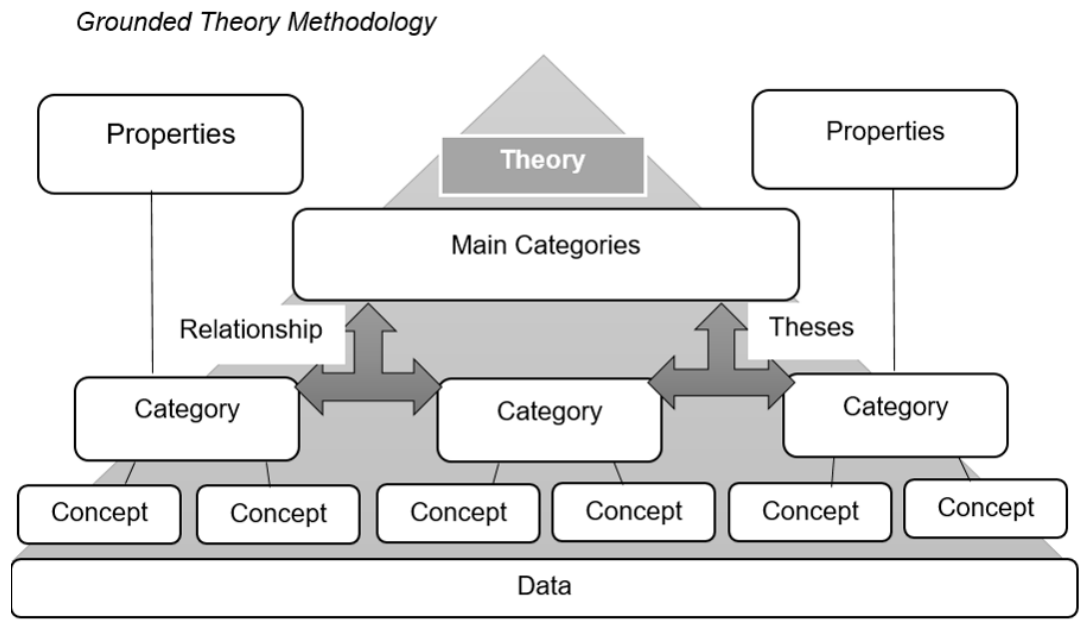
The framework of grounded theory methodology was adopted into the research design to guide the researcher's investigation of understanding the experience of iLead teachers. The grounded theory aims to discover empirical information to generate rather than to validate a theory. It provides an opportunity for practitioner-researchers to pursue a study relevant to their contextual field experience through an inductive process to create meanings and interpretations through the researcher's worldview (Charmaz, 2014). "In this view, we construct research process and products, but these constructions occur under pre-existing structural conditions, arise in emergent situations, and are influenced by the researchers' perspectives, privileges, positions, interactions, and geographical locations" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 240). Therefore, the researcher believes that grounded theory is appropriate for this study because it constructs a well-grounded research framework for data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Grounded theory will energize the researcher's attempt to explore and uncover the teachers' experiences in the iLead program, including their challenges in becoming transformational leaders themselves. It also underpins the emergence of a theory from the field experience data posited as the "grounded theory mantra" (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, p. 32) to advocate the significance of a research study through the exploration of field experiences from the participants to construct the learning to benefit the community. The researcher aims to create a model using the grounded theory

approaches to identify the essential components for designing organizational programs through the teachers' iLead experiences.

**Dissertation Research Study Design**

The dissertation research design is based on Glaser and Strauss's (1967) grounded theory of using a constant comparative method through data collection. This design will identify concepts and integrate categories and properties, which contribute to the core category that either delimits or composes a theory, as displayed in Figure 1 below. Glaser and Strauss's methodological approach was recognized and accredited by Bryant and Charmaz (2007) for their positive contribution to qualitative research to bring in "innovative methodological strategies to these trends that inspired generations of new scholars to pursue qualitative research (p. 31). The methodological design of this study was based on Glaser and Strauss's original theory.

**Figure 1**



*Note.* The illustration represents the grounded theory approach for theory building from data.



Qualitative study is descriptive by nature, which makes the theory generation challenging. Thus, the employment of the grounded theory method works to integrate, explain, and interpret the descriptive data through a systematic set of the inductive process. Glaser and Strauss (1967) recommended a research process through rigorous data collection and progressive analysis along with a merging partnership between the researchers and the participants to simulate the theory as the “reality of social interaction and its structural context” (p. 32). Through a critical concurrent information comparative process analyzing the theoretical relationships and themes amongst these various components, the researchers identify the concepts from the collected data and logically organized them into categories to merged the different variables into the essential properties to derive a theory from a phenomenon (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Parry, 1998).

Leadership researchers have propagated more qualitative methodologies to provide more significant insights into the existing theories and empirical practices to either refine or discover a novice theory (Hunt, 1991; Strong, 1984; Yukl, 1994). Avolio (1995) notably advocated grounded theory as a research methodology for future leadership studies by making the following statement, “Let’s see what a grounded theory approach to leadership brings as opposed to the very quantitative and empirical experimental approach. I can’t imagine why either grounded theory or qualitative applications can’t both make a contribution” (as cited in Parry, 1998, p.89). The purpose of the grounded theory is not to conduct a study to prove a theory but rather to allow a theory to emerge through a systematic set of inductive procedures of data collection and comparative analyses of the relationships among the phenomena (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Therefore, the researcher aims to fill in the research gap of how transformational leadership elements are enacted to transfer classroom teachers’ practices and behaviors through

the context of a district's program by collecting and analyzing the qualitative interview data of teachers' experiences in the iLead program.

### **Future Possibility**

This dissertation study's methodological design framework was based on Glaser and Strauss's (1967) grounded theory to explore the teachers' experience through a transformational leadership designed program instead of an individual leader. The researcher believes its findings can benefit the district to enhance and improve the iLead program continuously. Also, he hopes his dissertation study may also offer vital empirical information for a possible future action research study conducted by the district if chosen to aim for ongoing improvement of their action taken (Rouse, 1997). The researcher has been working collaboratively with members of the organization to problem solve the issues in a spiral reflective model in which the team continues to identify the concerns, implement the changes and collect, analyze, and reflect on the data until the problems are resolved (Collis & Hussey, 2014; Lesha, 2014). The researcher recommends that the district actively encourages all stakeholders to reflect on their learning throughout the entire process critically. It was also recommended to allow the participants to continuously explore additional options and identify new areas of concern to deepen all participants' understanding while seeking out effective solutions for productive outcomes (Gunnell, 2018).

### **Research Questions**

The qualitative study intends to explore the following research questions:

Main question: What are the experiences of the teachers in the iLead program? In what ways did the iLead program influence teachers through a transformational leadership designed approach?

Sub-question: From the perspectives of iLead teachers, what were the gains and challenges through their experiences in the iLead program? How did the components of transformational leadership elements contribute to the teachers' responses to their successes and challenges?

Often, educational institutions proceed to a new program year after year without collecting data from stakeholders. In doing so, they miss the opportunity to develop a greater understanding of their existing practices to improve their effectiveness. Therefore, the findings may offer the researcher an opportunity to discover an authentic theory stemmed from the teachers' experiences in becoming a transformational leader through a program's influence instead of through a leader. The data from this study will also be beneficial for a possible iLead action learning project spearheaded by the district staff in the future. The iLead planning team hopes to incorporate the best practices learned from the program to eventually help increase teacher motivation and enhance student academic achievement.

### **Setting**

The iLead program is designed and implemented in a K-12 public school district with a total of 41 schools serving approximately 27,000 students, with 3,000 employees in a suburban area in Orange County, Southern California. The student population is racially diverse. About 57% of students are identified as Hispanic in addition to 27% White and 10% Asian students. About 51.7% of the students are socioeconomically disadvantaged, with 25% English learners and 11.4 % of students with disabilities (Education Data Partnership, 2018).

Over the years, the district has piloted various innovative programs, such as 1:1, iLearn, iTeach, eBadge, and iDevice, as their professional development designed to expand teachers' capacities. The district hoped these programs could help improve teaching and learning in the

classroom. The researcher was solicited for this qualitative study because of his active participation in all other district's programs stated above. He has been working closely with the student achievement department staff, which launched the iLead program. Knowing the researcher is currently in a doctoral program, the department administrator approached him for assistance with a research study inquiry to gather empirical data for continuous program improvement.

The iLead program is an annual program open for all district teachers to apply. The plan was initially intended to select one teacher per school site. If there were multiple applications from a single school, the principal would recommend a teacher based on the school's needs. For example, one principal may choose a teacher who requires additional instructional support. In contrast, another principal may select a teacher leader who is influential among the staff to assist the principal in building other members' capacity on site. Since this is a voluntary program, no teacher should be imposed to participate in the initiative. If a school failed to apply for the program, multiple applicants might be accepted from the same school site. The iLead program was launched at the beginning of the 2018-19 school year. Out of the total 32 applications, 29 teachers with completed paperwork were accepted to the program. The researcher was also one of the participants. The participants of the qualitative interview study included all 29 iLead teachers and the three coaches who mentored the iLead teachers. Each coach was assigned to multiple iLead teachers to work with throughout the entire school year.

All three coaches were veteran classroom teachers before becoming the district instructional specialists. They have been in their current position for more than eight years in supporting the implementation of various district initiatives and mentoring teachers. A one on one interview was given to both the iLead coaches and the teachers. Since permission to be a part

of the research study is a requirement for participating in the iLead program, the researcher conducted a total population purposive sampling to include all three coaches and 29 iLead teachers. Among the 29 iLead teachers, five were high school teachers from three of the four comprehensive high schools at the district. The remaining 24 iLead participants were elementary teachers from kindergarten to sixth grade of general and special education who worked at 11 of our 27 elementary school sites.

### **Instrumentation**

The researcher received pre-existing iLead teachers and coaches interview transcripts from the district staff. However, since the iLead program advocates collaboration as a significant transformational leadership component, the researcher worked with the district staff to develop the interview questions for the qualitative research study (see Appendix B and C). The researcher strongly recommended open-ended questions to the district staff to encourage the teachers to express their thoughts freely (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004). The framework of the interview questions was to identify, examine, and interpret themes and patterns of transformational leadership components in the iLead program from both the iLead coaches' and teachers' perspectives. In addition to working collaboratively with the district staff in developing the interview questions, the researcher also conducted training and provided guidelines and interview strategies to ensure the validity and reliability of the data collected since the department administrator preferred the interviews to be done by the district's staff instead of the researcher. The researcher used the *Strategies for Qualitative Interview* from the Harvard Sociology Department to establish the interview protocol (see Appendix D). The researcher also discussed interview strategies with the group, such as allowing the interviewees to tell their stories on their own terms and giving sufficient time for the participants to thoroughly elaborate

their points of view without excessively prompting the interviewees (Harvard Sociology Department, n.d., p. 2).

### **Data Collection**

The research permission was included and acquired during the iLead application process (see Appendix E for the application). The coaches sent an interview information email one month before the interview to remind the participants (see Appendix F for the email). A structured interview approach was adopted for both coach and teacher interviews to guarantee consistency among various interviewers (Levashina et al., 2014). A one-hour iLead teacher program exit interview was conducted by an iLead coach who did not work directly with the specific teacher. Three principals from the iLead teachers' schools were randomly chosen to interview the coaches. The researcher held a mock interview at the district office with the principals and coaches to calibrate the process (Harchar, 2005). He explained the interview protocol, including using the designated code and number to refer to the teacher and school without revealing their identities during the confidentiality interview. The interview was recorded by the coach and transcribed by the district staff to prepare for the qualitative analysis conducted by the researcher later after the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for exemption. No teacher or school name would be identified on either the transcripts or the audio files. Only the transcripts were given to the researcher for data analysis. All documents would be destroyed once the final report was approved and accepted by the district office.

### **Data Analysis**

Qualitative research tends to generate a wealth of information, but without proper analysis, it is sometimes not eloquent or marginally related to the specific research questions (Kneale & Santy, 1999). Krathwohl (1998) suggested that a researcher must transform and

simplify the data into a comprehensible format in the context of the research question. Therefore, in order to analyze the data effectively, the first step is to organize it by reducing and transforming the information from the raw data. Glaser and Strauss (1967) focused on discovering theory from data utilizing a comparative analysis method. The researcher followed Glaser and Strauss's grounded theory coding process by constantly comparing and refining the information to ascertain patterns to generate concepts among various groups of individuals. Glaser and Strauss's (1967) grounded theory recommended a rigorously systematic method to analyze the data.

The researcher utilized Nvivo to facilitate the thematic comparative analysis of the study. Nvivo is a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) designed to support various methodological frameworks, including grounded theory (Nvivo, 2020). The data analysis steps included coding the line by line data, customizing the code system, category building, and constructing theories. The researcher adopted an open coding method using the software, in which he conducted a comparative analysis to organize the information to determine the consistencies among the data gathered. The continuous effort to identify and compare the various patterns allowed the researcher to code the emergent themes into hierarchical concepts through their relationships to establish linkages among all various components to develop a theory.

A memoing procedure was also be used to record how various categories begin to construe the process until no more new categories were presented during the transcript reviewing process. By comparing the iLead teachers' and coaches' data, the researcher began to ascertain patterns in their experiences, which eventually led to the generalization of concepts to unveil a theory. Glaser and Strauss (1967) explained, "In discovering theory, one generates conceptual categories or their properties from evidence, then the evidence from which the category emerged

is used to illustrate the concept” (p.23). The researcher then examined and explored these conceptual categories, among other cases, to refine and modify the concepts for generalization to “develop a theory that accounts for much of the relevant behaviors” (p. 30). The researcher mainly focused on generating the substantive theory with a specific inquiry on designing the professional development program and hoped to encounter an opportunity to transform the learning to a formal theory on either expanding or emerging the conceptual knowledge and application of transformational leadership.

During the open coding process, the researcher looked for themes and patterns, especially in the area of challenges and gains of the iLead program from the participants’ perspectives. The purpose of doing the thematically comparative and inductive analysis was to discover how the transformational leadership qualities impacted the participants through the implementation of a designed program instead of an individual leader and explore its constraints and successes.

### **Limitations**

The iLead study contains several limitations. First of all, the iLead program's objectives, enhancing teacher motivation, and improving student achievement, were limited and predetermined by the district staff based on the end-of-year administrator survey. The researcher wonders whether the district should consider a more extensive scale survey with other stakeholders, particularly the teachers and students, to adequately estimate the challenges their schools are currently facing in the rapidly changing 21<sup>st</sup>-century education. This grounded theory approach to investigate the iLead teachers' experiences aimed to discover critical insights into how transformational leadership's essential elements affect the individual participants through a designed program instead of through a leader. However, it was still implausible and farfetched to conclude the iLead program's direct impact on teacher motivation and student achievement.



Secondly, the researcher should always be mindful of the potential errors caused by the researcher's prejudice and bias and the participants in the study. The researcher understood how much the iLead district team desired an optimal outcome from the study, especially when the student achievement department was now accountable for more than \$150,000 spending on this program. However, it was essential to accurately examine the data and ensure a rigorous and analytical process to interpret its findings carefully. No matter what the results indicated, the researcher reminded the district team that no scientific approach could contribute a 100% accuracy of any findings due to its reasonable limitations and failings. Therefore, the results of the study might be considered as a provisional and probabilistic truth. A future action research project including on-going pluralistic and multi-plastic researches such as a mixed-methods approach to examine the correlation between teacher motivation and student achievement as well as other means of continuous research effort is positively encouraged and recommended to broaden the perspectives and deepen the understanding of the knowledge learned from the initial study findings.

Lastly, this study was limited to a qualitative analysis due to its relatively small sample size. The researcher is distinctly cognizant of the district's ultimate intention of designing an innovative program to impact student achievement, particularly on the state assessment. Since 2018-19 was the initial implementation year of the iLead program, only 29 iLead teachers were involved in the first-year cohort. Also, due to the iLead application process's design, all iLead participants were limited to the volunteering staff among all district teachers, which ran the risk of participant bias. Although a total population purposive sampling was conducted with all iLead teachers, due to the low number of cases studied, it was challenging to generalize the findings to a broader population and proceed with an evaluation of its impact on students' academic

performance. Since iLead is an annual program and more district teachers will be participating every year, the researcher calls for continuous mixed-methods program studies to triangulate more extensive data to increase the investigation's validity and reliability and successfully assess the effectiveness of the program.

### **Access and Role**

Gair (2012) claimed the concept of insider and outsider could be “understood to mean the degree to which a researcher is located either within or outside a group being researched” (p. 137). Scholars have various perspectives on a researcher's role as an insider or outsider of a study. Some believe the outsider offers a more objective perspective (Innes, 2009) when others argue that the insider's insight generates unique knowledge that creates an authentic value to the study, which might not be accessible for the people from the outside (Merton, 1972). However, post-modernists and post-structuralists arrogate a researcher's shifting position in a study (Naples, 1996; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2013; Xu, 2016), which is evident in this study.

The researcher was surprised but excited when asked by the district to conduct a research study for iLead about a year ago. The researcher played a dual role as both insider and outsider of this research study. As an insider, the researcher has been teaching in the district for three years and has always been an active participant in many district programs like iLearn, iPilot, iTech, and eBadge in the past. He has developed a strong relationship with most of the district's iLead planning team members, which were the administrator and the three coaches from the student achievement department. As an insider, the researcher appreciates the opportunity to work closely with these coaches and teachers. The initial idea started with a program evaluation request. However, the district team allowed the researcher to share multiple methodical approaches with various epistemological ontologies based on different theoretical frameworks

and eventually settled down with a qualitative research proposal presented in this dissertation study. This dissertation study will be part of the district's future action research project to assess and improve the iLead program's effectiveness continuously.

As an outsider, the researcher was fully engaged in dialogues with members of the iLead planning team. However, the district staff granted only limited access to the researcher and preferred no direct contact between the researcher and the iLead teachers to ensure their teachers' and students' confidentiality. The interviews and transcriptions were conducted and prepared by the district staff. The interview transcripts were given to the researcher using an ID code to protect the participants' identities. Each school was assigned to a letter, and everyone from that school was assigned to a number. For example, teachers from school A were coded as A1, A2, and so forth. The three coaches were also being coded as Coach A, Coach B, and Coach C. iLead teachers were made aware that no names of students, teachers, coaches, and schools will be shared with the researcher.

There was much debate regarding the dual role's shifting positions with its controversial propositions between the inferior and superior knowledge and experiences of the research project (Råheim et al., 2016). However, the researcher believed the two roles were intertwined and enhanced by the collaborative relationship between the planning team and the researcher. It fortified the researcher's knowledge of the program and allowed him to maintain intellectual independence and the academic autonomy needed to procure an impartial and unbiased study.

### **Reciprocity, Trust, and Rapport**

In a research study, reciprocity pertains to the benefits received from the researchers and the researched participants. Given (2008) claimed, "Research relationships are not necessarily reciprocal, but good research ethics practice requires that researchers consider what they take

from research participants as well as what they give to them” (p. 124). Trust is integral and compulsory to an adequate research project. Any initiative like the iLead program research cannot be effectively conducted without the stakeholders' collaborative efforts and firm commitments. Incoherence and uncertainty arise when the credibility of the program and leading members are at stake. Mintzberg (2004) explained,

These contributions are significant to business leaders and corporate directors who have seen their organizations' lose credibility and public confidence in a world in which business leaders are largely distrusted, as well as to scholars and academicians who are struggling to improve both the quality of management being taught in business schools and the causes of distrust intellectually (as cited in Caldwell et al., 2008, p. 161).

Trust is also identified as an essential element in building a strong relationship and in developing rapport to facilitate organizational initiatives. Lines et al. (2005) believed that the staff's trust in institutional decisions helped build new knowledge and practices. Likewise, the trust and rapport that the researcher has with the participants are also crucial in underpinning the autonomy with collegial responsibilities among all stakeholders in the research project (Conner, 2015). The researcher of the study has a long-standing rapport with the iLead coaches and the district staff. He was approached by the district administrator to assist in the research project due to the staff's recommendation. Concerning the relationship between the coaches and their teachers, the iLead coaches strive to build trust and partnership with their teachers to motivate and encourage them to take a personal interest in supporting the iLead vision as one of their own. The coaches must work collaboratively well with one another as well as with their teachers. The trust and rapport must be grounded firmly on a cohesive and robust relationship to allow

researchers to collect authentic and reliable data with high-fidelity that accurately reflect the research study outcomes (Bell et al., 2016).

### **Trustworthiness and Credibility**

Both institutional and epistemological research stances are closely related. Instead of approaching the two dichotomously in an oppositional manner, iLead research project aims to employ epistemological knowledge and beliefs to a real-life application. The district decided to conduct a study on their program to foster “the centrality of action, the requirement of spiraling self-reflection on the action, and the intimate, dialectical relationship of research to practice” (Anderson & Herr, 1999, p.12). There have been on-going conflicting viewpoints between the theoretical knowledge from higher education and its applied values in the pragmatic professional realm. Meyer and Rowan (1977) explained,

The problems faced by professional schools such as colleges of education are complex since members of these communities must legitimate themselves to an environment which includes both a university culture that values basic research and theoretical knowledge and a professional culture of schooling that values applied research and narrative knowledge. (as cited in Anderson and Herr, 1999, p. 12)

Anderson and Herr (1999) reminded us, “academics and practitioners need to continue to find ways to work together and to see their critical reflection on these efforts as part of the new scholarship” (p.20). Therefore, the validity forms of trustworthiness and credibility would help bridge the gap between academic and practitioner while transforming the applied learning into pedagogical knowledge for the iLead program.

## **Validation**

To further safeguard the study's credibility, five criteria-specific validities proposed by Anderson et al. (1994) will be considered to present in this research study to examine its trustworthiness and credibility. They are democratic validity, outcome validity, process validity, catalytic validity, and dialogic validity.

### **Democratic Validity**

All stakeholders involved in the study needed to be included in the process to ensure democratic validity. Anderson and Herr (1999) referred to the democratic validity as “to the extent to which research is done in collaboration with all parties who have a stake in the problem under investigation” (p.16). The iLead planning team has been actively involved in the discussion of identifying the problems for the research questions as well as the design of the study. Additionally, along with the principals, the coaches and iLead teachers also helped with the data collection process and were expected to offer valuable suggestions continually. Once the district iLead planning team reviews the research study, it will be shared with all iLead teachers and their principals to seek out critiques and inputs from all stakeholders. However, with strict roles and responsibilities outlined by the district and the constraint of time and resources, not all stakeholders could be involved in every course of the process. This step was essential for a transformational leadership designed program to actively engage the members through a shared decision-making protocol to create a shared vision.

### **Outcome Validity**

The research outcomes should address the original problems presented earlier regarding the district's effort to design an effective program based on the critical elements of the transformational leadership theory to motivate teachers and enhance student achievement.

Anderson and Herr (1999) stated: “Outcome validity also acknowledges the fact that rigorous practitioner research, rather than simply solving a problem, forces the researcher to reframe the problem in a more complex way, often leading to a new set of questions/problems” (p.16). The researcher believes the iLead research project will become a cornerstone of the district’s continuous efforts to support their educators in facing the challenges during an exponential time of 21<sup>st</sup>-century education. In this initial study, both the district team and the researcher realize that they will not be able to propose a valid recommendation without faithfully understanding what genuinely motivates and engages the iLead teachers to center their beliefs to compose the actions they take through their experiences in the program. Although transformational leadership elements are used to guide the iLead program design, it is not intended to be a one-size-fits-all solution for similar dilemmas that other educational institutions may be experiencing globally. The researcher is confident that the research study will set a firm footing for others to search for their own solutions.

### **Process Validity**

Anderson and Herr (1999) explained,

Process validity asks to what extent problems are framed and solved in a manner that permits ongoing learning of the individual or system. In this sense, outcome validity is dependent on process validity in that if the process is superficial or flawed, the outcome will reflect this. (p. 16)

After thorough consideration, both the district staff and the researcher felt confident and were in agreement that a qualitative study would be adequate for the initial study of the iLead program. The study will offer continuous learning opportunities for both district members and the researcher during the entire research process and even afterward. The researcher has precise

research questions to aim for and uncover. Besides, the researcher insists on thinking outside the boundary and opens to all other themes merged through the data analysis. The researcher and the district team are looking forward to any unexpected but pivotal discoveries in their journey together.

### **Catalytic Validity**

Lather (1986) delineated catalytic validity as "the degree to which the research process reorients, focuses, and energizes participants toward knowing reality to transform it" (as cited in Anderson and Herr, 1999, p. 16). The iLead district staff, including the administrator and the coaches from the student achievement, have been incredibly supportive and engaged in learning the leadership theory and assisting the researcher in preparing the information needed for the data analysis. The district office is committed to investing more time and resources regardless of everyone's busy work schedule and heavy workload. The researcher believes they will reflect on the findings and consider the study's recommendations to take necessary actions to improve their program.

### **Dialogic Validity**

Dialogic validity involves the study's findings being critically examined through peer-reviewed or collaterally lateral discussion (Wolcott, 1994). The iLead planning team has tentatively scheduled a review of the researcher's initial report in fall 2019. Due to the IRB approval timeline to approve the dissertation proposal, the district staff has agreed to delay the initial review until spring 2020. Both district members and the researcher will engage in a reflective and interactive dialogue to discuss the findings and validate or consolidate their various viewpoints. Furthermore, the results will be reviewed by all iLead teachers and their



principals to gather their feedback as well. The researcher hopes to receive permission from the district office to submit the dissertation study to an academic journal in the future.

### **Expected Findings**

The researcher felt very fortunate to have an opportunity to work with a group of experienced, highly qualified, and passionate educators to put a theoretical leadership style framework into a practical application. The study will allow the researcher to examine further the iLead program's influences from the participants' perspectives to improve and enhance its design and implementation process. The researcher expects to obtain findings that help to optimize the effectiveness of the program. Besides, he hopes to discover whether or not the elements of a leadership style can be integrated into a designed program in addition to identifying opportunities and obstacles that these participating teachers may face in adopting an innovative district program like iLead. Also, transformational leadership advocates members' involvement to engender a firm commitment for a shared vision. The iLead district staff and the researcher wish the findings can benefit the participating teachers and other educators in becoming reflective lifelong learners to improve their instructional practices and continuously increase student performance outcomes.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The educational profession immediately impacts a significant ethical dimension and an obligation to act morally and independently beyond the existing law-abiding system (Markie, 1994). The right to academic freedom does not excuse them from the ethical responsibilities personally and professionally. Their actions reflect the values and the ethical dimension of the institution and the community they represent. It sets the standards and guidelines for the forthcoming generation and the entire human society as well. Ethical consideration is essential in

any research project. It helps set the norms and standards of the conduct to prevent data fabrication and misrepresent the research outcomes for improper usages or inappropriate representations. It also elucidates the guidelines to regulate all stakeholders' behaviors in the research project to promote mutual respect, accountability, and integrity in a collaborative working environment. In this research study, to ensure the participants' complete confidentiality, no identities of the students, teachers, and schools were shared with the researcher. Although the school district office was hoping to have optimal research findings to justify the rather expensive funding allocation for the iLead program, the district staff still insisted on remaining an impartial role during the entire research study. They allowed the researcher to work independently to secure an ethical data analysis process to result in a fair and unbiased conclusion of the investigation.

### **Summary**

Postpositivistic researchers compose the inquiries that value the trustworthy reasons that affect and interact with the individuals (Paul, 2005). They also accept that *reality* is independent of our perceptions and utilizes multiple measurements and observations as the core of a scientific endeavor to understand the information received, which is not totally value-free (Mills et al., 2010). Scholars research the problem by addressing the need to investigate the causes of the results or reveal the unknown. That is, the researchers act as a critical realist and make an effort to examine the possible *Why* as variables by using the most appropriate research method with the understanding that no perfection of the natural causes can possibly be comprehended by the imperfect intellectual function of human beings (Letourneau & Allen, 1999). The district intends to design an effective incentive program to motivate teachers and improve student achievement is admirable and commendable. The researcher believes their efforts can successfully influence

the lives of the students. It is applaudable regardless of its unpredictable and uncertain limitations in this qualitative study.

The study aims to enhance and augment the researcher's understanding of the transformational leadership design program's complex integration and implementation from the participants' perspectives. It also allows a more comprehensive investigation regarding how various transformational leadership factors may generate the challenges and induce a positive influence through the participants' experiences in the innovative iLead program. Nevertheless, there are still limitations, including the program fidelity and the limited number of iLead teachers counted for the study due to the initial implementation year. The iLead planning team is committed to a future multi-year action research project involving an on-going process with data gathering, program evaluation, and reflection cycle. The insights from this initial qualitative study will empower and deepen the knowledge of all individuals involved. It will provide critical information and guidelines for the district's planning team and other educators to continuously create, refine, and revise their program to eventually achieve their goals, increasing teacher motivation and student achievement in the accelerating 21<sup>st</sup>-century education.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

### Introduction

The study explores the teachers' experiences of a district initiative, iLead, to integrate transformational leadership's essential components into its program design to build collective leaders of 21<sup>st</sup>-century education. The iLead initiative incorporated the four I's of Bass and Avolio's (1994) transformational leadership, Inspirational Motivation (IM), Idealized Influence (II), Intellectual Stimulation (IS), and Individualized Consideration (IC) into the design and practices of its implementation. The program demonstrated the district's conscious effort and absorptive capacity to build leaders among all stakeholders for accomplishing increased achievement through an organizational systematic approach and process.

The innovative idea galvanizes the academician interest and, more importantly, accentuates the knowledge and intellectual assets of the field of leadership. The main research questions guided the study are:

- What are the experiences of the teachers in the iLead program?
- In what ways did the iLead program influence teachers through a transformational leadership designed approach?

It also attempted to investigate the following sub-questions:

- From iLead teachers' perspectives, what were the gains and challenges through their experiences in the iLead program?
- What are the successes and challenges of the iLead program?

Grounded theory methodology was adopted with a line-by-line approach to generate codes and memos from both the teachers' and coaches' interview transcripts for emergent themes to address the above research questions. The relevant concepts were grouped by categories and linked to the proper properties to develop the proposed theory from the iLead experience.

The Chapter will first introduce the background and contextual description of the participants, including their ages, gender, race, years of teaching experience, current assignment, and the items they purchased through the iLead program to help enhance teaching and learning in the classroom. It will lead to a later discussion of the impetus of basic needs to build leaders' learning pathways through the iLead program. The researcher will explain and describe the process of emerging themes using the grounded theory approach to analyze the interview data and memos in the research methodology and analysis section. The researcher will synthesize the clusters of patterns and comparisons gleaned from the codes to offer descriptive parameters responding to the research questions as a summary of the research findings. A grounded theory model with open coding and a constant comparison protocol was employed to interpret and manage the data to facilitate the theoretical development. Since the researcher's district initially requested the iLead study, the Chapter four summary is organized and presented coherently and comprehensively to establish the findings to the research questions for the scholarly experts in the field and the relevant officials in the district. As part of the member check process, the district presentation was initially scheduled for August 2020. Due to the school closure, the live presentation was postponed until further notice. Instead, the research's findings were reviewed by the district staff to provide feedback.

### **Sample Descriptions and Findings**

The study's objective was to explore the teachers' experiences and their gains and successes in the iLead initiative. The district intentionally incorporated the essential transformational leadership components into the iLead program design elements such as vision setting, planning protocol, coaching model, and practices to explore whether a strategically designed program, instead of an individual leader, could enact the influence of the leadership.

The grounded theory methodology was adequate and commensurate to facilitate the investigation process because of its analytical approach to proceed beyond the complex and exhaustive description of the examined phenomena to an explanatory theoretical model grounded in the data (Linden, 2006). NVivo, the Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS), was employed to enhance the iterative procedure accommodated to the grounded theory to ensure the study's validity with greater transparency (Bringer et al., 2004).

### **Description of Sample**

There are 29 iLead teachers in the 2018-19 cohort supported by three district coaches under the supervision of the executive director of Student Achievement. The iLead participants consist of 24 elementary educators and five high school teachers who serve at 15 different schools in the district. Out of the 24 elementary school participants, there are 18 general and three special education teachers, as well as two English Learner specialists and one speech therapist. The five high school participants comprise three science, one math, and one English teacher. As indicated in Table 1, the iLead teacher's age ranges from 24 to 61 years old, from teachers with only two years of teaching experience to a more than 30 years veteran teacher who started her career in 1986. The ethnic composition of the iLead teachers is 65% White, 21% Asian, and 14% Hispanic. Among them, there are only four male participants. The transcripts of the three coaches are also available for the study. All three are White, female, and have been coaching for more than five years in the Technology and Student Achievement department. All three coaches were elementary teachers, each with more than ten years of teaching experience.

**Table 1***Demographic Information and Teaching Experiences of iLead Teachers*

Demographics	Number of Participants
Age	
20-29	3
30-39	7
40-49	7
50-59	6
60-69	1
Gender	
Male	4
Female	25
Race	
White	19
Asian	6
Hispanic	4
Years of Experience	
1-5	5
6-10	5
11-15	11
16-20	3
21-25	1
26-30	1
30+	1

*Note. The information represents the data collected during the 2018-19 school year when the interview took place.*

The iLead initiative is a district grant program to fund every participant three thousand dollars to financially support and motivate teachers to identify their instructional issues to seek out solutions and opportunities to enhance and improve student learning in the classroom. The participants can utilize the fund with no structural parameters or guidelines regulated by the district office as long as they can offer the rationale of their propositions and agree to work collaboratively with the coaches to progress and monitor student growth during the entire implementation school year. The district also elicits and honors teachers' autonomy for problem-solving and shared decision-making to build a collaborative organizational culture. According to Table 2, 75.8% of the iLead teachers purchased technology related devices, such as Smart

Boards, Chromebooks, iPads, or headphones for their students. 37 % of teachers ordered flexible seating furniture to begin to transfer their antiquated classroom to a 21<sup>st</sup>-century learning environment to promote creativity and collaboration among their students. However, 17.2% of teachers were still being challenged by meeting their basic supply needs when choosing to spend their money on items such as lab coats, goggles, markers, and even construction paper (see Table 2).

**Table 2**

*iLead Teachers Purchased Items Summary*

Categories	Percentage
Flexible Seatings	37
Classroom Supplies	17.2
Curriculum	
Software	17.2
Sub Day	13.7
Technology Items	75.8
Conferences	6.8
STEM Education	6.8

*Note. The summary table is based on the inventory spreadsheet provided by the district staff.*

**Findings through Grounded Theory Methodology with NVivo**

The grounded theory methodology is a systematic but versatile approach engineered to support the development of substantial and interpretative models grounded in pertinent empirical information (Hutchison et al., 2010). Hutchison et al. (2008) recognized the methodology's critical characteristics, such as an iterative process and open coding with systematic comparisons to advance the theoretical development to contribute to the maturation of a quality research study. To enhance the theory-building process, the researcher utilized the NVivo software to assist his coding, memo writing, and theme-finding operations. Richards (2002) recommended that the researcher consider only applying the software to meet the study's needs instead of



altering the research project to adapt to the tool. The use of the computer program was intended to augment data investigation's effectiveness to optimize its findings.

**Themes**

A grounded theory qualitative study does not usually operate with a sequential data analysis procedure to produce its results. Instead, it inclines to be an iterative process that demands the researchers to query, explore, and discover all elements of concepts from the data while consistently reflect and compare the information and categorize it into relevant properties and themes for theory building (Bowen, 2006). After a line by line coding on the 29 teachers and three coaches' interview transcripts, more than 80 codes were initially generated in addition to the 30 memos accompanied by the individual interview files. Glaser (1992) explained, “Using constant comparison method gets the analyst to the desired conceptual power, quickly, with ease and joy. Categories emerge upon comparison, and properties emerge upon more comparison. And that is all there is to it” (p. 43).

These four themes are *the impetus of needs, the empowerment for collective autonomy, the invincible coaching support, and the focus on progressive learning in the making of 21<sup>st</sup>-century leaders*. The researcher organized the findings and discussed the four themes with the main concepts displayed in Table 3.

**Table 3**

*Four Themes with Main Concepts*

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Main Concepts</b>	
The Impetus of Needs	Disequilibrium of the Basic Needs for 21st Century Education	
	From Deficiency Needs to Growth Needs for Continuous Motivation	
The Empowerment of Collective Autonomy and Serendipity	Designed Program for Teacher Empowerment	A Clear Shared Vision
		Empowerment and Teacher Autonomy

		Empowerment with Accountability for Collective Serendipity
	Reflective Coaching Model with Collaboration and Self-Accountability	Reflective Progress Monitoring Coaching Model
		Collective Autonomy and Collaboration
		Collective Serendipity of Self-Accountability
The Invincible Coaching Support	Soft Skills for Individualized Support through Relationship Building	Individualized Consideration through a Responsive, Non-Judgmental Active Involvement
		Inspirational Influence to Achieve Fulfillment and Shared Successes
	Hard Skills of Best Practices through Data-Driven Decision Making Process	The Cycle of Effective Instruction
		Time and Opportunities for Collaboration
The Focus on Progressive Learning in the Making of 21 <sup>st</sup> Century Leaders	Leadership Qualities	Communication and Collaboration
		Creativity and Critical Thinking
	Pathway of Building Leaders	Reflective Learning Pathway through Problem-Solving
		Perseverance and Resilience of 21st Century Leaders

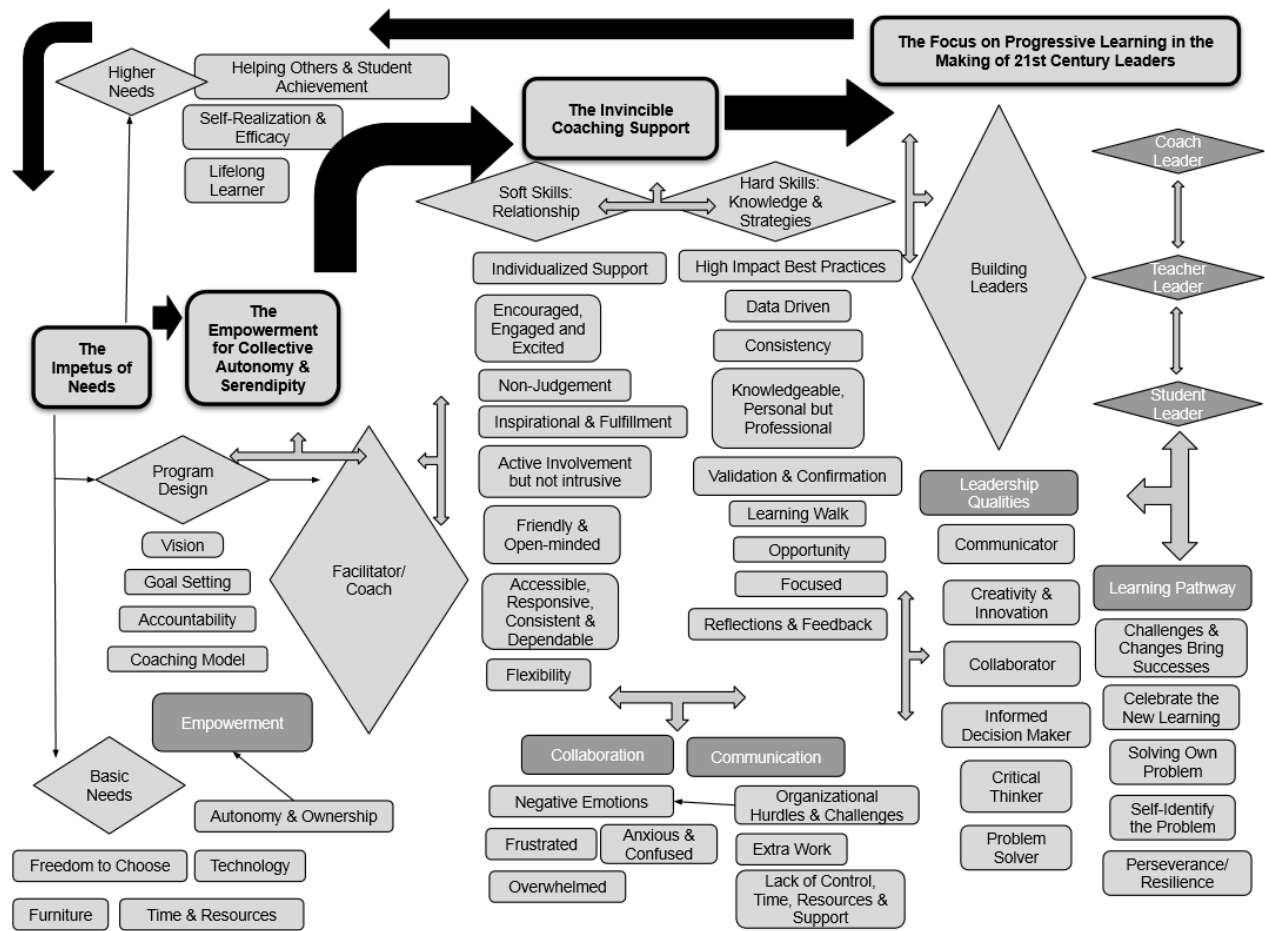
*Note. The researcher's analysis of the four themes was organized and elaborated based on the above framework.*

Through the grounded theory approach, Figure 2 illustrates how the four major themes surface through the entire comparison and emergence process to describe the iLead teachers' experiences and highlight their challenges and gains throughout the entire journey. Although teachers' *impetus of need* prepares an adequate environment for learning draws their attention to participate in the iLead program initially, the desire for self-realization to impact other students'

lives continuously motivates them to enhance their overall achievement. By empowering teachers through *collective autonomy* with the coaches' *invincible support* while emphasizing the progressive learning process instead of the achievement outcome, the iLead teachers, coaches, and the students define their own successes and maneuver through their challenges to become leaders of 21<sup>st</sup>-century education.

**Figure 2**

*The Concept Map of iLead Teachers' Experiences through a Grounded Theory Approach*



*Note.* The data is analyzed based on the 2018-19 iLead teacher cohort.

In the following section, the author will share the emerging themes by excerpting the context directly from the iLead participants' transcripts and the researcher's memos when appropriate. The direct quotes and notes will be utilized to elaborate and support the findings.

The four major emerging themes of the iLead teachers' experiences are 1) the impetus of needs, 2) the empowerment of collective autonomy and serendipity, 3) the invincibility of distinct support, and 4) the focus on progressive learning in the making of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century leaders.

### ***The Impetus of Needs***

The iLead program caught teachers' attention by providing funding to meet the teachers' needs in supporting the learning of their students. A few of the applications were basic classroom supply requests, such as construction paper, lab coats, and goggles. Thus, most other applications were either technology items or flexible seating furniture for teachers to prepare and design a classroom setting to enhance student learning. The theme's two main concepts are the disequilibrium of the basic needs for 21<sup>st</sup>-century education and the continuous motivation from deficiency needs to growth needs. The disequilibrium of basic needs for 21<sup>st</sup>-century education might induce teachers to apply for this program initially. However, the data indicated that self-efficiency in gaining confidence and meaning in life when experiencing successes in the iLead program by focusing on the progressive growth of themselves and their students appeared to be the ultimate motivator that drove one's internal impetus to continuously improve and thrives.

**Disequilibrium of the Basic Needs for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Education.** The findings indicated that the disequilibrium stemmed from teachers trying to integrate 21<sup>st</sup>-century learning while experiencing gaps in technological resources and meeting their basic instructional needs. Unlike most grant applications with specific parameters and guidelines to regulate the expenditure, the iLead program was purposefully designed to allow the participants to spend the money based on their own discretionary as long as the participants *believed* their choice would help improve student learning in their classroom. As introduced earlier in Table 2, the purchased items summary, 75.8% of iLead teachers ordered technology-related hardware or software, such as

Chromebooks, iPads, mice, headphones, TV monitors, or interactive whiteboards. The sites have long been responsible for all operational and instructional expenses for their schools. Four years ago, the district office began to supplement the site with a five-year teacher laptop and computer lab refresh program. However, according to these teachers, the one teacher device and 40 student computers were certainly not meeting the needs of these classroom teachers. Student's fair access to sufficient resources to achieve an equitable learning opportunity became questionable and threatened by depriving an educator's basic needs to instruct effectively for their digital native learners. As the B10 Teacher, 4<sup>th</sup>-grade elementary teacher, stated the reason she purchased the technology items:

I decided to apply because I feel that we need to teach 21st-century learners and students, and we didn't have as many resources as far as laptops, iPads. I was hoping to acquire more so that I could pursue that goal of being more tech-savvy and implementing more technology in the curriculum. I believe that it is to get more resources to teachers, especially because there aren't as many as we would like. It would be awesome if everyone could have one to one and have all the resources, supplies, and tools that they need to properly teach their classrooms, and so I'm assuming this was a way to help them achieve that goal.

Or the basic impulse could be explained simply as the statement from the B9 Teacher, a 6<sup>th</sup>-grade teacher from B10 teacher's school:

I participated because I needed technology in my classroom. Money is very tight, and it was a way that I could get at least a few so that I could slowly rebuild so that at some point, maybe I can obsolete the old ones.

The second-highest category that teachers purchased was flexible seating furniture. Based on the interview transcript, these teachers hoped to design and construct a 21<sup>st</sup>-century classroom to address the instructional and social-emotional needs of the diverse learners in their classes. Thirty-seven percent of the participants ordered flexible seating furniture, including standing desks, stability balls, wobble stools, cushions, bouncy seats, collaboration tables, and many more. B5 Teacher, a second-grade teacher, described why she spent her money on flexible seating:

Well, one of the main reasons I had purchased some flexible seatings because I heard students could be more focused simply by sitting on these types of furniture. The setup I had was so old. It was so frustrating. So I hoped these flexible seatings would allow me to get a better classroom engagement to move towards the 21-century classroom and get my students up-to-date learning opportunities.

While many teachers began to obtain items to promote collaboration and creativity with more flexibility to meet the students' diverse needs, others were still struggling to meet the fundamental needs to provide basic instruction. Some iLead teachers were buying classroom supplies, such as markers, construction paper, student whiteboard, and erasers. Incidentally, two high school science teachers both bought lab coats and goggles for their students, which were the indispensable protection gears to ensure students' safety in a science lab. The A4 participant was one of the high science teachers who also ordered particular trash cans for the broken glass.

I bought the lab equipment for my class. I bought some lab coats. I don't know the exact number, about 30 lab coats. I bought 40 college grade goggles, and I also bought a couple of Sharps trash cans. I bought these Sharps containers because we don't have any containers that are specific for broken glass, and that's what I got.

In sum, teachers continued to express their challenges in an antiquated learning environment with inadequate instructional resources. The interview data showed that most teachers sought additional financial support to promote 21<sup>st</sup>-century learning in their classroom when a few of them were still trying to fulfill the fundamental needs to provide basic instruction in their classroom. The researcher's surprising finding was that the iLead program initially attracted the participants to apply by meeting their basic needs. Thus, it was the realization of the higher-order impulse to affirm and sustain their learning experiences and best practices from the program.

**From Deficiency Needs to Growth Needs for Continuous Motivation.** Based on the interview transcripts, the researcher noted that many iLead teachers who initially participated in the program were to secure additional financial resources for their classrooms. Thus, teachers later realized that they were driven by the eagerness to help their students and were continuously motivated by impacting their students' lives, which led to their personal and professional gains of self-realization. Below is a statement from the C5 Teacher, a first-grade teacher, describing such a transition after purchasing some technology and flexible seatings for her classroom.

Do kids learn best by sitting in a chair? Do kids learn best by sitting on a bouncy ball? Do kids learn best by using an iPad more or just paper and pencil? I wanted to find all these different things that are going to help them. The program did support me in achieving this goal by, again, allowing me the opportunity to get more flexible seating and get more options for these kids as well as more iPads. So now I have more iPads, and I can have, in my small groups, three rotations of kids using the iPads, and so they're learning and doing more things with technology, which is what they need to be doing these days to compete in a digital world.

A4 Teacher also explained how he was motivated and inspired by his students through the iLead program.

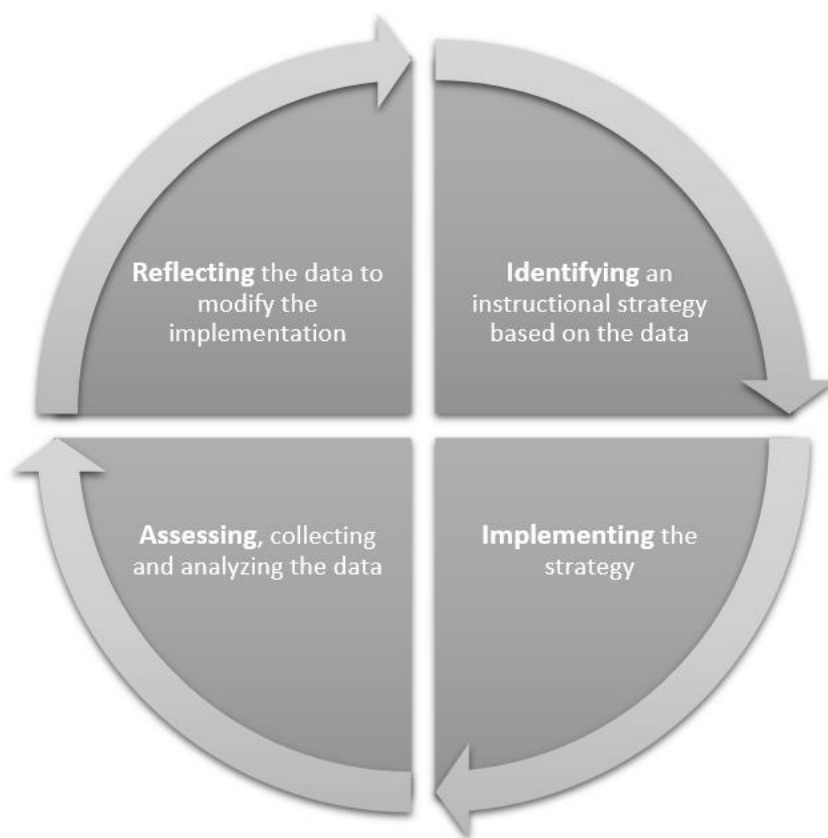
What motivates me the most is to witness a student realizing that they're growing in ways that they haven't before. It goes back to the whole cliché moment of like when a teacher sees a lightbulb go off in a student's eye. It really ties in strongly to this because there's such a huge difference between what we had before iLead, and we have now that we're in iLead. And the students see that, and the students are impacted by it. Now the students have access to all these things they didn't have before, and they're interacting with the material in a completely different way. They're learning in so many different more ways. That's what keeps me going. That's why I wanted to be in this program and continue this kind of work because it's exciting. It's not for me but also for my students, so that's what motivates me the most.

One of the interview questions was to inquire whether or not these teachers planned to continue with their practices even without the financial incentive from the iLead program next school year. The iLead coaching practice was designed based on the cycle of effective instruction similar to the instructional improvement cycle included in the toolkits developed by the Regional Educational Laboratory Central for York Public Schools in Nebraska (Cherasaro et al., 2015). The four major components of the iLead coaching cycle are: identifying an instructional strategy based on the data, implementing the strategy, assessing, collecting and analyzing the data, and reflecting the data to modify the implementation (Figure 3).



**Figure 3**

*iLead Coaching Model: The Cycle of Effective Instruction*



*Note.* The iLead coaching model is modified based on the instructional improvement cycle included in the toolkit developed by the Regional Educational Laboratory Central for York Public Schools in Nebraska (Cherasaro et al., 2015).

All 29 iLead teachers stated that they would carry on the iLead practice even though data gathering and analysis were identified as one of the most challenging tasks throughout their experiences. Here are several statements from the iLead teachers that noted their rationales.

From Teacher A1, a 59-year-old female first-grade teacher:

Yes, I would definitely continue because I see the value to my students, and I see the value to myself, and I think it strengthened my teaching. And I think that it helped me see that there were learning opportunities for them that I would not have explored otherwise.

Teacher A4 shared another message:

Yes, it's my own personal opinion that this kind of critical approach to trying things in the classroom in order to better yourself as an educator, that's why we're here. We didn't sign up to become teachers to say the same things every single day, every single year of our lives. No, we wanted to be teachers to make an impact on a student's life, and that shouldn't be taken lightly. For me, it always entices me to know that every single time I try something, I always find like ten more things I could learn from it, and it just keeps on exponentially going that way, and it makes me more excited to try all these different things that I haven't tried yet.

And the B2 Teacher, a high school environmental science teacher who taught mostly senior students, summed it up very well by stating:

Oh, 100 %. iLead showed me how to be a better teacher. I think true professionals are always trying to get better at what they're doing, and this is definitely a good motivator. I mean, after 18 years, sometimes you need a little prodding to question what you're doing, and this was that. Yeah, I'm gonna do it. I'm excited for next year to keep tweaking the things I've been doing this year to become even better.

Maslow (1970) defined self-actualization as “It may be loosely described as the full use and exploitation of talents, capabilities, potentialities, etc. Such people seem to be fulfilling themselves and to be doing the best that they are capable of doing” (p. 150). It was evident that the iLead teachers were inspired and continuously motivated by enhancing teacher efficacy to support student learning and achievement through their participation in the program. The positive experiences amplified their desire for continuous learning and improvement to maximize their potentials and actualize their self-growth goals.

### *The Empowerment for Collective Autonomy and Serendipity*

The impetus of needs actively engaged the participants with strong motivation and commitment in the purposefully designed iLead program to empower teachers through collective autonomy and serendipity. This theme includes two major concepts: a designed program for teacher empowerment and a reflective coaching model with collaboration and self-accountability. Collective autonomy among teachers, coaches, and the organization empowered all stakeholders to become leaders and resulted in the serendipity of achieving accountability for their shared vision. An incentive focusing on meeting the participants' basic needs was a clever way to draw the teachers' attention. It ignited their motivation to take the risk of applying for an innovative district initiative. However, a designed program embedded with essential factors of the transformational leadership style, being executed effectively by the enforcers, the coaches, was the lasting combustible fuel to keep the energy frame going to ensure its maximum influence and sustainability. Without these critical components, the early impetus would only be fugacious and unable to endure the hardship and challenges along the way. The iLead program integrated with the transformational leadership factors to empower teachers, resulted in collective autonomy and serendipity. It was well supported by its designed program and executed effectively through the three iLead coaches' coaching practices.

**Designed Program for Teacher Empowerment.** From the interview of teachers' experience of the iLead program, three elements were observant of the iLead program's design. The program emphasized a clear vision, empowerment and teacher autonomy, and finally, collective serendipity accountability. The innovative idea of the iLead program was its attempt to incorporate Bass and Avolio's (1994) essential elements of transformational leadership, the four I's, into the design framework and implementation of the program. The alignment of the four I's

was, as indicated in Appendix A. The district intended to explore how these transformational leadership qualities impacted the participants by a designed program, such as iLead, instead of individual leaders. Bass and Avolio's four I's enunciated a clear vision to motivate and empower the followers by assuring them the autonomy to set challenging goals for problem-solving and encouraging them to overcome their hurdles through intellectual stimulation. These transformational leadership elements constituted collective autonomy to reinforce the individual's accountability by elaborating on their ownership and responsibility of the independent choice on decision-making and being held accountable for its outcome. That is to say, the transformational leadership components of inspirational motivation, individualized influence, and consideration, as well as the intellectual stimulation embedded in the program, constituted a clear shared vision for teacher empowerment. The collective autonomy from the iLead stakeholders resulted in the serendipity of enhancing teachers' accountability to themselves, their coaches, the district that funded the program. These iLead teachers thrived not only for the success of the organization they served but also for the students they were ultimately responsible for.

*A Clear Shared Vision.* The vision of iLead was to improve instructional efficacy by empowering teachers to make decisions for enhancing student achievement. The shared vision was created collectively by a group of teachers and iLead coaches one year before implementing the program. A mandatory orientation took place at the start of the program to communicate the program vision. As part of the program requirements, the teachers had to set one clear and specific goal to align with the district vision after reflecting on their current instructional practices based on student achievement data. They would then develop individualized action

plans and implemented them accordingly with their personal coaches' support throughout the entire program. Coach C described how the program was put together before the deployment.

I was part of the initial focus group and worked with teachers developing on how this program should look, on how the program should roll out. I was part of developing the questions for the grant writing process, the interview that we did with the teachers who were participating in the grant, and are reviewing with them- how to evaluate their needs and what kinds of things that they wanted to do.

Teacher B18, a K-1 special education teacher serving students with severe autism, also related the following message to express how the program's vision helped her construct one of her own.

Well, it helped me create more of a vision. I had an idea of what I wanted at the beginning, but I didn't know how to create it or how to make it possible. And I also unsure of what I wanted to be the right one for my kids, or maybe I just didn't know what I really wanted. So I got something for my class. That was great. But if that could impact my instruction and increase student achievement to align with the district vision, that I was not sure. The simplicity of the district vision definitely helped me set up my own goal. With only one goal to work on, I could stay more focused and pay attention to the impact of my plans and actions and knew where to grow from there.

***Empowerment and Teacher Autonomy.*** Empowerment involves the degree of control between the authoritarians and followers. Previous research exhibited a strong correlation between staff empowerment and better job performance, satisfaction, as well as their commitment to the workplace (Setbert et al., 2011). The opportunities to empower the teachers were purposefully integrated as the essential components of the iLead program. The program design started with teachers having the ultimate freedom to decide how they would spend the

grant to approach the academic issues identified by themselves. They then worked collaboratively with the coaches and other colleagues to continuously modify and refine their plans and actions. For example, the iLead program assured teachers of the utmost latitude regarding the fund's disbursement and exempted them from the district's standard devices and purchasing regulations and guidelines. Also, teachers were encouraged to set their individual goals based on the learning needs they identified from the student group of their choice. Although the program regulated a minimum bi-weekly coach meeting, coaches were flexible with the frequency and scheduling of the meeting time and format to meet their teachers' needs. The iLead's best practice of the cycle of effective instruction was also a critical component of the program design. However, the iLead teachers were put in charge of the pacing and expectation of their own learning experience. In other words, the program did not require teachers to demonstrate positive student achievement gains to justify the spending. Instead, teachers' reflection and learning from the entire iLead experience was the cornerstone of the program objectives. The purpose was to elevate the teachers' autonomy and safeguard the ownership and autonomy of the individual. Below are some of the comments from the participants. From Teacher A3, a 5<sup>th</sup>-grade 15-year veteran elementary teacher:

Definitely the teacher autonomy in terms of getting to choose whatever you want, to have that freedom to really know what you want, what you see the needs are in your class, and being able to put it in effect and try something you've never tried before. To have your own little experiment in your classroom and see how things work. I think that's huge.

From B15, a fourth-grade second-year teacher:

The best thing I like is I had the freedom to use the grant to buy what I think is important to my classroom that will be helpful to help me increase student achievement. The

strength is we get support outside the classroom. We aren't just given by other people what they think we need in the class. With the grant, we get to decide what to buy that works for the classroom is awesome. That's what I like the best about iLead.

From C5, a 29-year-old, female first-grade teacher:

I think the biggest strength, for sure, is the fact that it's very open. You, as a teacher, get to decide what you want for your classroom. You, as a teacher, get to decide what's going to fit best for those students' needs.

Moreover, Coach C, who was recognized as the Teacher of the Year for the State of California during her teaching career, summed it up nicely for the core purpose of the iLead program.

I think what motivates me the most is knowing that every student can learn and that teachers in this program have volunteered themselves to this experience to commit to working with the tools that they want to try and commit to meeting and reflecting on a regular basis and to move forward. I also think that it's important for teachers to have more autonomy in knowing what you're providing for their students to make a difference in their lives.

***Empowerment with Accountability for Collective Serendipity.*** The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines *serendipity* as “the faculty or phenomenon of finding valuable or agreeable things not sought for” (“Serendipity,” n.d.). The dictionary further distinguishes its meaning from the word *luck* by signaling the distinct connotation of accidental positive findings when one is not purposefully seeking. The preliminary idea of developing a teacher incentive program to incorporate all essential qualities of a leadership style was experimental as quoted from Coach A, who has been a coach for the department for over seven years:

In the beginning, we did not know what this [iLead program] was going to lead us. We read about the major components of transformational leadership and its seem-to-be amazing influences on staff motivation and culture change. We knew we needed something to get our teachers motivated and excited. But none of us were administrators, and we weren't sure how to take advantage of it. And then we thought, why not just build a program around the same concepts and see what would happen. Can we get to where we want to go, which for us, the coaches, is to support our teachers to enhance student learning and achievement if we simply let them (teachers) decide where they want to go and how to get there?

Unexpectedly, the focus of iLead program on teacher empowerment did not only elevate teacher autonomy but, most importantly, had evolved into a self-regulated accountability protocol that has brought about a surprisingly optimal outcome for all. It successfully converted the negative perception of a progress monitoring and reporting requirement into a positive self-validation and growth opportunity beneficial to all stakeholders, including the district office, coaches, teachers, and students.

Stopford and Baden-Fuller (1990) advocated the empowerment of staff to augment organizational performance. Thus, Ogden et al. (2006) argued the inability for operation if without accountability. Statt (1991) suggested a positive influence of empowerment on raising accountability by stating the empowerment was a “kind of delegation in which the subordinate owns the task she has been entrusted with and accepts full responsibility for it” (p. 40). However, critics also contended the containment of empowerment when limited options were available for practice due to accountability (Hales, 2000). Regardless of the various viewpoints above, the relationship between the two has never been considered part of the program objectives. Besides,



the 2018-19 cohort was the first-year implementation. Therefore, the iLead planning team aimed to discover and explore the teachers' experiences instead of evaluating its impacts on student achievement. In other words, the iLead program's focus was to hold the participants accountable for constant reflections on their own learning experience for the maximum growth opportunities to enhance teacher efficacy instead of students' academic performance outcomes. As Coach A noted in her interview transcript:

The purpose is to allow teachers to have to be empowered to make decisions about what's best for their own students based on their data. So looking at their student assessments, looking at their student behavior, looking at attendance, any issue that can impact student achievement, and we are empowering the teachers to say my students need this. I need these tools to help improve their performances. If it works, that is great. Let's celebrate! If not, let's learn from it and also celebrate what we have just learned! So I feel like that's the ultimate purpose. Yes. Hold them accountable for their learning, not the student assessment results. Help them realize that it all is in the hands of the teachers with the support of coaches to work with them.

Teacher A4 was empowered by being in the driver's seat of change.

As the participating teacher, I feel that in terms of the whole role of iLead, I think that I'm kind of the driving force for making the type of change that I want specific to my own needs. What I see is fit for my students.

Teacher C5 also shared a powerful statement about her commitment.

Having all the freedom of making all these decisions all by yourself, you'd better be ready to own it and are willing to do whatever it takes to make it work.

**Reflective Coaching Model with Collaboration and Self-Accountability.** According to teachers' experiences, the iLead practice, a reflective progress monitoring coaching model focusing on collective autonomy and collaboration for collective serendipity of self-accountability, was well recognized as a main component of the program. Browning (1993) noted in his report regarding the administration's battle to improve organizational performance to acknowledge *process* as "an organizing concept that pulls together absolutely everything necessary to deliver some important component of strategic value" (p. 48). An idea to incorporate transformational leadership elements into a district incentive program to enhance teacher empowerment and efficacy was supported by an organic process to allow coaches to work collaboratively with the teachers to scheme and guide its implementation. The iLead coaching model was a structured *process* to provide the pragmatic application framework to engender the linkages among the various transformational leadership theoretical concepts' essential components. It offered an adequate mechanism for both the teachers and coaches to work collaboratively with self-regulated accountability to maneuver throughout the iLead experience successfully.

**Reflective Progress Monitoring Coaching Model.** The iLead coaching model was based on the best practice of the cycle of effective instruction to achieve the program's mission to develop a collaborative culture and continuously focus on student achievement by implementing data-driven instructional practices and integrating technology to better prepare students as 21<sup>st</sup>-century learners (See Appendix E). The teachers first identified their students' learning needs, followed by adopting a progress monitoring coaching model to strengthen their instructional practices. The coaches met with teachers once a week or every other week to observe their lesson, analyze, and reflect on the data. The purpose of collecting the data was to monitor student

progress and continuously modify the action plan that was put in place to address the learning needs prior. Coach A explained the shared objective of the reflective progress monitoring model for teacher empowerment below.

My overall coaching goal is to really help the teachers be able to reflect. And so they're being empowered by taking charge of their journey in this program. That's my goal. I feel like if they are able to take the time to reflect and look at the data and pay attention to what their students are doing, it will help to build confidence and validate the choices they are making. I am simply here to support the reflection process. I am not here to tell them what to do but to collaborate with them to problem solve and keep them motivated. I hope this coaching model would empower them to continue to do that so they will start making data-driven decisions. So really, my goal is ultimately to get that reflecting cycle going when a teacher does something, they look at the effects, and they make changes based on that. So while the ultimate goal would be increasing a student's achievement, for the teachers I coach, my goal is really to empower them to reflect.

The reflective coaching model facilitated a data-driven progress monitoring process to formulate and channel the focuses and discussions on refining teachers' instructional practices based on the data. In other words, the reflective coaching model was although data-driven but not performance-driven. With a growth mindset, teachers and coaches celebrated and capitalized on all learning experiences, even a negative one, which was viewed as one step behind their successes. Orienting the emphasis from the student achievement outcome to teachers' acquisition experience helped alleviate teachers' stress. Teacher B1, a teacher union representative of her site, stated:

I think the hardest thing was just the extra work that it [iLead] put on me. I needed to keep that data coming up and decided what data I'm going to keep. In the beginning, I had no idea how I could relate the information to the purchase I made. I was uncertain what data to collect, and I was really struggling. That was really hard. My coach and I needed the data to reflect on constantly, so we can discuss a plan to modify my instruction accordingly. I have been a teacher for 18 years, and I knew I was a good teacher. I was a bit discouraged by the process but glad that I did not need to justify my spending base on the results I got.

Based on the teachers' comments, the reflective coaching model empowered them to think critically for problem-solving and made data-driven decisions to enhance their teaching for improving student learning. Many iLead teachers recognized the values of the data-driven decision-making process to improve their teaching for addressing the unique needs of the individual student. The A4 Teacher stated:

I appreciate the coaching model. There's this whole data-driven aspect to it which continues to iterate that process of we tried something, let's look at the data. What was good? What was bad? Let's try this next and then cycle it back. The whole iterative process is really important to improving yourself as a teacher to meet the needs of as many students as possible.

A similar comment from Teacher B10:

I was encouraged by my coach to solve the issue based on the data we reflected together. I think having a lot of data to be able to analyze and refer back to is essential. The way to make changes as you needed truly meets the individual needs of each student.

Another one from Teacher B14, a ten-year Mandarin immersion program teacher:

As I mentioned before, the progress monitoring tool that I created allowed me to assess my students daily. That's one of the best experiences being in the program cause, like I said, I got to see my students' performance right away and provide feedback to them right away, so I knew what to do next.

C4 Teacher, an educational specialist for her site, also shared her positive experience with the data-driven process in her comment below.

I was given the platform to see firsthand whether or not these digital tools and resources I purchased could promote student achievement. I believed the frequent check-ins of their progress and the use of the formative assessment to discuss it with my coach helped me refine my teaching and became a better teacher. The baseline data at the beginning of the year and the end of year summative one also allowed me to see where my students were at before and how far that I was able to help them grow. That certainly makes me feel good.

***Collective Autonomy and Collaboration.*** The collective autonomy of the iLead program referred to the autonomic but collaborative interactions and experiences shared not only among the teachers but also between the iLead teachers and their coaches. Cattaneo and Chapman (2010) identified knowledge, self-efficacy, and competence action as the critical components for empowerment. These essential constituents were magnified and reinforced through the collective autonomy and collaboration for both the iLead teachers and coaches. In iLead, the participants were given the full authority to make their own independent decisions for problem-solving to enhance student learning. The synergy from working with other iLead teachers toward their mutual goals was observant. The collaborative partnership with the coaches helped to extend

teachers' knowledge and skills. It contributed to a higher degree of self-efficacy and competence for espousing teacher empowerment to successfully execute their actions. A4 Teacher viewed the autonomic collaboration among the teachers, coaches, and the district as a partnership relationship.

The partnership of having support from people in the district and allowing teachers to make their own decisions is definitely a plus. The collaboration all the time that we've had to really talk about my idea and how to proceed with it was great. The constant follow-up from my coach, I think it is super important. It's not just here's the stuff, and we'll look at the data at the date at the end of the year. It has been an ongoing relationship, and we were able to make our decisions collectively. The vision is for it to be ongoing, beyond this year, which I think is a super big strength.

The iLead planning team originally projected to accept one teacher per site, a total of 41 applicants for the first-year cohort. However, since there were only 32 applicants, the team decided to admit all 29 applicants who submitted a complete application regardless of their school sites. The same coach was assigned to teachers at the same school to ease the tension of providing flexible scheduling and increase the opportunities for more comprehensive and cohesive planning through collaborative discussions among the participants while taking advantage of the same coach facilitating the collective autonomy and collaboration process.

For example, School G was a non-Title I school receiving limited federal funding to modernize their classrooms to offer a 21<sup>st</sup>-century learning environment for their students. A group of eight teachers from School G decided to capitalize on the avenue and applied for the program concurrently. Although the applications were submitted individually, it was evident that these teachers worked collegially to compose their individual proposal as a part of the prominent

component for a larger and grander plan shared among themselves. They hoped to develop students' 4 C's skills by first reimagining their antiquated classrooms with flexible seating furniture and technology-enhanced learning tools to eventually lead to the transformation of the entire school to meet their digital native learners' needs. By sharing the same coach, Coach B developed a comprehensive understanding of the team's strengths and weaknesses to expedite their learning by pairing them to work collaboratively and interactively during the Professional Learning Community (PLC) time when she was not on campus. B10 teacher from School G commented on how she and her partner rallied for the program to get more teachers involved at her school.

In the beginning, I decided to apply because my partner next door asked me to apply. In the end, we were able to get eight teachers from our school to apply. We felt that we needed to teach 21st-century learners and students, and we didn't have as many resources as far as laptops, iPads, and our classrooms were very old from the 70's I guessed. So we were hoping to acquire more stuff so that we could pursue that goal of getting the more tech-savvy tools for our kids and implementing more technology in the curriculum.

Rousseau and Aubé's study (2013) suggested that collective autonomy might undertake as a motivation factor to propel one's desire to endeavor their challenges and achieve more. B11 Teacher, who was School G's language immersion program coach, discussed the collective plan strategized by the eight teachers from School G and how the PLC enhanced their learning experiences.

When I heard about the program, I thought that it was an excellent opportunity to get more resources to teachers, especially because there weren't as many as we would like. Although it was still not enough with this grant, we figured out if we could get a couple

of more teachers involved, we could all share the resources, and we could also work together on our tasks since I was not too techy myself. Our PLC meeting really helped me a lot since Coach B was not here all the time. Eventually, it would be awesome if everyone could have one to one in our school with flexible seating to allow more students to collaborate and communicate in class, which were part of the 4 C's, the 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills, I believe.

The iLead coaches also connected teachers with similar goals and challenges from various campuses to form a holistic PLC team tailored to their needs to ensure a network of extended support for all participants. A4 Teacher denoted his best experience in the iLead program regarding the teacher PLC:

I felt the iLead program was able to give teachers more access to resources that they would not have known were there. I feel like a lot of teachers kind of feel stuck in their own little situations that they have similar problems, but they are so far apart that they don't know that they have the same problems. Some of us have a little bit more progress in solving those problems, but in the end, there is not a lot of communication within schools. Not only between high schools but also between secondary and primary. The PLC was very helpful and really drove home with the idea that yes, we are trying to connect the district as a whole, not just through the same high school, middle school, elementary but all the way throughout to connect these teachers that are having these struggles, that are having these same needs that can be fixed by just simply having a conversation about it. And to be able to connect us in this way really makes us feel more capable. I have ideas that I can start trying now that I would not have been able to think about had I not been a participant in this program.



*Collective Serendipity of Self-Accountability.* Ghanem and Castelli insinuated (2019) the enhancement of power-sharing within the organization when the staff is empowered and bonded by a trusting and cooperative relationship. Mordhah (2012) suggested that self-accountability could reduce oppression and empower individuals through an inclusive decision-making process to mutually the responsibility of the outcomes. Lerner and Tetlock (1999) also implied the advancement of self-observation and self-regulation competency due to self-accountability development. The collective serendipity emerged when iLead teachers started to appreciate the routine coach meeting to impel them to begin holding themselves accountable for not the learning of the students but, most importantly, their own growth and experiences. C1 Teacher, a K-1 teacher, explained how the program urged her to thrive and achieve more after teaching for 31 years.

It [iLead] supported me in two ways. First and foremost, it gave me tools that I didn't already have. The second part of it is because of having a coach's support. It allowed me to push myself. There was something about being held accountable to somebody else to eventually reach the point that I was able to hold myself accountable. And then definitely when we did the walk-through, later on, I wanted to be as good as somebody else. I wanted to be better than somebody else. It just definitely kept pushing me, and that was huge.

C3 Teacher, a female fourth-grade teacher, also shared her mixed feelings from being held accountable to become self-accountable.

What I liked most is also what I liked least about the program, which is the accountability piece. I was meeting with my coach so often held me to a standard, ensuring that I was doing what I said I was going to do on a weekly basis. So, while it was a lot of work

throughout the school year, it also held me accountable and allowed me to see the growth within my students. I plan to continue to do so even without someone making me do it because I know it will benefit my students.

Overall, iLead, a well-designed innovative program with a reflective coaching model, would not be successful and effective without considerable support from the competent and versatile coaches. iLead coaches helped to embark on a shared journey collaboratively and synergistically with the teachers to hold everyone, including themselves, accountable to strive for continuous student achievement. As B17 Teacher, a 55-year-old high school chemistry teacher signified her message in the interview:

So overall, I think the biggest strength is that a teacher gets to be owning their choices.

The district is supportive of his or her innovations and creativity and wants the teacher to do the right thing for kids and put that energy into the right place and not feel burned out with it. I think that couldn't happen without the right people involved. So I really appreciate the ladies [coaches] that were involved in the program and driving it forward. Because if they weren't the right people and they didn't have their hearts in the right place, or they didn't share a similar mission as ours and the patient and skills to support us, it wouldn't work.

The relationship between the teachers and coaches was interconnected as they shared the journey together. It was also serendipitous because teachers were empowered to make the autonomic decision while working collectively with their coaches, making them feel more accountable for enhancing and improving the students' learning they were ultimately responsible for. B2 Teacher summarized well regarding the collective autonomy and serendipity engendered from teacher empowerment of the iLead program.

The strengths are two-fold in my eyes. One, it's the independence and any vision a teacher has for the i-Lead. The program promotes that and makes every possible idea come true. But the second part of that is the guidance, and the coaches did such a great job making sure that you're in fulfilling your vision. You're constantly thinking about the students' needs and realize you are responsible not only for your kids but also for yourselves as a teacher in this profession. Are the needs of your students met, and how can you prove that they're being met? And just having that constant reminder from the caring and supportive coaches prods me to re-evaluate my teaching, which was immense positive in the program. I believe not only were the students benefited from this program, so were the teachers, the coaches, and the entire district as well.

### ***The Invincible Coaching Support***

The impetus of needs provided the drive for the teachers to begin their shared journey for collective empowerment and accountability through the iLead program. However, the coaches' comforting support was indispensable to safeguard the mental wellness of the participants while experiencing setbacks for being boldly innovative to try something new. The coaches' extensive knowledge and professional expertise were also essential for problem-solving to overcome their obstacles. The invincible coaching support included coaches' soft skills for individualized support through relationship building and the hard skills of best practices through the data-driven decision-making process. iLead, an educator incentive program with a strong focus on teacher empowerment, would not be eminent without the coaches' invincible support. Previous research suggested a positive impact of coaches' support on teachers' instruction to improve student performance (Kraft et al., 2018; Lake et al., 2012; Sailors & Shanklin, 2010). The early work from Joyce and Showers (1980) conceptualized the coaching support as a vital component to

enable teachers to convert the theoretical knowledge and skills to functioning instructional applications in the classroom, which helped lay out the foundation of teacher coaching theory and practices (Joyce & Showers, 2002). The existing teacher coaching literature centered on the various theories of action with different coaching models and implementation (Cornett & Knight, 2009; Schachter, 2015; Stormont et al., 2015). Nonetheless, the studies' emphases pertained directly to the two major constituents, the soft and hard skills of the coaches to perform their job effectively.

Noe et al. (2015) defined skills as one's degree of competency to execute the required duties and differentiated these various abilities into the technical and behavioral dimensions. The hard skills refer to the epistemological proficiency and content expertise relevant to the specified profession. These skills can be acquired through a knowledge inquiry process and measured by a diagnostic assessment. On the contrary, the soft skill capitalized traits and attributes of the individual to connect, communicate and collaborate with others for relationship building in order to execute the tasks and shared objectives adequately and sufficiently (Daud et al., 2012). By offering individualized support through building an empathetic relationship, the knowledgeable iLead coaches became the most valuable asset as invincible support and resources for teachers to communicate and collaborate to make informed data-driven instructional decisions to overcome their challenges. iLead teacher overwhelmingly complimented the coaches' support they received and explained how essential it has been to their successes. According to Teacher A3,

I think the strength is definitely the personalization of the program that each teacher can get what they feel will support their individual teaching. I also think the individualized coach and training us to look at our data was another strength because it's one of those last things that you really want to do at the end of the day is go back and look at your data

as they can supply a lot of information. It's beneficial. I believe this is the key to my success in this program.

From B18 Teacher,

The coaching practice was great, and the main reason that I was able to stick with the program. I had Coach B in my classroom twice a month to help out. It was good cuz she would sometimes do things I couldn't see. Give some great advice with that, and we just kind of ongoing, so she was able to make sure we achieved something. Although sometimes, it didn't quite work out the way that I was trying to do. She just wouldn't let me quit. She was like my friend, my cheerleader, and someone that I could always count on. I would hate to lose her support in Year 2. I hope the coaching support will continue for all iLead teachers. I am not sure if I am ready to support other teachers yet without her help.

The iLead coaches' support is flexible and individualized to meet the needs of the learners and optimize the learning experience.

**Soft Skills for Individualized Support through Relationship Building.** The two primary soft skills were the individualized consideration through a responsive, non-judgmental active involvement and the inspirational influence to achieve fulfillment and shared successes. In iLead, individualized support was emphasized and provided through a strong and robust relationship between the coaches and teachers. The critical components of instructional coaching enhanced teachers' understanding with continuous assistance by offering constructive feedback and consistent follow-up in a "non-threatening, collegial way" (The National Reading Technical Assistance Center, 2010, p. 2). The non-threatening and collegial relationship between the coaches and teachers was effected through an individualized consideration of a non-judgmental

active involvement and inspirational influence with an open mind to encourage the participants to pursue not only the fulfillment of the individual but also the triumph of the collective efforts.

***Individualized Consideration through a Responsive, Non-Judgmental Active Involvement.*** Avolio and Bass (1995) delineated a discernible quality of individualized consideration in transformational leadership as its recognition of the individual's diverse needs required for growth and the development of their potentials. The empathetic approaches of the iLead coaches included responsive and non-judgmental guidance through active and flexible but not intrusive engagement with the participants. Consistently, the iLead coaches met with their teachers at least every other week regularly but remain flexible to meet the teachers' needs. Coach A summarized the coaching protocol shared among all coaches. The coaching etiquette and guidelines aligned with the descriptions provided by the teachers.

So I see all my teachers once a week or every other week, pending on their needs.

However, I tried to see them every week, if possible. Every week involves checking in with them to see if they need anything from me because I wanted to make sure I could address their needs first. I was here to support whatever they needed, even if that day was fixing their Excel spreadsheet. That's what I was there for. Our routine was an observation of some sort or supporting whatever they were doing around formative assessment or their goal and then a discussion afterward with how things were going with their data collection, especially in regards to informing their instructions. I would always follow up with an email of what we discussed as our next steps, including what the expectations were for each other. Yes. We had a shared responsibility in this journey together. There's a lot of communication through email, and there was a lot of sharing through text as well. They knew that I was always available for them and would try to

help them whenever questions that come up. I needed them to trust me, so I tried to make sure the most important thing for me as a coach was my availability and support.

B7 Teacher, a special education teacher who taught students with either moderate or severe disabilities, alluded to the emotional agility needed for her in order to participate in this program.

The schedule was really easy with Coach B, which I definitely needed, so I wouldn't feel overwhelmed and helpless. She would come out every Monday, and we're kind of setting that time up at the beginning because it was a better day for me. But she's kind of offering a variety of other times, so it was very flexible for me. She would normally come every other week. When I needed her the most, especially when I was having trouble gathering my data, she came almost every week. I could also chat with her via email or texted her. She was always available to me. I don't think I can survive this program without her.

The flexibility did not only apply to the coaching availability but also methods of communication. C4 Teacher described how the multi-faucet ways of interactions between the coach and him helped strengthen the collaborative relationship in addition to the responsive, timely support his coach offered in order for him to achieve his goal.

Some ways that we collaborated were through the weekly meetings. We communicated face-to-face when we met, and we also communicate through Google doc form that we shared to provide information, feedback, comments. We also have communicated on the phone, through text messages, all of that. There have been multiple times that I needed help with iLead, and she was able to be flexible with her schedule and come out on an additional day or on a day that she was not really scheduled here. She was even open to changing the time that we met from the morning to the afternoon because I felt that I

needed her to observe some areas I needed her feedback on. So I felt that we had very strong communication and a very strong partnership, and it really helped me to promote student achievement by being able to collaborate with someone like her.

Although flexibility was essential to address the individual's diverse needs, iLead teachers also appreciated the coaches' consistency and dependability to build trust and establish purposeful objectives. C3 Teacher noted in her transcript below:

I meet with my coach every week. We met on Monday afternoons, and that allowed me the whole week to work on my writing with my students and then to look over it over the weekend before we met. It was nice to have a consistent schedule and format in addition to having someone that you could count on to show up weekly to help. The structure of our meetings was informal, which was nice. And every meeting, we would go over what my students had done, and then we would set a goal for the next meeting as far as how we were going to break it down into smaller steps or what we were going to look forward to in the next assignment. She [Coach] made it clear and simple for me to work on, and I knew I could trust her advice, and she would always be there for me if needed.

Additionally, the iLead teachers expressed their sincere appreciation of the non-judgmental, active but not intrusive coaching approach, which helped cultivate a personalized and riskless learning environment led genuinely by the participants instead of the coaches. Being non-judgmental helped secure a safe and open forum to encourage creativity and endorse critical thinking for problem-solving (Huang et al., 2016). Therefore, instead of approaching teachers as problem solvers with solutions, the iLead coaches acted more as teammates who shared the teacher's discovery journey together. These coaches had made themselves vulnerable by frankly telling their teachers that although they might not know all the answers, they would be side by



side with their teachers until they found one. Chhibar (2019) also emphasized the vulnerability in a coaching process to allow the participants to feel unthreatened while sharing their deepest concerns and doubts with their coaches for advice and improvement. Many iLead teachers highlighted this essential positive relationship with their coach. From

Teacher B2:

The best thing about the coach is she made me feel comfortable with the program. I felt like I could discuss anything with her via challenges or the mistakes I made. She never made me feel like I couldn't ask her about anything.

From Teacher B9:

I like the fact that I never felt like I was being judged. It was never in the sense that somehow if I messed up in front of her, it was going to affect me later down the road. It is total support, and that is good as it is a validation for my hard work, good or bad.

Coach B, who served as an elementary instructional coach before becoming an educational technology coach, summarized her working relationship with her teachers below:

My working relationship with my teachers is professional, collegial, but also very comfortable. It has teachers go through their own learning journey so they can find their strengths to help students improve their achievement. They would be able to figure out the kind of tools to use, how to monitor, being accountable for monitoring the data, and having honest conversations not only with me but also with themselves. All the above could only occur when they were in a supportive and non-threatening relationship with me. I think probably the strongest coaching piece is to have somebody to reflect with and knowing the person is not going to be judging you, but otherwise, planning with you.

*Inspirational Influence to Achieve Fulfillment and Shared Successes.* In addition to attending to the individual's diverse needs, iLead coaches' inspirational influence with amiable attitude and positive reinforcements actively invited and promoted the outside of the box ideas and resolutions. Their approaches helped teachers persevere through adversity to fulfill and achieve the collective goals shared between the teachers and their coaches. Scholars confer various viewpoints regarding inspiration. Goddard (1981) and Cutcliffe (2006) perceived inspiration as hope. Chamorro-Premuzic (2006) defined inspiration as creativity, while Thrash and Elliot (2003) argued against viewing it as a synonym to creativity but rather a mindset to catalyze creative products. However, regardless of viewing it as the spur of hope or the thrust for innovation, inspiration ignited ample fuel to keep the imagination going to promote critical thinking for problem-solving to fulfill one's goals and objectives.

The iLead teachers gave overwhelmingly high praise for their individualized coaching experience in the program, especially the encouragement they received from their coaches. The teachers appreciated the friendly, open-minded, and positive attitudes from the coaches, who always inspired and challenged them to think creatively to persevere through their problems. They worked collaboratively as a team and celebrated their efforts and learning gains from the iLead experience instead of the achievement outcome, which could be viewed as evaluative and possibly caused a certain degree of anxiety and excess stress. B14 described the supportive relationship she received from her coach, who gave her the courage and opportunity to grow through a process of trial and error.

I think my coach, she's very friendly and very open-minded, very supportive. Working with her, it's not just like coworkers collaborating with each other or mentors like supporting a teacher. In fact, it's more like friends too. Like we can talk about any

challenges and difficulties, and she's fully supportive and always makes me feel like everything is possible and encourages me to be bold to let my imagination go. I feel like I can try anything and do not have to worry about making a mistake in front of her. It is definitely a shared journey for us.

B7 Teacher explained the guided support she received from her coach below.

The piece that I really enjoyed was to a degree she was not only there to coach, but it was more of a collaboration. Piece of it, so it's not like I need you to do X Y, and Z since these were part of the program requirements. Although there were components, such as documents that we needed to upload as a requirement of being part of the program, which is totally understandable, her support went beyond helping me meet the requirement.

When she came out to support, it was where do you need support? How can I help you?

What is the next piece that you need support in? She would observe my class and reminded me of potential concerning areas that I either overlooked or were unable to foresee. So although she was there to support, it kind of was guided on where the need was, which was good.

In summary, the individualized coaching approach was widely recognized and endorsed by the teachers as one of the program's greatest strengths. The C4 Teacher noted how her needs were met, and the level of frustration was reduced through the one-on-one coaching support.

Being able to have someone to bounce ideas off, and having someone to observe me in a very safe and non-judgmental way, and give me honest feedback, and challenge me with innovative ideas to improve myself continually is huge. Although I needed individualized support, sometimes, just a cheerleader, especially when I got stuck or was totally lost.

Other than just getting more and more frustrated and mad at myself, all I needed was my

coach, a friend to lean on. That part was very important for me, and I feel that my individual needs were met in that way through my relationship with the coach.

iLead coaches inspired their teachers by being open-minded with positive attitudes full of excitement and encouragement to promote creative and innovative ideas to support student learning and success. They were committed to a collegial knowledge inquiry journey focusing on the learning experience. As a result, the iLead teachers were at ease to work collaboratively with their coaches to take advantage of the coaches' profound knowledge and endeavor best practices to reflect on their own actions and enhance their instructions for continuous improvement.

**Hard Skills of Best Practices through Data-Driven Decision Making Process.** The coaching model's infrastructure for a data-driven decision-making process focused on the cycle of effective instruction and the allocation of time and opportunity for collaboration. Educational data was often collected for compliance and accountability purposes rather than to inform instructions (Husein et al., 2017). Neuman (2017) discussed the data-driven instructional practice as a decision-making process while teachers collect the information that leads to a systematic and deliberate student learning analysis cycle to help teachers differentiate their instructional strategies and applications to address the diverse needs of the learners. The purpose of the process was to meticulously calibrate a customized and adaptable instructional pathway for the individual student to elevate a higher achievement outcome. Young and Kim (2010) stressed the essential role of data-driven instruction practice in our current educational reform policy. However, they expressed their concern about the competency gap that imperiled teachers' ability to make data-driven decisions to improve student learning adequately. Therefore, professional development through coaching support and time and opportunity allocated for teachers to

collaborate, analyze, and reflect on their data were identified as critical components of the iLead program to increase the teachers' capacity to enhance student achievement.

*The Cycle of Effective Instruction.* Coach A elaborated on how the iLead program supported teaching and learning through a data-driven instructional coaching process.

The entire program supports teaching and that teaching is driven by student achievement. What I mean by this is we are really working on a cycle of effective instruction or continuous improvement where it begins with the teacher looking at their students' data. This data drove what the teachers asked for. So, for example, if there was a weakness in writing, the teacher created a goal based on writing and chose to spend his or her money on something that would help the teacher address the goal regarding student achievement. Then, our role as coaches was to come in and look at the data with the teacher, help the teacher implement their plan, and then circle back around again. Look at the data, make adjustments to the plan, pull individual students, implement, assess, and then look at the data again. So the whole program is built around using student achievement to drive teaching decisions.

B9 Teacher gave a detailed example of how the progress monitoring cycle promoted purposeful teaching to increase her instruction effectively.

I kept working on changing and modifying my practices throughout the progress monitoring cycle based on the assessment data I received. A big piece of my goal was for my kids to do better in the calculation area of math claims on the SBAC, ultimately, of course. I collected data with quick checks almost daily and used the topic assessment on Envision math weekly. I also did some SBAC interim practice tests, which I was able to choose a specific claim for my students to practice since I needed to make sure the results

I got from the local assessment aligned with the state testing. These were all of the data I was collecting on my kids. When my coach arrived, we discussed how my students were doing and worked on not only the area my students needed to improve but also the progress they made to identify what worked. I had to say the best part was I really became so aware of the skill levels of my kids. For example, even though they're sixth graders, several of them didn't even know their location facts, which were first and second grade standards. I knew I must work on filling these gaps so they could even have a shot with our new lessons. So I found a free website, and it became part of the morning routine. I started the small group rotation, as suggested by my coach. Some students would get the laptops out and drill on their multiplication and division while others would be working on close reading or free-write. For math, because when you're trying to do multi-step problems as if you're getting into more complicated math. If they didn't know basic math, it would create a mental block in their thinking process. Therefore, the rotation time allows me to work with different groups of students every day based on their needs and progress. I also had to readjust the benchmarks for a couple of my students several times this year to make sure they were achievable for my students as well as for me. The progress monitoring cycle was difficult and a lot of work, but I believed it would pay off in the end.

The iLead teachers found the data-monitoring decision-making process challenging but rewarding because they could receive diagnostic data from the formative assessment and reflect on the coaches' immediate feedback to amend their instructional practices expeditiously. Coach B stated her best learning experience in the iLead program as follows:

That to me, to everybody, what did I learn from this? Although everybody has something to refine and improve, we do not spend enough time to find out what that is before making our decision on what action to take. As a teacher, do I really know what my students need, or am I just guessing what they need from me? Teachers take many things for granted, from the highest achieving students to our lowest-achieving students, for example. Things that we, as teachers, assume our students would or would not know. We have to stop teaching based on our *assumptions*. I heard many teachers say: I never knew my students in this way. I now understand them in a new way. I wished I had known that before. Without using data to guide our practices, we are simply shooting in the dark and keeping our fingers crossed to wish for the best. That, to me, is insufficient and a waste of time and effort. Again, knowing every student has something unique for him or her to learn and starting to narrow our focus to make an informed instructional decision based on the data received is what every competent teacher must do. You never know what you're going to find and how much more effective you are going to be as a teacher.

***Time and Opportunities for Collaboration.*** Louis (1992) suggested that teachers' time and opportunity to collaborate may be more significant on student achievement and school improvement than the learning environment and tools provided or even the professional development offered. However, Fullen and Miles (1992) alerted the unlikelihood of such collaborative time and opportunities to take place for teachers without making the “extra energy requirements” demanded to assure the occurrences (p. 750). The iLead program was created as an innovative idea to safeguard the essential elements of transformational leadership, including sufficient time and opportunities for teachers and coaches to collaborate and support one another as a professional learning community. Learning walk was an institutionalized strategy

incorporated in the iLead program to cultivate and promote synergistic learning among all members.

Fisher and Frey (2014) propagated the positive impact on teachers' instruction from the non-evaluative class visits of their colleagues' classrooms when the transformative learning occurred to transmute professional development to empirical practice. Unlike instructional rounds with defined problems of practice and protocols for establishing networks (City et al., 2009), learning walks were less structured with greater flexibility to meet various learners' needs. The objectives of iLead learning walks were to cultivate a collaborative learning community where educators could support one another for personal and professional growth. Although the purpose of collective capacity building was compelling and intriguing for the iLead teachers, without a trusting relationship, fears of being judged and evaluated by others, including their peers, would have impeded collegial learning progress. Fisher and Frey suggested establishing some boundaries and protocols with voluntary and twofold participation when the hosting teacher also served as a member of the walkthrough team with the opportunity to visit other teachers' classrooms.

The iLead learning walk was scheduled during March and April each school year. iLead teachers were grouped by similar grade levels or subject areas with no more than five teachers on a single day visit. Substitute teachers were secured to cover each teacher's class while the iLead teachers were both the hosting and visiting teachers during the walkthrough. Other than the iLead teachers and coaches, the principals could be invited but only by the iLead teachers at their site. The decision was left for the iLead teachers to avoid unnecessary stress and pressure for the teachers. Since the walkthrough was only a snapshot of the teaching and learning activities in the classroom, Jones and Black (2018) recommended less than 20 minutes for any single class visit.



During the 20-minute classroom visit, the visitors were asked to pay attention to how the teacher instructs and, more importantly, how the students learn as a result of the teacher's instruction. A sample learning walk schedule and protocol shown in Appendix G indicated that a reflective conversation with the coach immediately took place after the classroom visit. The participants were engaged in an interactive dialogue to provide feedback and share what they noticed and what surprised them from the teaching and learning in the classroom, particularly as to how it related to their own learning and practices. A PLC time was also reserved at the end of the day to allow all team members to consolidate their previous reflections into one or two action items to refine their current instructional practices and thrive for higher student achievement outcomes.

A few teachers were unsure about the program expectation initially and were also concerned about overcommitted something they might not be able to deliver. Thus, overwhelmingly, the iLead teachers expressed extraordinary compliments of their learning walk experiences. Many of them considered it a tremendous success of the program for elevating teaching efficacy and building capacity. B10 Teacher simply stated the followings:

For me, one of the best experiences was when we did the walkthrough with the other classes because I ended up borrowing so many things that I saw from other classrooms that I then used immediately afterward. And it felt like it really helped.

B5 Teacher urged for more learning walk opportunities, which was loudly spoken by the Year 1 teachers. Fortunately, with the district administrator's support, the iLead planning team received supplemental financial resources to fund an additional walkthrough for the Year 2 cohort.

Well, even though I don't really like to be out of my classroom or to teach in front of people, I did enjoy visiting other classrooms because I love seeing what's happening and what I can use in my classroom to help with my instruction. I appreciate the student

engagement I observed in many of the teachers' rooms. It was powerful to see other teachers' innovative ideas in action. I think we can even see more and have more opportunities like this.

B18 Teacher explained why learning walk was her best experience of the program.

My best experience was the iLead learning walk. I think that it was incredibly beneficial just to be able to see what everyone else did with their money and how they implemented it, which helped create a greater vision for me. I was uncertain how to best incorporate the SMART TV into my instruction for my students. Now not only did I see what others had done, but I could also collaborate and exchange ideas with other teachers. I think we don't always get that time and opportunity to grow personally and professionally. We are kind of living in a bubble, but it's really important to communicate with teachers even from other schools, other grade levels, or other subjects. For example, my visit to the Chinese immersion classroom, that was amazing for me to see! So I think the iLead learning walk was the most beneficial for me. I want to root for it.

B7 Teacher summarized her learning walk experience by elaborating on how her view of a classroom walkthrough shifted from being evaluative to collaborative due to a focus on collegial learning, which empowered and made her a more effective teacher.

I really enjoyed the learning walk. Teachers rarely get out as much, and as an SDC [Special Day Class] teacher, I am with the same group of students all day long. We rarely go and see what other people are doing. Initially, I think of the learning walk as a high-stress requirement because somebody's going to come in through my room, and I would normally consider that an evaluation, like a critiquing one, which made me very uncomfortable. But through the iLead program, it was very different from that. Every

team member came through with such an open mind, looking for the positives as opposed to critiquing me. They knew things might not have been 100%. A lot of positive things were seen and shared across the district - the way I would never have seen otherwise. There were so many various viewpoints, from a speech therapist's perspective, a special education teacher's perspective, or from the Mandarin immersion teacher- to see how everybody is managing and implementing their ideas in such an amazing way. That is why the iLead walk becomes my favorite part of the program, and of course, I want more of it even though I know it is costly. However, I truly feel that I am a better teacher because of it.

“Failure to institutionalize an innovation underlies the disappearance of many reforms” (Fullen & Miles, 1992, p. 118). The district's concerted effort to systematically institutionalized an innovative idea to structure a teacher incentive program with transformational leadership elements was commendable. However, the iLead initiative's objectives were not attainable without the invincible coaching support to promote the 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills, the four C's, creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration in an encouraging and optimal professional learning environment. The iLead program's emphasis on the individual's progressive learning instead of the summative achievement outcome propelled all stakeholders to the pathway in becoming 21<sup>st</sup>-century leaders.

### ***The Focus on Progressive Learning in the Making of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Leaders***

iLead teachers were highly motivated by the impetus of needs through a strategically designed program with immense support from their coaches for collective empowerment and accountability, leading to a progressive learning journey of becoming 21<sup>st</sup>-century leaders. The two main areas of discussion concerning the making of 21<sup>st</sup>-century leaders were the leaders'

qualities and the building of leadership pathway. iLead program focused on its members' progressive learning, including teachers, students, and coaches, in becoming the 21<sup>st</sup>-century leaders. The learning model shared similar qualities of Dewey's progressive education, including accentuating individual diversity and developing creativity, critical thinking, and socially engaged intelligence. The learning pathway focused on the progression from the experiences when members aimed to fulfill a personalized target and achieve a common goal for a shared vision (Dewey, 1916; Cremin, 1961; Lane, 1983). These competencies also aligned with the 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills, the four C's, *Communication, Collaboration, Creativity, and Critical Thinking* defined by the California Department of Education ( [CDE], 2018). The accents of the leadership transformation centered on the democratic but synergetic means to assure an autonomic and self-reflective knowledge inquiry and skill-building process while leaders made the informative decision for problem-solving to surmount the challenges with perseverance and resilience.

**Leadership Qualities.** The iLead program was designed based on Bass and Avolio's (1994) essential elements of transformational leadership, the four I's, which were Inspirational Motivation (IM), Idealized Influence (II), Intellectual Stimulation (IS), and Individualized Consideration (IC). The 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills, the four C's, *Communication, Collaboration, Creativity, and Critical Thinking*, also coordinated the significant components of transformational leadership. The iLead program hoped to develop leaders who could effectively communicate the shared vision to motivate and empower others through collaborative efforts and engender an influential impact for an optimal result. Meanwhile, the iLead leaders, including teachers, students, and coaches, would also be capable of considerably attending to others' diverse needs and talents to promote creativity and stimulate innovative ideas to think critically for problem-solving.

***Communication and Collaboration.*** Rubinstein (2014) arrogated that communication and collaboration strengthened the partnerships among members to contribute to organizational improvement. He illuminated the *productivity of democracy*. The ideas were shared frequently and openly to receive reflective feedback from all stakeholders through multifaceted lenses before a collective decision was made and owned by its team members. Leaders learn to become effective communicators and collaborators by cultivating a systematic perspective to value the individual voice and seek meaningful problem-solving contributions. As a result, communicative and collaborative leaders characterize their team members as part of the solution with ample ammunition and full commitment necessary to conquer the battle ahead and prevail in their journey together. A communicative collaboration process may be defined as members work conjointly to exchange information and continually support one another to maximize the individuals' contributions for a shared vision (Maynard, n.d.). iLead institutionalized these elements into its program design, structure, and action protocols to safeguard the methods, time, and opportunities for extended communication and collaboration for all its stakeholders and influenced its participants, even the students involved, to act accordingly. Teacher A1 described below how the learning from the iLead changed her expectation of her students.

My kids, being 21st-century learners, need to have a different learning environment and method from what we used to have in a classroom. So by giving them the choice of how and what they learn as well as where they learn is a good way to start gathering data to see if it's an effective strategy to improve communication and collaboration in our classrooms. My kids need to take charge of their own learning.

Teachers gave various examples of how they communicated and collaborated with their coaches. According to A1 Teacher.

We collaborate and communicate face-to-face but also through email or even sometimes a text message or just to say, “Hey, I tried this, it didn't go well, what would my next step be?” And then, when it was face-to-face, it was like, “how did that work, and what did you do differently?” Cause there would be times when I’d go “that didn't work, but I tried this from that suggestion.” It is constant and timely.

A4 teacher also shared how flexible it could be to meet the needs of the teacher,

In the beginning, we had first met and kind of agreed to communicate over email, and that was our primary mode of communication. But after some miscommunication between the office staff and whether or not I had an open period during the third period, we decided to switch that. And I just gave her my phone number so if she had anything that she wanted to let me know about. She could text or call me, saying, “I'm going to come at this time, are you free?” Yes, I'm free so to help communication happen faster.

A3 Teacher summarized well with a great deal of appreciation to explain how the communicative collaboration through the iLead team approach empowered her to become a stronger leader in the journey of her own to share with others.

I like the team approach very much and believe this is the best part of the program. With a regular schedule, we [Coach and Teacher] communicated constantly and worked together all the time. It was like a part of a small team with me and Coach A, my leader. And then part of a larger team. I have two other teachers here at my school that we could kind of talk about and bounce ideas off. All of us were also part of an even larger team in the district that we got together a couple of times during the year to kind of hear what they were doing and kind of see how it's working at other schools and other grade levels. We then became a network of support systems and continued to share ideas and stay

connected to help one another as often as needed. By being strong together, I think we all feel empowered to lead our journey not only individually but also jointly at the same time.

***Creativity and Critical Thinking.*** California Department of Education identifies creativity and critical thinking as two of the four C's, essential skills for 21<sup>st</sup>-century education (CDE, 2019). Previous research also recognized the significance of the two elements as the vital competencies for developing the individual to endure challenges in an expeditiously changing environment (Florida, 2004, 2019; Gidley, 2007; Pink, 2011). Therefore, 21<sup>st</sup>-century learners are encouraged to think innovatively and strategically to argue a logical solution and aptly resolve their issues. Learners must be prepared to thrive through fluidity rather than solidity, reflexivity rather than conformity. The capricious situations they may encounter in the millennial world when progressive changes and continuous evolutions become a new norm of life. Montuori (2012) viewed the trend as a positive transformation from the antiquated reproductive education, which suppressed creativity for homogeneity and compliance in the industrial age of the last century, to the creative inquiry when learners began to embrace the enigma to explore and unfold the knowledge instead of consuming what was presented to them. Dwyer et al. (2014) explained the critical thinking process as a necessary metacognitive procedure that helped deepen the learners' understanding and strengthen the individual's capacity to make intelligent decisions for problem-solving, which concurred with the objective of the iLead program of building the 21<sup>st</sup>-century leaders.

The iLead program challenged its teachers to become reflective problem solvers by efficiently evaluating, synthesizing, and analyzing the issue with less cognitive bias but more heuristic thinking based on informative data and rational judgment to implement remedial

actions innovatively. The program set a high expectation of its participants in becoming 21<sup>st</sup>-century educators to lead and drive their students' success. C5 Teacher described how the innovative, flexible seating idea led her to reflective critical thinking inquiries to seek out possible solutions and take charge of her own mission to improve student achievement.

I will say that I've actually been looking more critically at the data. It's been kind of interesting. Obviously, I always look at data because it is what we are asked to do. We have so many different assessments, but honestly, I have never found them meaningful to me mainly because I am unable to see the connection to what I am trying to do. But through iLead, I was actually really looking at it because I got to choose what I wanted to focus on and decided on the data that could give me the information I needed. I purchased the flexible seating, so I really focus on where these kids were sitting and how it impacted their learning. Were they making the same choices? Again, I asked the kids where they wanted to sit, and some kids were starting to stay in the same places, and their scores were doing better. Was it because they were giving a choice? But then there were those other kids whom I've noticed that were constantly changing their seats, and so it made me really look back and like, okay well, where were they doing well? What worked, and what not? When they were sitting in a regular chair, were their test scores good? What can I do to help them? How can I change things for them? It was like a puzzle, but it was interesting to me. I had to go through and kind of looked at a lot of different pieces to see if this was actually helping them and what I could do to make things better for them. I guessed that was why they called this program iLead because it was ME, leading my own learning for sure. When things don't work, I must think outside the box and find out what happens and be creative.



A2 Teacher, a 15-year female fourth-grade teacher, gave an example of her creative and innovative attempt in teaching writing,

For my creativity, I tried to integrate coding with writing together this year. I used Minecraft for a project and asked my students to create the setting and characters of their story in Minecraft. Innovation - it's very nice having the artificial intelligence grade the writing, so the students are getting immediate feedback. It was also done on six different traits, so the students are able to get immediate feedback, and they were really enjoying going back in and trying to increase their scores. Because they could see their score and feedback right away, and they could improve it. I could never imagine having a computer grade an essay can be so powerful.

Coach A summarized well how the iLead program endorsed the four C's to prepare all stakeholders for becoming 21<sup>st</sup>-century leaders.

I think the iLead program opened it up for teachers to be as innovative and creative as they wanted. The iLead program itself didn't necessarily tell you how to be innovative and creative. It really lends teachers research, looks out, sees what's out there to meet their students' needs. So I think that's the biggest thing, and it provided the freedom for teachers to be as innovative and creative as they wanted because they were being given \$3000 to do that. And then additionally, with a communicating vision and mission in addition to collaborative support from coaches and peers to help teachers implement their, you know, their greatest ideas, they were able to take the lead on the learning pathway and be successful. Our theme for this year was all about how we used the greatest showman to help you achieve a million dreams. Teachers were encouraged to do whatever they want to do to help their students reach their dreams. So the premise of the

program is for everyone to work communicatively and collaboratively to support innovation and creativity for problem-solving.

The iLead program promoted creativity and innovation to support student learning and enhance student achievement. The statement below from the A4 Teacher highlighted the quest the iLead program was calling for.

Yes, it's my own personal opinion that this kind of critical approach to trying things in the classroom in order to better yourself as an educator, that's why we're here. We didn't sign up to become teachers to do the same things every single day, every single year of our lives. No, we wanted to be teachers to make an impact on a student's life, and that shouldn't be taken lightly.

**Pathway of Building Leaders.** For iLead teachers, a reflective learning pathway through problem-solving with perseverance and resilience was essential for becoming leaders in their own journey. As education moves into a more complex and fast-paced realm with continuing changes and incertitude, one will be stagnating amid the permanent white water if they fail to adapt to the evolving condition. Vaill (1996) defined Permanent White Water as a complex, rapidly developing, and turbulent environment that tended to generate novel issues and caused recurrent problems when all matters appeared to be massive chaos and full of uncertainties. Vaill encouraged the participants to view themselves as explorers and learners in life who would take a risk and enjoy the adventurous journey. He explained,

To be an explorer is not to know where precisely and concretely. The explorer feels your uncertainty and your fear and even sometimes your fury. However, he or she does not think these states of mind can be escaped. Instead, they are part of what the explorer explores. Perhaps that is the difference between the explorer and you. (p. 45)

In other words, although the circumstance is somewhat unpredictable and overclouded with instability, agile 21<sup>st</sup>-century leaders shall approach the challenges through a lens of opportunity instead of considering them the roadblocks to success. The aspiring leaders in the iLead program, including the teachers and coaches and the students, must emerge themselves into a reflective learning pathway for problem-solving with a growth mindset to embrace the experiences through perseverance and resilience to rise to the occasion.

***Reflective Learning Pathway through Problem-Solving.*** Visone (2018) affirmed problem-solving as an indispensable role of leaders, especially in a perpetual complex and ever-changing situation. Leithwood and Steinbach (1995) explicated that the field of education consisted of more ill-structured problems with unclear objectives, methods, or evidence of effective antidote. However, leaders were frequently beset and confronted with the pressing demand to intellectually decide an action for an effective solution to meet the diverse needs of the stakeholders they were trying to serve and support. Simon (1993) outlined the three steps of the decision-making process: locating the problem, developing a plan, and assessing the quality of the decisions before implementing the action for problem-solving. With a circular vision, the iLead program enacted a reflective learning pathway by developing problem-solving skills, underpinning the enhancement of identifying the issue, and designing possible action courses to make informed decisions.

The iLead reflective learning pathway began with the inquiry of self-identified problem of practice based on the informative data in addition to the sense of priority and connectedness to the enhancement of student achievement. Teachers then entered a guided problem-solving pathway supported by a personal coach with district funding to set meaningful goals to develop an action plan for addressing the issue. Vanlehn (1991) acknowledged the different processes

conducted by the experienced and novice problem solvers to imply a substantial reflective, analytical procedure was imperative to an optimal solution. Correspondingly, the iLead's coaching model, the *Cycle of Effective Instruction*, was formalized to construct and institutionalize it as a best practice. The goal was to ensure a fully operational implementation consistently with fidelity among all teachers and coaches and capitalize on a growth mindset to celebrate the learning from the problem-solving experiences, especially while facing the seem-to-be insurmountable obstacles and the numerous failing attempts. Here are some examples of how teachers and coaching explained their reflective learning journeys.

From B10 Teacher,

I like how even though it seems tedious at the time, you have to really think about what you're doing and have a purpose and track what you're doing cause then you can look back and see how you've grown, how your students have grown, and you have tangible evidence that shows that it was meaningful and impactful.

B4, a veteran teacher, stated how her iLead experience unexpectedly helped her reassess her own teaching after 18 years in this profession.

Yeah. I've been teaching for 18 years, so you know, honestly, I was a bit skeptical and how much my teaching would change. But having an opportunity to look and re-evaluate what I was doing and what my goals were was huge for me, and I saw my practice actually change throughout the year. On top of that, actually looking at quantitative data was huge. I got to see as, for example, writing prompts, and I saw how many kids were riding through throughout the year, and I constantly adjusted those prompts based on the quantitative data I was getting.

Coach A shared how the *magic moment* occurred when her teacher began to act as an aspiring leader by taking control of her own journey during the reflective learning problem-solving process.

One day, one of my teachers came running in and said I got to show you this.

And she was showing me her daily formative assessment that she had been doing tracking her students' understanding of problem-solving. And then, she reflected on their scores on the last two topic tests, and she saw a huge increase in all of her students and especially her lowest students. The strategy we decided for her to practice, now she had concrete data to show it worked. She found it incredibly valuable, even though we had to tweak it many times. One thing I learn from this is that even the best teachers are hesitant to try new things because they believe whatever they are doing is working. If we can get them just to try it, like the iLead program, they will have an opportunity to learn something different. We need to have a way to have them take ownership to solve their own problem and reflect on their decision. When they see the impact, then it's something that starts to spread throughout the curriculum, ongoing and grows them as leaders. So I feel that because she has that magic moment, it reinforces what I'm doing as a coach and what the program is trying to accomplish, and it shows that it will keep continuing beyond even when I'm not working with her as a coach.

***Perseverance and Resilience of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Leaders.*** Being an educational leader facilitating and influencing change in a world of permanent white water in the 21st-century, one must be mindful that changes apply to the contextual pedagogies and operational practices and, most importantly, the stakeholders' mindsets. Leaders shall become continuous self-aware, directed, creative, progressive, and reflective learners for problem-solving and assuming optimal and

adaptive perspectives to view challenges as opportunities to enhance our life experiences through perseverance and resilience. In the effort to build the 21st-century agile leaders prevailing persistence and confidence while facing failures and disappointments, the iLead program focused on developing the abilities and, more essentially, its stakeholders' mindsets on assessing, adapting, and reimagining their strategies to achieve their goals despite setbacks. Instead of allowing the hindrances and failures to terminate their quests and diminish their wills to succeed, the perseverant and resilient leaders view them as a means to advance their skills and knowledge to render better outcomes. The iLead participants, including coaches, teachers, and even students, were prepared for a shared learning journey where they built competencies by confronting the challenges and learning from the mistakes.

Teacher B8, a transitional kinder teacher who taught mostly four-year-old children, described how she continued to try and learned from her mistakes for better results.

One of my challenges in the iLead program is that there are things that I don't know about, especially the effectiveness and implementation of things, like knowing how my wobble chairs and robots could work well to enhance my teaching or if my students' performance would improve with the new practices that I tried. However, I just kept on trying. I knew that even though I wanted to quit, my coach wouldn't let me. For me, the most challenging one was to integrate the Qball, a programming robot, into my curriculum. I agreed with my coach that it shouldn't be a stand-alone lesson that my students and I have no time to waste it on. I struggled with figuring out a way to make it meaningful and purposeful while integrating it with my ELA or Math lessons. In the beginning, I knew my kids were having lots of fun with it, but that was all they got. I knew that it was not a sound instructional lesson. My coach and I would work on revising

my lesson plan several times before giving it a try again. At first, I relied on my coach a lot for ideas and technical support while implementing it in class. I knew my lesson was better. How? By learning from my mistakes. I only needed one revision [Laughing], and I was even comfortable doing the lesson all by myself without my coach being there. I used to think technology is not my thing, but now I am very proud of myself that I was able to overcome that.

iLead program emphasizing the learning experiences rather than the performance results cultivated the growth mindset of all learners. It encouraged its participants to act as leaders to face up their challenges with tenacity and agility. A1 Teacher explained how the iLead program allowed her the opportunity for improvement.

Seeing what we need to look at and work on again and again in order to understand how we can make better choices moving forward. It's very effective for us to just focus on that instead of worrying about the outcomes. The iLead program is awesome! It just gives you the opportunity to carry out creativity that you see a vision in your classroom, and it gives you the many opportunities to try it with the help from the coaches and your peers. If it doesn't work, that is totally okay too. Just to work on revising it and give it your best shot to make it a doable thing for your students and yourself.

B9 Teacher gave an example of how the learning experience altered her practice regarding the use of assessments to result in an optimal outcome, which was not expected by her.

Well, I did love the kick-off to iLead, especially the part we were told to enjoy the ride itself. In our first meeting, I was given a book about assessment, which was really not my top choice of the book. I was not required to read the book but was told by other teachers that it was a good one to read and refer to. I haven't gotten through the whole book, but I

keep going back and reading pieces of this book. It aligned with what I was trying to do, but honestly that I was not very good at it. I have tried many different strategies and digital tools in this book. Some worked, but others failed. However, I was reminded by my coach that knowing what worked and what didn't was the exact purpose of the experience. For once, I felt like a teacher. My success could be defined by what I have tried and learned instead of what I have accomplished. For that, I did not hesitate to try everything. I was able to open my eyes to the different ways I could do to assess my students' performances. I did one of my assessments using Breakout. I also did another assessment using Prodigy. So I started trying to make my own informal assessments using the various platforms. I used Kahoot and Quizlet for a review. So I started trying to use different things for the formative pieces that were more gamified, which I was very reluctant to try before because I was not very techy. The best part about this was I was able to see the true performances of my students when I could assess their learning differently. These gamified assessments were a lot more fun for the kids. I am proud to say that my students were very engaged and working really hard to increase their scores in a *fun* way, of course.

Overall, iLead incentivized its stakeholders to foster creativity, build connections, promote innovation, stimulate, and celebrate learning. It enhanced the leadership capacities of both coaches and teachers and the students they served and supported.

### **Summary**

The gains and challenges of the iLead program were multifaceted, which were substantially related to the progressive learning of various stakeholders involving the work on complex cognitive behaviors and mindsets as well as the encounter of implanted institutional



cultures and pre-existing practices within the organizational constitutions. These bureaucratic regulations and systems could sometimes be considered some of the most significant hurdles while promoting innovation and creativity for critical thinking and problem-solving (Duke, 2018). The district's revolutionary iLead initiative was commendable for its courageous attempt to step outside the boundaries with an innovative approach of building leaders through a designed program and collaborative learning community. The implementation was fueled by one's bursting innate motivation and driven by the vehement desire for self-actualization, which positively contributed to the replicability and sustainability of the program.

### **Gains**

Although facing the program's unknown challenges, the district's team was proud of its first year's implementation gains. The iLead program had effectively drawn a considerable amount of attention from the teachers and the site administrators who were excluded from the Year 1 program. The student achievement department extended its application invitation to principals in Year 2 due to the site administrators' overwhelming requests who were eager to participate after observing the positive impacts on the iLead teachers at their sites. According to Coach C and A, two things that surprised these principals the most were the district's firm commitment, both personally and financially, to support an unprecedented, innovative program and its ability to transform the stakeholders' mindsets through motivation and collaboration. The iLead experience enabled individuals to thrive to succeed and become emerging leaders. Coach C stated in her interview:

I was approached by at least five principals wanting to do the iLead program themselves. I had to explain to them that this program was currently for teachers only, but I would definitely bring their requests to the department so the team could consider the possibility

for next year. When I asked them why they wanted to do it on top of their heavy workload, one principal told me that finally, there was a program that made sense to her. Knowing she has 100% support from the district office was great. One other principal commented on the control that the district was willing to let go to let the leaders lead was nice. Another principal told me that he believed the iLead program would allow him to do things he always wanted to try but was told not to because he must follow the district's guidelines and regulations, which did not make too much sense to him most of the time.

Coach A mentioned her conversations with the principals about building leaders through the iLead program.

I had two principals wanting to do their own iLead program at their schools. They were so impressed with how motivating and positive their iLead teachers have become. Seeing these teachers working together and helping one another was great. One of the principals said the collaboration helped support the *Can-Do* attitude, which was what she has been trying to change her teachers' mindsets for the last three years but did not go too far with it. She has seen some dramatic changes in the two teachers she had on her site and started to see them becoming teacher leaders among their peers. She would like to replicate the same thing for other teachers as well.

Besides the impact on the site administrators, iLead program not only empowered the coaches by giving them the administrative role to work with the teachers to improve their practices but also build teacher leaders through empowerment and ownership. Through ample collegial support both professionally and social-emotionally from the coaches and their peers, the iLead program successfully cultivated a collective professional learning community for emerging

leaders. Also, influenced by these iLead teacher leaders, their students boldly stepped up and started to lead their own learning as well. A1 Teacher gave an example of how a 21<sup>st</sup>-century learning environment empowered learners in her classroom.

My kids, being 21st-century learners, need to have a different learning environment than we used to have in a classroom. So by giving them the choice of how they learn and where they learn is a good way to gather data to see if it's an effective strategy with collaboration in our classrooms. The iLead program with flexible seating gave my kids so many options to just be comfortable and have their own learning styles. And you could tell they loved having the opportunity to choose. It gave them power over their learning.

C4 Teacher also explained how the leadership development opportunity seamlessly presented itself to her special education students through her iLead program's involvement.

I work with students with special needs primarily and students who are struggling. So a lot of the programs that I'm involved with target students that need some type of intervention, and at this point, the iLead resources have really helped me to develop social skills intervention program, a reading intervention program, and a math intervention program. And by being able to choose the resources that I needed, I was able to really get my students excited and take ownership and pride of the resources in our classroom. They were involved in every step – once our resources were delivered when it came to unpacking boxes and setting up the classroom. It allowed my students to really have leadership opportunities that they don't necessarily have in their General Ed classroom. This has been consistent throughout the iLead program. They arrive in my room, and they are able to set up the iPad and connect it to the Apple TV so that my iPad is screen mirrored on the display screen. They make sure that all of the seating is put back

in place, all of the flexible seating. They have a particular folder that they put their stylus pens in, and they're just very proud and very excited to have the opportunity to have these resources, and they share that with anyone that will listen to them. They are so proud of this room and what they have available to them.

C5 Teacher discussed student leadership as the most significant thing for her in this experience.

Well, I think the biggest thing for me is student leadership. I've made a big deal with the kids that there's going to be different flexible seating options, and so they like the fact that I am letting them choose and letting them make decisions. I constantly let them know how they're doing and also ask them to reflect on their own learning. I wanted them to experience the same as I experienced in the iLead program. I want them to take charge. I asked them, "Do you think this is the right fit for you?" "How do you know?" If not, "What are you going to do about it?". I need them to come out with their own solutions. These reflective questions have been helpful in their achievement and going over their scores with them and letting them know 'you're talking more in this seat, and your scores are going down, do you think that this is going to be a good option for you?' or "What do you think is causing the problem?" Believe it or not, these kids do know the answers. They are finding the answers because I'm putting choices in their hands and allowing them to make decisions for themselves that I am there to support them. I am there to make sure that they are doing well in class, which is the same support I am getting from my coach.

Overall, the 21<sup>st</sup>-century education focusing on the development of the four C's flourished the involvement of student leaders when learners were also given the autonomy to think critically and work collaboratively to take charge of solving their own problem as well as embracing the

experimental process through a reflective learning cycle to continuously analyze, synthesize, evaluate and reconnect relentlessly until a resolution was taken effect successfully.

### **Challenges in Bureaucracy, Competency, and Time**

Weber (1978) defined Bureaucracy as rigid regulations of the legitimate constitution for vast organizations. Segal (2011) acknowledged that the entrenched bureaucratic system stifled the opportunity for continuing reform and revolution to keep up with the changes needed for improvement. Howard (2012) suggested strong leadership to repress the bureaucracy and secure time and space for self-growth, especially in education, when educators were governed mostly by the centralized authority's arbitrary rules and regulations.

One known example is the federal and state accountability ordinances, which require the local educational agencies to meet the targeted achievement goals on the standardized assessment to preserve its funding and avoid perpetual penalties and interferences from the upper hierarchy. In some states, these test results are used for teacher evaluation. Therefore, many teachers began to integrate rigid drilling protocols in their instructions and coach test-taking strategies to increase test scores, which remained questionable to represent the students' learning outcomes (Baker et al., 2010). Some educators shied away from the use of assessment data and viewed it as teaching to the test (Volante, 2017). As a result, it induces a major concern of lacking the fundamental understanding of data-driven instruction, which demands sufficient time for teachers in their busy schedules to develop and strengthen their skills. Consequently, the lack of time was pinpointed as the most significant challenge for iLead teachers.

The inadequate data analysis competency was not caused by the scarce of tests conducted during the school year. Ironically, iLead teachers complained about the on-going assessments, such as inventory tests for reading and math, district benchmark tests, the interim tests for state

assessment, and the curriculum unit and topic tests they were required to report annually. They found themselves overwhelmed by having too much data but lacked time and skillsets to sufficiently use the information to drive instruction. C2 Teacher, a fifth-grade female teacher, explained how she was overwhelmed by the district's testing calendar.

The biggest challenge was probably keeping up with the testing schedule on top of collecting and analyzing the iLead data. Just with everything else in this job, it was always one thing after another that I was asked to do. We have so many tests that the district actually gives us a testing calendar every year. I found myself just busy giving my kids the tests and reporting them. Sometimes, I wondered if they really looked at the results. I knew that I needed to look at the data, so I knew what my kids know and did not know so I could help them better. But honestly, I do not have time. Not at all. With the help from my coach, I was able to really take some time to truly look at my data this time through the iLead program. However, the reason it worked was simply because I could just choose one area and really focus on it. I wondered why this couldn't be a district practice, so teachers wouldn't be spending their valuable time doing things only for compliance purposes.

B19 Teacher, a third-grade teacher who has been at her school for 17 years, advocated the time she needed from the coach to sharpen her data analysis skills and improve her instructions.

I think for me, the biggest challenge is the time with the coach. I am not a math person, so it has been very helpful to have my coach with me to reflect on my data. I think if there is a way to, and I don't know how this would happen, but if there's a way for me to work with my coach more and to have more data chats together, I knew I could do a lot

better. But I don't know how either of us could find time in our busy schedule. I think there is less pressure to squeeze our conversation if we could have more time.

Overall, C3 Teacher summed it up nicely by making an excellent suggestion to reduce mandatory requirements to improve teacher efficacy.

I think the biggest challenge is time consumption. So as classroom teachers, we're very, very busy, and so it was very demanding on my time within my instruction, during my day and also outside of my day, in grading and making sure that all my other mandatory requirements are filled. In addition to teaching, we were being asked to do tons of testing and reporting. It was just very, very time consuming with my day. Suggestions? I would suggest just finding a way to mainstream some of the requirements. Knowing that teachers have a demanding schedule, finding ways to hold them accountable but meaningful, like iLead, so we can actually benefit from it.

In summary, the iLead teachers' experiences were concluded of the following four major themes: the impetus of needs, the empowerment for collective autonomy and serendipity, the invincible coaching support, and the focus on progressive learning in the making of 21<sup>st</sup>-century leaders. The impetus of needs ignited and sustained the participants' motivation through inspirational vision and fulfilling one's physical and psychological desires. The aspiration was driven by the complete autonomy to empower teachers through collaborative influences for shared accountability and collective contributions. The concerted effort optimized its impact while intentionally offering the individual consideration on developing the professional competencies and the interpersonal and intrapersonal skills of the individuals. Finally, through a reflective learning pathway, iLead offered a unique example of a district's attempt to pursue the

building of 21<sup>st</sup>-century leaders who could communicate, collaborate, be creative, and think critically for problem-solving through an institutionalized structured program.

The researcher found the four themes corresponded to the four I's of transformational leadership and overlap one another. The progressive learning pathway was driven by the initial engagement of the basic human desires to fulfill self-actualization needs echoing Maslow's motivation theory. As the four themes are discretely listed with challenges and gains mutually interacting, all the critical components are logically and organically connected and should not be elucidated independently. In Chapter 5, the researcher will explain how these various themes with gains and challenges fuel into an impetus leadership model leading a progressive learning pathway to optimize the achievement outcome.



## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of the dissertation study is to offer a research-based implementation guide for designing and planning teacher incentive programs for capacity building. After examining and analyzing the iLead participants' experiences utilizing the grounded theory methodology, four major themes were concluded in response to the research question of the teachers' experiences in the program. In Chapter 5, the researcher will attempt to define, evaluate, and provide a personal interpretation and insight into the four themes and make connections to the conceptual implications and practical applications. The program's gains and challenges elaborated in Chapter 4 will stimulate the discussion of limitations and recommendations for future studies in this chapter. The researcher intends to bring not only confirmation but also new knowledge and understanding to the community of academia scholars as well as the field professionals. The iLead program was one district's progressive idea to build 21<sup>st</sup>-century leaders who were capable of communicating, collaborating, being creative to think critically and innovatively to solve problems with perseverance and resilience. The researcher hopes his research study will contribute to the enhancement of the iLead program and constitute valuable theoretical and pragmatic knowledge for future studies. As Albert Einstein once said, "Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited; imagination encircles the world". Therefore, most significantly, through his study, the researcher wishes to empower, inspire, and motivate other educators with a change of mindset to break through the institutional bureaucracy and turn their imagination into reality.

## Summary and Discussion

The district office reached out to the researcher almost three years ago to solicit a possible qualitative study to explore and analyze the teachers' experiences of the iLead initiative, a teacher incentive program to incorporate the essential transformational leadership elements into the planning, designing, and implementation of the project. By encompassing the 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills, the four C's, which resonate with Bass and Avolio's (1994) major components of transformational leadership, the four I's, the district wishes to build innovative leaders of its stakeholders. Instead of focusing on the impacts of the individual leaders, through a systemic organizational approach, it hopes to architect a model with more excellent reliability and replicability to provide consistency and sustainability for designing any future teacher efficacy and leadership building program.

The district aspires the study to identify the significant components to competently formulate and strategize a leadership building program through organizational processes and practices by having the researcher investigate the experiences, including the gains and challenges of iLead participants, which constitute the research questions of the study. Through a grounded theory approach, the researcher suggested considering the *Impetus Leadership Model* to connect the theoretical, conceptual framework of transformational leadership to a practical fieldwork application. The model emphasizes the work driven by the hierarchy of needs and supported by all stakeholders' collaborative efforts to promote a learning environment to celebrate innovation and progression instead of the overall achievement outcomes. The linkage ensures the opportunity and development of the four C's, communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking, to cultivate a community of 21<sup>st</sup>-century leaders to encroach on challenges and strive to succeed.

## **A Systemic Organizational Approach**

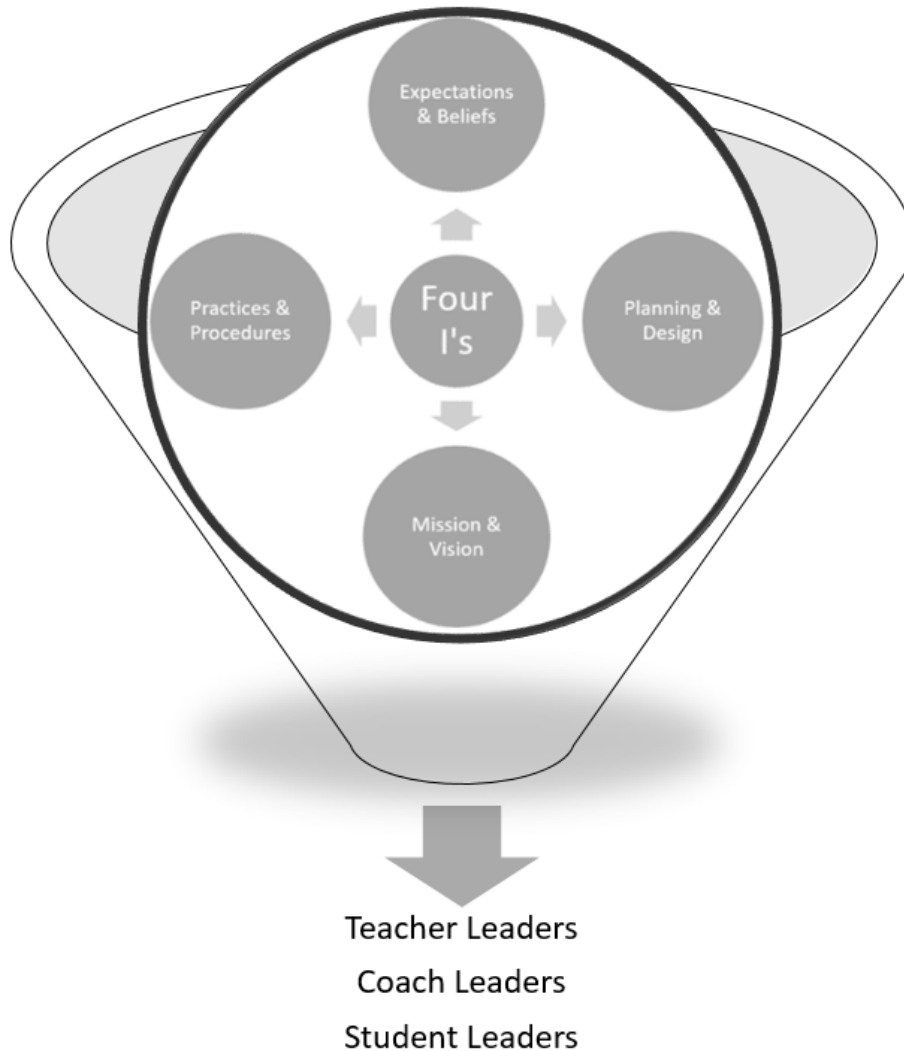
The leadership studies have been controversial in entrepreneurial research (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Khurana, 2002). Some argued the leader's prominent role by defining the authority to make administrative decisions and employ policies and changes needed to affect organizational successes (Jabbar & Hussein, 2017; Khan et al., 2016). Others were skeptical and criticized its relevance to engender a substantial impact and sustainable transformation when the governance was heavily constrained by standardized protocols and established regulations within the organization (Hannan, 1984; Hannan & Freeman, 2013). Therefore, iLead's systemic organizational approach, as illustrated in Figure 4, attempted to shift the leadership development focus from the individual administrators to a community of stakeholders, including teachers, coaches, and their students. It constructed a systemic organizational program with structured processes and purposeful practices to warrant inclusive opportunities and consistent and faithful implementation of all major components, in this case, the four I's, the essential elements of transformational leadership, regardless of the variances of participants and institutions.

The advantages of a systematized approach are as follows. First, it expedites the improvement needed to progress when organizational development does not rely only on one single administrator's leadership impact. Instead, the approach utilizes all team members' collective efforts to cultivate and optimize an organizational change culture through shared leadership and collegial commitment to strive for a common goal. Second, the organizational approach enhances the stability of its implementation outcomes. That is, the leadership development opportunity is no longer provided to only the individual leader but also all stakeholders involved. The extended capacity building opportunities help develop, secure, and

embrace the talents of a larger number of participants who can influence additional members to catalyze prosperity continuously.

**Figure 4**

*iLead Program Systemic Organizational Approach*



*Note. iLead program builds leaders through a systemic organizational approach.*

Lastly, The systemic organizational practices and procedures establish a clear and concrete framework for program design, which can be feasibly implemented and reproduced to maximize its impact to a greater extend. The iLead program won the 2020 California Golden Bell Awards, which recognizes and promotes the state's outstanding educational programs

annually to encourage educational institutions to learn from one another and advance the overall achievement (California School Board Association, n.d.). The district hopes the iLead experiences can spread from a local district to other educational agencies to build 21<sup>st</sup>-century leaders and achieve higher student success.

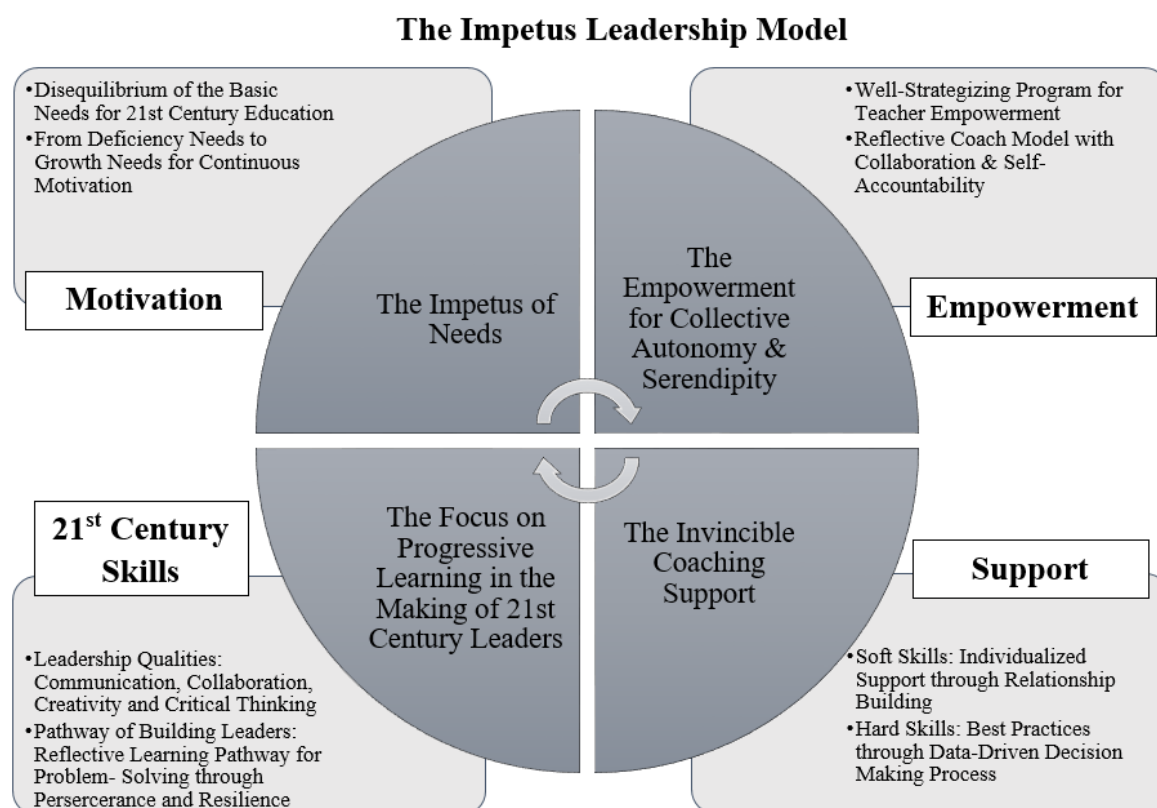
### **The Impetus Leadership Model**

The iLead program was considered progressive, especially in a K12 public education, which exercises under stringent governing regulations and policies with preordained goals and legislative accountability system demanded by either state or federal agencies. As a result, many innovative ideas were shut down due to the concern of breaking the norm and regulations (Horn, 2011). In this district, principals are required to set up their annual goals, particularly in academics, based on the state assessment data in September, the beginning of the school year. A majority of principals will then schedule a data chat meeting with the individual teachers to review their students' state testing results and determine the targeted growth for the teachers for the new year. Both the site administrators and teachers will meet with their direct supervisors to review the benchmark assessment data multiple times during the school year to monitor the progress and reflect on the instructional practices. Although teachers are not evaluated based on the scores, the testing data were viewed negatively among many iLead teachers based on the interviews. Teachers used words such as *overwhelming*, *frustrating*, and *stressful* while describing their feelings about the testing data. As a result, it discouraged these teachers from utilizing the valuable assessment data to inform their instructions, which was considered one of the best practices to enhance teacher efficacy and an essential feature for nationwide school reform (Datnow et al., 2012).

All the first cohort iLead teachers gave a definite yes when asked whether they would continue the same cycle of data-driven instruction practice next year even without being in the program. It was evident that the iLead teachers were able to alter their viewpoints and evolved into emergent leaders by taking charge and being responsible for the learning of their own and the students in their classrooms. Therefore, the researcher suggested the impetus leadership model, as illustrated in Figure 5, contrived from the four themes through the grounded theory data analysis in chapter four outlines the essential components of a leadership building program through motivation, empowerment, support, and the development of 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills. The four components also echo Bass and Avolio's four I's of Transformational leadership and offer an empirical application to a theoretical framework. The vital elements of the impetus leadership model are grounded on the four I's, which closely connect the Inspirational Motivation (IM) for motivation enhancement, Idealized Influence (II) for collective empowerment, Individualized Consideration (IC) for mentorship support, and finally, Intellectual Stimulation (IS) for innovative 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills development.

**Figure 5**

*The Impetus Leadership Model*



*Note. The four essential components of the model are Motivation, Empowerment, Support, & 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills.*

***Motivation and Empowerment***

The word *Impetus* is defined as “a driving force” or “stimulation or encouragement, resulting in increased activity” (Impetus, n.d.). The model constitutes the critical constituents needed for building leaders capable of thinking innovatively and critically to persevere through their challenges and thrive. As steering a large ship to its destination, in the impetus leadership model, motivation and empowerment are operated as ceaseless combustible fuel to keep the engine going despite the unexpected ferocious storms coming their way. Leading to a change to advance in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century education will never be a smooth ride. Any attempt either by an

individual leader or a design program such as iLead will require conscious efforts to obligate the team members throughout the entire journey until attaining proper mindsets and competencies to achieve its goals ultimately.

What iLead has endeavored through the application of the Impetus model was its ability to actively and vigorously engage the participants during the entire learning experience to allow sufficient time and efforts to facilitate the process of building leaders. It began with arousing teachers' great interest to participate in the program when giving them the resources, autonomy, and flexibility to fulfill their basic needs, in this case, any items they identified based on the assessment data to enhance teaching and learning in their classrooms. Under such a circumstance, data was given a meaningful purpose to permit the iLead teachers to rationalize the spending. For many, the self-directed beneficial function redefined the data analysis practice to commence an opportunity for these iLead teachers to desire for the inquiry of new knowledge and skills.

“There is nothing, right or wrong, which belief, plus burning desire, cannot make real. These qualities are free to everyone” (Napoleon & Berfes, 2010, p.55). If motivation works to ignite the burning desire, the empowerment fortifies a firm belief of self-confidence through ownership and progressive learning of the participants. It aims to achieve the individual's fulfillment to loop back to Maslow's highest level of need for self-actualization to ensure the sustainability of the program. The empowerment allowed iLead teachers to gain control over the dilemma they were in and shifted their beliefs of the degree of influences they could have on the actions taken to remedy the situation. They began to own the decision they made and strived for continuous improvement until they were satisfied with their performance outcomes. In the impetus leadership model, the participants' drive to continue trying and learning for higher



achievement and self-realization keeps the engine running until the ship eventually docks in its designated port.

### ***Support and 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Skills***

The support and 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills are also critical components of the impetus leadership model, both psychological and behavioral essences in building strong leaders. The iLead support includes technical and emotional assistance from the coaches. It provides the professional knowledge to plan, design, master, and reflect on the decisions made for solving the problem and the reassurance and encouragement needed to regain confidence and inner strength to encroach all obstacles while experiencing failure and setbacks. The 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills, the four C's, construct the competency framework of 21<sup>st</sup>-century leaders through reflective learning while actively communicate and collaborate with others to create and think critically for problem-solving. With the continuous fuel supply from *Motivation* and *Empowerment*, the *Support* and *21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills* are the other two indispensable elements in the impetus leadership model. They shall operate as the solid boat frame equipped with modern engineering machinery and the advanced 21<sup>st</sup>-century Global Positioning System (GPS) to aptly and safely navigate the ship penetrating the thunderstorms on the voyage towards its final destination.

### **Implications for Theory and Research**

In Chapter 2, the researcher discussed the definition and theoretical framework of transformational leadership to identify Bass and Avolio's (1994) four I's: Inspirational Motivation (IM), Idealized Influence (II), Intellectual Stimulation (IS), and Individualized Consideration (IC) as the significant qualities of the transformational leaders. The literature review on previous empirical studies also discussed the possible influences of the transformational leadership factors on teacher motivation and student performance in 21<sup>st</sup> - century education. The iLead initiative incorporated these essential elements into its design,

planning, and implementation of the program. Its results indicated an apparent association between the conceptual supposition and its empirical application. However, the researcher found it challenging to isolate the four factors as they must operate cohesively and sometimes synchronously in a symmetrical manner for an optimal outcome. The researcher also seizes the opportunity to investigate its connection with 21<sup>st</sup>-century education and was uncertain of the impact on student achievement since it was not part of the research design of this study.

### **Four I's**

Bass and Avolio (1994) interpreted the four I's, Inspirational Motivation (IM), Idealized Influence (II), Intellectual Stimulation (IS), and Individualized Consideration (IC), the makeup of a transformational leader. The four dimensions are crucial leadership characteristics for cultivating a communicative, supportive, and collaborative environment to increase individuals' capacities through motivation with inspiring vision and promotion of creativity and innovation (Bromley & Krschner-Bromley, 2007; Businessballs, 2020; Clavelle, 2012). Leaders gain trust and admiration from their team members when assuming themselves as role models to embody values for others to follow (Sugrue, 1998). Transformational leaders enthusiastically engage their members through inspiring motivation and vision in addition to attending to their personal needs through empathy and individualized support (Berkovich & Eyal, 2017; Kramer, 2007; Menegazzo et al., 2015). As a result, transformational leaders are more likely to solicit novel ideas and progressive approaches from their followers to solve problems (Carmeli et al., 2014; Fahey & Prusak; Tracey & Hinkin, 1998).

Based on the interviews from both coaches and the iLead teachers, it was evident that the four elements were incorporated, implemented, and exercised rigorously through a systematic process and strategic practices embedded in a designed program. Both the iLead teachers were

empowered and encouraged to lead the pathway by utilizing an innovative design thinking method to solve the self-identified problem. The impetus drive for self-actualization propels the inspirational motivation of the iLead teachers to prepare them as emerging leaders to take on the ownership to ensure student success in 21<sup>st</sup>-century education.

Thus, the researcher recognizes the absence of a critical factor in the transformational leadership theoretical framework, which may be rectified by discussing Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs theory perspectives on the individual's impulsive drive to attain the basic needs. That is, although an inspiring vision would have been phantasmagorical for many if the participants' fundamental needs were not met. Therefore, iLead program did not attempt to attract potential audiences by propagating teachers' noble mission of achieving student success. Instead, it centered on the individual's very basic needs to allow these teachers to reach their higher level of need for self-realization through a reflective learning pathway with time, guidance, and support. The unique iLead approach can be considered as an extension of the II, *Individual consideration* of transformational leadership essential elements with a people-driven emphasis to motivate the participants by satisfying their necessary demands.

### **Teacher Motivation and Student Achievement in 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Education**

The iLead program is unique for its attempt to influence participants through a strategically designed organizational process and practice to construct a functional model and framework for others to adopt for enhancing staff motivation and work performance. These effects were previously found relevant through the influence of transformational leaders. Although past studies indicated a strong correlation between leaders' transformational leadership qualities and staff motivation, the performance outcomes remain equivocal (Aburabl, 2012; Eliophotou-Menon & Ioannou, 2016; Suwanto et al., 2018). Much evidence implied either direct

or indirect leadership impacts on school effectiveness and student learning (Bolkan & Goodboy, 2009; Keck & Halling, 1999; Mazano et al., 2006). These educational leaders engaged their teachers in promoting 21<sup>st</sup>-century education with a shared autonomic vision to elevate innovation and creativity for organizational learning and change through a collaborative effort from all stakeholders (Hsiao & Chang, 2011; Kazmi & Narranoja; Raj & Srivastava, 2016).

The researcher uncovered an important observation after conducting an in-depth descriptive transcript analysis in this study. The researcher recognized the empowerment of robust shared responsibilities from all stakeholders to enhance the individual's commitment when an individual leader's role was removed and switched to the reflective learning efforts from all parties. As an extensional interpretation of the existing transformational leadership theoretical framework, the application of the leadership theory shall not be limited to only the attributes of the leaders but also the organizational actions and purposeful opportunities provided for its members. It allows all organization members to lead and thrive through a collective knowledge and skill inquiry-based learning pathway as structured in the iLead program. In other words, for building organizational leaders of all stakeholders, the researcher suggested an additional essential leadership element of IL, *Inquiry-Based Learning*, the fifth I, to embrace the reflective learning process instead of the outcomes. As a result, the achievement outcomes may still be unknown or indirect, pending various factors and definitions of success. By shifting the spotlight on the self-growth and improvement for progressive learning, transformational leadership theory may be sufficient and adequate in building leaders of all members facing the rapidly changing environment during the exponential time of 21<sup>st</sup>-century education.

## **Implications for Practice**

Scholarly research studies aim for confirming, filling the gap, or expanding the theoretical knowledge and understanding of the existing discernments and implications for practice to improve current pragmatic applications and implemented policies and regulations. There are two significant implications for practice from learning the iLead participants' experiences in this study. One refers to the systematic approach for continuity and sustainability of the organizational progression and accomplishment. The other one pertains to the shift of educational focus on learning growth instead of achievement outcomes to optimize the individuals' motivation and potentials to enhance teacher efficacy.

### **Systematic Organizational Process for Continuity and Sustainability**

Superintendents, deans, principals are commonly recognized as educational leaders by taking an authoritative role of providing a collaborative process to augment students' aptitudes and potencies, teachers, parents, and all other stakeholders to enhance the quality of education (Knerl, 2019). These leaders' primary responsibility is to ensure students' academic success, a matter of achievement management, and quality control from a business standpoint (Boske, 2012). Similar to many modern organizations, current educational institutes are structured functionally and hierarchically. As a result, these leaders' efforts toward achieving the shared essential educational goal become compartmentalized and fragmented (Garvin, 1998). Because of the administrative staff's quick turnover, the present progress and accomplishment become challenging to continue and sustain by their predecessors (Fullan, 2005).

Pascale et al. (as cited in Fullan, 2011), stated "It's easier to act your way into a new way of thinking than to think your way into a new way of acting" (Why Practice Needs to Drive section, para. 15). Often time, educational agencies such as school districts spend much time

sharing their vision and mission statement without explaining and developing a strategic and systematic process to align their actions to execute these BIG ideas. They rely on the individual administrators' leadership capacities to bring along their own staff to gear the entire organization toward the shared destination without leaving anyone behind. The unreliable variables, such as leadership turnover and the quality of the leaders, contribute to the challenges of making a continuous and sustainable collective effort to realize their common vision and mission.

Educational institutions should focus on developing a systematic organizational process to safeguard their efforts continuity and sustainability. Fullan (2005) advocated system thinkers in action to promote a programmatic organizational approach with a designed framework to deepen the learning of all members through a cohesive process to empower the stakeholders to take on the role of leadership to think critically and innovatively for problem-solving. Supported by Fullan's claim, the district's iLead program is an authentic application with its attempt to institutionalize the transformational leadership key elements into the process and practice of a program. The qualitative data analysis indicated its success in providing a continuously and consistently progressive implementation and influence on its participants regardless of the individual leaders. All Year 1 cohort teachers from different school sites and grade level expressed their willingness to continue the cycle of data-driven instructional practice even without the financial incentive next year. It is a strong implication of how a systematic process can root its impact on the members of the organization for on-going improvement and prosperity.

### **Focus on Learning Growth as a Meaningful Accountability Approach**

Elmore claimed, "Accountability for student performance is one of the two or three -if not the most- prominent issues in policy at the state and local levels right now" (as cited in Editorial projects in the education research center, 2004, para. 1). The purpose of educational

accountability is to hold districts, schools, and teachers accountable for enhancing student achievement. The assessment-based accountability system has been utilized as the mainstay for K12 public education since the 1990s (Polikoff, 2017). The Education Next's (2016) poll indicated overwhelming bipartisan support of a law-abiding accountability measurement to affix the funding allocation to school performance for assuring the fulfillment of its responsibilities to provide quality education for all students. However, several foreseeable problems occurred with the push for accountability. Teachers argued the reliability and validity of assessing their efficacy based on a single exam (Linn, 2000). Educators were also concerned about some punitive policy taken by many states to begin holding students accountable such as the California high school exit examination, which required the passing of a standardized test for graduation when proper curricula, resources, and teacher training might not be sufficiently provided to address the access and equality issue to improve student learning (Elmore, 2006).

The researcher believes student achievement outcomes shall be informative to drive educational policy-making and school efforts to improve education for all students. The iLead experience implied that the shift of emphasis on the improvement and the celebration of learning instead of performance outcomes could redefine the purpose of accountability. When empowered with autonomy as well as ample resource and support, the stakeholders will strive to hold themselves accountable by becoming persistent and perseverant learners for the progressive development to enhance student learning as an actualization of their own purpose for life. The adoption of ESSA in 2015 to replace the 2001 NCLB offered a more comprehensive approach for accountability. It provided a broader perspective with additional achievement indicators toward college and career readiness with increased flexibility at a local level to measure student learning growths through holistic performance factors in addition to requiring the

implementation of evidence-based strategies for interventions while assessing school effectiveness (Jimenez & Sargrad, 2017; Posey, 2014). The iLead program implied the alignment with the accountability reform through ESSA. Its success validated the district's innovative action to shift the accountability focus from outcome-oriented results to improvement-based measurement as well as hold all stakeholders accountable by utilizing the internal contributor instead of the external force. Overall, with the policymakers' continuing support, the researcher recommends a deliberate effort from more academic institutions for developing a coherent improvement, resource, and professional accountability program to advocate a meaningful and purposeful learning experience to enhance education efficacy.

### **Limitations**

Developing a coherent understanding of the connection between the research study and the literature theoretically and practically is critical to the essence of any scholarly inquiry. Scientific research strives to utilize appropriate methodologies to analyze the construed phenomena. The researcher believes the grounded theory qualitative study approach is appropriate to apprehend a complex meaning and reality within a context; in this case, the teachers' iLead experience. However, the limitations are inevitable due to the two major limitations of the study. They are the constraints of the research method and the organizational influence, particularly regarding the researcher's direct access to the participants.

### **Research Method Constraints**

Qualitative research is suited while attempting to explore the participants' experiences to develop an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of their perspectives and viewpoints (Austin & Sutton, 2014). During the investigation, one of the significant constraints is its ability to examine causality. Barbour (2000) argued the challenge of qualitative research of its



inconsistent conclusion due to the absence of statistical outcome and systematic process.

Although the iLead study did not aim to measure the effect of the program on teachers, instead, it grounded its interest in exploring the participants' experiences to explicate varied major themes uncovered and synthesized from the iLead adventure. The study becomes challenging to replicate and generalize since the research results were based on multifaceted perspectives and judgment from a unique group of participants.

Although the researcher was confident that data saturation was attained in his study, he was aware that other limitations might occur in this study, including the participants' collection bias and social coercion. Spencer et al. (2017) defined collection bias as a systematic flaw when the volume and accuracy of memories might be clouded to lead to the omission of event details or impressions regarding previous experiences. The iLead interview was conducted by the coach at the end of the school year as part of the program participation requirement. The end of year interview timing and the comradeship among all iLead members could mitigate some of the participants' negative emotions toward the program, leading to the overlook of their unpleasant experiences. Additionally, all iLead participants, including both teachers and coaches, established a strong personal and professional relationship after sharing the entire journey together. Although the iLead coach did not interview the teachers they mentored, the interviewees might be reluctant to exchange any negative discourse concerning one of their own. Therefore, the researcher must be sensitive to the social coercion that may be naturally evolved and pressed upon these teachers to offer desirable answers to maintain a friendly and supportive connection among the group.

## **Organizational Influence**

Although the district allowed the researcher to actively participate in designing, planning and implementing the program, the district staff ineluctably asserted its administrative influence on some parts of the research study design, especially regarding the researcher's direct access to the iLead teachers. The district preferred the interviews conducted by their own staff as well as having the recordings transcribed by their employees. The researcher received only the interview transcriptions with no identifiable information of the participating schools and individuals. All names of schools, teachers, and coaches were replaced with a letter or number code, such as School A, Teacher A1, or Coach A. It may be considered beneficial for the researcher to avoid the time consuming and labor-intensive interview and transcribing process. However, unfortunately, it also limited the researcher's ability to seek out more comprehensive responses from the interviewees by observing their physical reactions and assessing the inward emotions through their tone of voice and facial expressions.

Besides, with a structured interview conducted by the district staff, the researcher was also left out to approach the participants with clarifying questions and proceed with his analysis only based on the written transcription provided by the district. The researcher noticed that a couple of the answers were incomplete or possibly mistyped. After reaching out to the district staff for assistance, it was reported that most of the issues occurred in the original recording files. The participants' answers were either missing or hard to hear. Since the researcher was not present in the interview, he had no way to recall their answers or refer to the interview notes, which would have been taken if the researcher could interview the participants himself. Although the researcher understood the district's concern of having a fellow teacher interviewing their

peers and its intention to protect their staff's identities better, it imposes the limitation of the study.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

iLead is one district's systematic approach to incorporate transformational leadership's critical components into the design, planning, and implementation of an innovative program to shift the leadership development focus and its impact from individual leaders to all stakeholders involved within the organization. Not only is the iLead program unique to its practical application in the field of education, the researcher's leadership study omitting the role of organizational leaders, instead, focusing on a systematic, institutionalized approach, diverges from the tactic and paradigm of existing research studies. Since it is such a pioneering attempt, future research to uncover Year 2 and 3 iLead teachers' experiences as well as to examine the impact on performance and productivity with larger sample sizes and a wider range of practitioners in various professional sectors is solicited and imperative to the expansion of scholarly intellectual knowledge and pragmatic function for current educational practices.

### **iLead Multi-Year Research and Student Achievement Outcomes**

DePaulo (2002) suggested a sufficient sample size to expand the scope of data collection and construct a more inclusive and reliable qualitative analysis to decrease the discovery failure possibilities. Since the study was conducted based on the first year iLead teacher cohort, the researcher recommends a continuous study to include additional iLead teachers. More representative of the population can generate data among variables that are substantially distinct in order to result in more reliable findings and conclusions.

Federal and state laws and regulations continuously held their educational agencies accountable for student performance. LEAs and schools in California are evaluated based on

state-mandated assessments. Therefore, improving student achievement is essential to serve as the core purpose of education and secure the funding allocation and avoid administrative penalties from both state and federal government. The district staff has approached the researcher for another research project to analyze the iLead teachers' instructional impact on SBAC testing. The district staff expressed their urge to justify the more than one hundred thousand dollars spent on this program annually and a search for a conscious effort to effectively enhance student academic performance. Therefore, future multi-method studies to include the quantitative student performance analysis for triangulation and validity are beneficial and necessary to produce more compelling and robust results that can justify the spending and weight in the impact and interpretation of the researcher's original findings.

### **iLead Design Program on Various Organizations**

This paper demonstrates the possibility of shifting the focus of the leadership impact from individual leaders' endeavors to the processes of strategic organizational approach. The study suggests that participants can thrive and progress if giving complete autonomy and sufficient support undertaken by a designed program such as iLead. However, other variables must be considered for future studies, especially when the research was conducted during the initial year of program implementation and applied only in a single school district. Pierce (2008) explains *Facts* are the available data to represent snapshots of the event that occurred. However, *Truth* is the reality behind the facts that may be deliberately or accidentally obscure what actually happened. Therefore, the researcher recommends subsequent studies of similarly designed programs in educational and other organizational settings to discover and explore additional facts to add to the incomplete picture for a possible truth of originated from his findings.

## Conclusion

In the rapidly evolving 21<sup>st</sup>- century education, leaders thrive for innovative ways to enlist and empower their educators to surmount the unpredictable challenges and continuously provide a quality learning environment to enhance student achievement. The theoretical concepts of transformational leadership shed light on the possibility of synergizing team members to work collaboratively through inspirational motivation and individual consideration as well as developing their abilities to think critically for problem-solving through the idealized influence and intellectual stimulation (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Moolenaar et al., 2010). The district's pioneering iLead program incorporates the transformational leadership style's essential components and strategically designs a systematic educational program to pave a self-motivating and reflective learning pathway for staff empowerment and capacity building. The study's main objective is to uncover the iLead participants' experiences in this unique initiative and reveal their successes and challenges for future program enhancement and improvement. Additionally, the researcher encourages further research in education and other organizational leadership fields of study to elevate the academic knowledge of the scholars and the practitioners' pragmatic practices.

Through the grounded theory approach to systematically iterate, compare, and reflect on the qualitative research findings from the interview transcripts for synchronization and categorization, the researcher concludes the following four themes of the iLead experiences: *The Impetus of Needs*, *The Empowerment of Collective Autonomy and Serendipity*, *The Invincible Coaching Support* and *The Focus on Progressive Learning in the Making of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Leaders*. *The Impetus of Needs* keenly motivates the members to voluntarily participate in the program and empower them to endure the challenges and setbacks during the reflective learning

process until the higher level of self-fulfillment need is present and activated for achievability and sustainability. *The Empowerment of Collective Autonomy and Serendipity* warrants a collective capital for both staff and the organization through shared ownership and collegiality to assure the efficacy and accountability necessary for continuous improvement and successes. *The Invincible Coaching Support* provides the learning of the cycle of effective instructional practices and the development of 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills through a personalized relationship with inspirational influence to aim for the actualization of the individual as well as the overall achievement of the students. Lastly, *The Focus on Progressive Learning in the Making of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Leaders* cements the successes of iLead's ambitious goal of building future leaders who can communicate sufficiently to collaborate and think creatively and innovatively to resolve issues through a reflective learning pathway. It solidifies the development of perseverance and resilience for overcoming the challenges and becoming emerging leaders while are facing the continually changing bureaucratic policies and overwhelming demands and tasks in the exponential time of 21<sup>st</sup>-century education.

The four themes constitute the framework of the impetus leadership model to design a systemic organizational process focusing on the critical components of motivation, empowerment, support, and 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills to build leaders among all stakeholders for a sustainable organizational reform with reliable performance outcomes. The outcome is optimal because of its theoretical implication of congruent impacts on staff motivation and capacity building through a strategic learning process embedded with the essential leadership components without direct actions driven by any individual leaders. The results also indicate the pragmatic implication of a systematic organizational approach to promoting reflective learning and accountability by shifting the focus on progressive learning instead of the performance outcome.

The celebration and triumph of every moment of improvement, especially during challenging times, become monumental because it signifies the extraordinary growth and enhancement opportunity to achieve self-actualization as the highest level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943).

There are still various limitations due to the constraints of the current research method and substantial influence from the district on various research design levels. Future studies shall continuously explore research in a more significant number of participants in the educational setting and other business sectors to increase the liability and dependability of the overall findings to conclude a profound understanding of the multidimensional phenomenon observed. The researcher hopes his study broadens the scholarly knowledge of the theoretical transformational leadership concepts with comprehensive and applicable perspectives in the practical fieldwork. Mostly, the researcher desires his research reinforcing the innovations needed to catapult the development of 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills for preparing leaders from all walks of life, particularly in the field of education, to thrive and prevail in providing quality education for our future student leaders.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix A

### iLead to Student Achievement in 21st Century Education Program Information Sheet

Transformational Leadership Key Elements		Structure and Application
<b>Vision (IM)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborative culture</li> <li>• Continuous improvement</li> <li>• Focus on student achievement</li> <li>• Technology Integration</li> <li>• Prepare for 21<sup>st</sup>-century education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coaches planning</li> <li>• Pilot teacher planning</li> <li>• Orientation</li> <li>• PLC time</li> </ul>
<b>Goals (IS; IC)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher Exemplar (Yr. 1) &amp; Teacher Leader (Yr. 2)</li> <li>• Networking and collaboration</li> <li>• Change the culture to focus on student achievement with data-driven and technology integrated instruction</li> <li>• Change mindset</li> <li>• Build a community of learners &amp; global citizens</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PLC time</li> <li>• Goal setting and reflection</li> <li>• End of year celebration</li> <li>• Data collection and monitoring three times a year</li> </ul>
<b>Inspiration (IS)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trust</li> <li>• Ownership</li> <li>• Empower the participants</li> <li>• Professional pride and self-fulfillment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coaching training</li> <li>• Coaching log</li> <li>• Coach assignment</li> <li>• Teacher's choice and decision making</li> <li>• T-shirt and newsletter sharing</li> <li>• Social media share out</li> </ul>
<b>Shared Vision and Value (II, IM)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Value creation</li> <li>• Inclusion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Application</li> <li>• Orientation</li> <li>• Team planning</li> <li>• Pilot teacher inputs</li> <li>• TechTalk for principals' inputs</li> <li>• Reflection meeting with the participants and coaches</li> </ul>
<b>Motivation and Encouragement (IM, IC)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Celebrate success</li> <li>• Mentorship</li> <li>• Strengths and Skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Newsletter and data sharing</li> <li>• \$3000 and \$1000 for both year and a possible third-year option from site funding</li> <li>• Encouragement and positive coaching support</li> <li>• Classroom visits and sharing</li> </ul>
<b>Innovative Thinking (IS)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creativity</li> <li>• Challenge</li> <li>• Problem-solving and support collaboration</li> <li>• Celebrate "failure" as an opportunity to learn</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PLC sharing</li> <li>• Teacher-driven decision making</li> <li>• Innovative tools and practices to support student learning</li> </ul>
<b>"People" Development (IC)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual's need for achievement &amp; growth</li> <li>• Supportive learning environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data monitoring</li> <li>• Information sharing on PowerSchool</li> <li>• Continuous professional development</li> <li>• Districtwide and school iLead teacher PLC event</li> <li>• Classroom visit</li> <li>• Year 1 and Year 2 site support team</li> </ul>



## Appendix B

### iLead Interview Guide for Coach Interview

#### iLead Interview Guide for Coaches

Thank you for participating in iLead Program study at XXX School District. On behalf of the district office, we appreciate your involvement in this innovative program, and we would also like to thank you for agreeing to share your valuable insights with us through this one on one interview. We want to assure you again that no name of the school, coach or student will be revealed in this study. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have questions or concerns. I will now ask several questions about your experiences and reflections of the iLead program.

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How do you view your role in creating the vision for the iLead program?</li> <li>2. How has that impacted your coaching?</li> <li>3. What is the purpose for the iLead program?</li> <li>4. How does your experience align to this vision?</li> <li>5. What do you like most about the iLead program?</li> <li>6. What motivates you the most to improve student achievement in the iLead program?</li> </ol>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Describe the coaching practice you have provided - schedule, routine, structure</li> <li>8. How was your coaching influenced by this experience? Were there any changes from your prior beliefs and practices? If so, what were the changes?</li> <li>9. What was your overall coaching goal? Has the program supported you in achieving this goal? Why or why not?</li> </ol>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10. Describe your working relationship with the teachers. What did you like? What didn't you like?</li> <li>11. How do you collaborate and communicate with your teacher?</li> <li>12. How did you address the individual needs of your teachers?</li> </ol>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>13. Did the iLead program support innovation and creativity in the classroom? If so, how did the iLead program support innovation and creativity in the classroom?</li> <li>14. What has been its effect in supporting teaching and student achievement? How do you know?</li> <li>15. Describe one of your best experiences while participating in iLead.               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Why?</li> <li>b. What did you learn from this?</li> </ol> </li> <li>16. Describe one of your most challenging experiences while participating in iLead.               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Why?</li> <li>b. What did you learn from this?</li> </ol> </li> <li>17. What are the challenges of the iLead program?               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Any suggestions to address the challenges</li> </ol> </li> <li>18. What are the strengths of the iLead program?</li> <li>19. How did the iLead program influence you as regards to being an educational leader in the 21<sup>st</sup> century education?</li> <li>20. Is there anything else that you would like to share?</li> </ol>

## Appendix C

### iLead Interview Guide for Teacher Interview

#### iLead Interview Guide for Teachers

Thank you for participating in iLead Program study at XXX School District. On behalf of the district office, we appreciate your involvement in this innovative program, and we would also like to thank you for agreeing to share your valuable insights with us through this one on one interview. We want to assure you again that no name of the school, teacher or student will be revealed in this study. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have questions or concerns. I will now ask several questions about your experiences and reflections of the iLead program.

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. (Pilot Teacher Only) How do you view your role in creating the vision for the iLead program?</li> <li>2. How has that impacted your implementation?</li> <li>3. Why did you participate in the iLead program?</li> <li>4. What is the purpose of the iLead program? (Teacher Only: Interviewer states vision.) How does your experience align with this vision?</li> <li>5. What do you like most about the iLead program?</li> <li>6. What motivates you the most to improve student achievement in the iLead program?</li> </ol>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Describe the coaching practice you have received. - schedule, routine, structure</li> <li>8. How was your teaching influenced by this experience? Were there any changes from your prior beliefs and practices?</li> <li>9. What was your goal? Has the program supported you in achieving this goal? Why or why not?</li> </ol>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10. Describe your working relationship with the coach. What did you like? What didn't you like?</li> <li>11. How do you collaborate and communicate with your coach?</li> <li>12. How were your individual needs met through coaching?</li> </ol>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>13. Did the iLead program support innovation and creativity in the classroom? If so, how did the iLead program support innovation and creativity in the classroom?</li> <li>14. What has been its effect in supporting teaching and student achievement? How do you know?</li> <li>15. Describe one of your best experiences while participating in iLead.             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Why?</li> <li>b. How did the experience impact your instructional practices?</li> </ol> </li> <li>16. Describe one of your most challenging experiences while participating in iLead.             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Why?</li> <li>b. How did the experience impact your instructional practices?</li> </ol> </li> <li>17. What are the challenges of the iLead program?             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Any suggestions to address the challenges</li> </ol> </li> <li>18. What are the strengths of the iLead program?</li> <li>19. Would you continue the practices you put in place without ongoing iLead support? Why or why not?</li> <li>20. Is there anything else that you would like to share?</li> </ol>

## Appendix D

### Strategies for Qualitative Interview

#### Strategies for Qualitative Interviews

##### A Few General Points

- Stop and Think: should interviews be included in your research design?
  - Are there alternative ways of answering your research question through documentary review, observation or unobtrusive measures?
  - Be clear about the possible biases and limitations of interviews
- The point of a qualitative interview is to let the respondent tell their own story on their own terms.
- THIS IS NOT A SURVEY! The guide acts as a prompt, reminding you of necessary topics to cover, questions to ask and areas to probe. As such, it should be simple so that your primary focus can stay on the respondent. It's best to memorize your guide!
- How much time will you spend with each respondent? Adjust your guide accordingly (it may take several interviews to judge the correct length).
- Try out a new guide (or parts of it) on friends and get their feedback before using it in the field.

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#### Should you record and transcribe interviews?

##### PROS:

- It helps to correct the natural limitations of our memories and of the intuitive glosses that we might place on what people say in interviews
- It allows more thorough examination of what people say
- It permits repeated examinations of the interviewees' answers
- It opens up the data to public scrutiny by other researchers, who can evaluate the analysis that is carried out by the original researchers of the data (that is, a secondary analysis)
- It therefore helps to counter accusations that an analysis might have been influenced by a researcher's values or biases
- It allows the data to be reused in other ways from those intended by the original researcher—for example, in the light of new theoretical ideas or analytic strategies.

##### CONS:

- It introduces a different dynamic into the social encounter of the interview, and recording equipment may be off-putting for interviewees.
- Transcribing is a very time-consuming process. It also requires good equipment, usually in the form of a good-quality tape recorder and microphone but also, if possible, a transcription machine. Transcription also very quickly results in a daunting pile of paper.

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### A Successful Interviewer is:

1. *Knowledgeable*: is thoroughly familiar with the focus of the interview; pilot interviews of the kind used in survey interviewing can be useful here.
2. *Structuring*: gives purpose for interview; rounds it off; asks whether interviewee has questions.
3. *Clear*: asks simple, easy, short questions; no jargon.
4. *Gentle*: lets people finish; gives them time to think; tolerates pauses.
5. *Sensitive*: listens attentively to what is said and how it is said; is empathetic in dealing with the interviewee.
6. *Open*: responds to what is important to interviewee and is flexible.
7. *Steering*: knows what he/she wants to find out.
8. *Critical*: is prepared to challenge what is said, for example, dealing with inconsistencies in interviewees' replies.
9. *Remembering*: relates what is said to what has previously been said.
10. *Interpreting*: clarifies and extends meanings of interviewees' statements, but without imposing meaning on them.
11. *Balanced*: does not talk too much, which may make the interviewee passive, and does not talk too little, which may result in the interviewee feeling he or she is not talking along the right lines.
12. *Ethically sensitive*: is sensitive to the ethical dimension of interviewing, ensuring the interviewee appreciates what the research is about, its purposes, and that his or her answers will be treated confidentially.

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### The Interview as an Interpersonal Encounter

- The social skills of empathy, warmth, attentiveness, humor (where appropriate), and consideration are essential for good interviewing.
- Any judgmental attitudes, shock or discomfort will be immediately detected.
- Never answer a question for the respondent.
- One must be completely engaged with the respondent, while at the same time keeping track of the questions one needs to ask.
- Use every active listening technique at your disposal:
  - Repeating back
  - "Wow!"
  - "Tell me more about that!"
  - "That is really interesting."
- Don't be afraid of silence; you can use it to prod the respondent to reflect and amplify an answer
- Don't follow the interview guide—follow the respondent. Follow up new information that he or she brings up without losing sense of where you are in the interview.
- Try not to think about time—relax into the interview.

## Guidelines for Developing Interview Questions

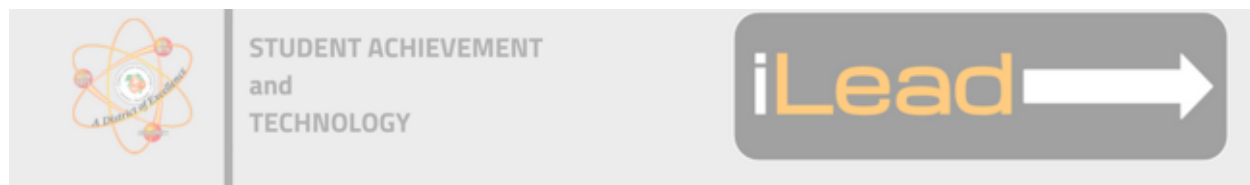
- Questions should be simple. Do not ask more than one question at a time.
- The best questions are those which elicit the longest answers from the respondent. Do not ask questions that can be answered with one word.
- Don't ask questions that require your respondents to do your analysis for you. This is YOUR job.
- Likewise, do not ask for hearsay or opinions on behalf of the group they are a part of "What do people around here think of x?" You rarely get anything interesting.
- Don't be afraid to ask embarrassing questions. If you don't ask, they won't tell.
- Types of questions or other interview talk:
  - *Direct questions:* 'Do you find it easy to keep smiling when serving customers?'; 'Are you happy with the way you and your husband decide how money should be spent?' Such questions are perhaps best left until towards the end of the interview, in order not to influence the direction of the interview too much.
  - *Indirect questions:* 'What do most people round here think of the ways that management treats its staff?', perhaps followed up by 'Is that the way you feel too?', in order to get at the individual's own view.
  - *Structuring questions:* 'I would now like to move on to a different topic'.
  - *Follow-up questions:* getting the interviewee to elaborate his/her answer, such as 'Could you say some more about that?'; 'What do you mean by that . . .?'
  - *Probing questions:* following up what has been said through direct questioning.
  - *Specifying questions:* 'What did you do then?'; 'How did X react to what you said?'
  - *Interpreting questions:* 'Do you mean that your leadership role has had to change from one of encouraging others to a more directive one?'; 'Is it fair to say that what you are suggesting is that you don't mind being friendly towards customers most of the time, but when they are unpleasant or demanding you find it more difficult?'

## Step-By-Step Guide to Writing Interview Questions

1. Write down the larger research questions of the study. Outline the broad areas of knowledge that are relevant to answering these questions.
2. Develop questions within each of these major areas, shaping them to fit particular kinds of respondents. The goal here is to tap into **their** experiences and expertise.
3. Adjust the language of the interview according to the respondent (child, professional, etc.).
4. Take care to word questions so that respondents are motivated to answer as **completely** and **honestly** as possible.
5. Ask “how” questions rather than “why” questions to get stories of process rather than acceptable “accounts” of behavior. “How did you come to join this group . . .?”
6. Develop probes that will elicit more detailed and elaborate responses to key questions. The more detail, the better!
7. Begin the interview with a “warm-up” question—something that the respondent can answer easily and at some length (though not too long). It doesn’t have to pertain directly to what you are trying to find out (although it might), but this initial rapport-building will put you more at ease with one another and thus will make the rest of the interview flow more smoothly.
8. Think about the logical flow of the interview. What topics should come first? What follows more or less “naturally”? This may take some adjustment after several interviews.
9. Difficult or potentially embarrassing questions should be asked toward the end of the interview, when rapport has been established.
10. The last question should provide some closure for the interview, and leave the respondent feeling empowered, listened to, or otherwise glad that they talked to you.

## Appendix E

### iLead Research Permission Notification



#### Key Dates:

- **8/17/18** Application window opens
- **8/30/18-9/20/18** See GoSign MeUp for Drop-in application support  
August 30, September 4, September 10, September 14
- **10/1/18** Application window closes

#### About

The iLead program develops a collaborative culture to continuously focus on student achievement. By implementing data-driven instructional practices and integrating technology, educators will prepare all of our students as 21st century learners and global citizens. The iLead grant will provide teachers the opportunity to implement strategies, practices, and technology to increase student achievement. Through coaching support and professional development provided by a variety of learning communities, classroom teachers will continuously reflect on instruction and assessment using the collaborative cycle of effective instruction.

#### Funding

- \$1000-\$3000 Funding for technology professional learning, devices, and collaborative release time to increase student achievement

#### Application Process:

- Complete an application to participate in the program
- Reflect on student achievement to identify a goal
- Determine instructional strategies, professional development needs, and/or technology to reach the goal, provide a rationale, identify implementation plan, and select progress monitoring tools for assessment

#### Requirements:

- Attend one introductory professional development session
- Participate in an iLead Learning Walk
- Coaching support for the implementation plan based on the collaborative cycle of effective instruction - at least two times per month
- Ongoing progress monitoring and reflection with three (once per trimester for elementary, once per quarter for secondary) submissions of summative data and analysis on the iLead Data Reflection Form
- Principal collaboration to support continued development
- Sharing of project implementation and results
- *By applying for the iLead program, the applicants are agreeing to participate in the district's iLead research study on teacher motivation and student achievement. School, student and teacher's name will remain anonymous during the entire research study process. An exit interview will be conducted by the iLead coach (recorded) for the qualitative research and their students' assessment data will be analyzed for a quantitative study.*



- Participants will return acquired iLead Grant resources if the participant separates from the district, leaves the classroom or does not meet program expectation
- iLead Grant resources will transfer with teacher if reassigned to another school within OUSD, as applicable. |



## Appendix F

### Interview Information & Reminder Email

#### **INTERVIEW INFORMATION/REMINDER EMAIL to be distributed to iLead interview participants**

**Subject line:** Reminder to participate in an iLead program experience and reflection interview

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for participating in our iLead program this year. We appreciate your support and involvement in the program and continue to be the innovative leaders to strive for student achievement. We would like to remind you as being part of the iLead program this year; you have agreed to participate in a one on one interview to help us develop a deeper understanding of the impact of the program to support teaching and learning. However, if you have any concern or reservation about our research study, please do not hesitate to contact us. We also want to reassure you that this study is completely confidential and no name of the school, teacher, coach or student will be revealed or shared with the researcher at Chapman University at any time during the study.

The interview questions will be shared with you prior to the meeting day for your review. This will be a structured interview meaning all interview questions will remain the same for all participants to stay consistent. The one-hour interview will be conducted by our district staff who will contact you to schedule a time at your convenience for this interview at your location.

We appreciate your willingness to share your valuable experiences and reflections with us through this interview. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or concerns about this study.

District iLead Team & Jarit

District iLead Leadership Team  
Orange Unified School District  
Educational Technology Department  
Student Achievement Department  
[ilead@orangeusd.org](mailto:ilead@orangeusd.org)

Jarit Unrau  
Chapman University  
Attallah College of Educational Studies  
[unrau100@mail.chapman.edu](mailto:unrau100@mail.chapman.edu)

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## Appendix G

### iLead Learning Walk Sample Schedule & Protocol

<b>Date</b>	
<b>8:10-8:45</b>	<b>Teach 1/School A/2<sup>nd</sup> Grade/ELA</b>
<b>9:15-9:45</b>	<b>Teacher 2/School B/1<sup>st</sup> Grade/ELA &amp; Language Acquisition</b>
<b>10:15-10:45</b>	<b>Teacher 3/School C/Kinder/Phonics</b>
<b>11:15-11:45</b>	<b>Teacher 4/School D/2<sup>nd</sup> Grade/Writing</b>
<b>11:45-12:45</b>	<b>Lunch</b>
<b>12:45-1:15</b>	<b>Teacher 5/School E/1<sup>st</sup> Grade/Close Reading</b>
<b>1:45-2:30</b>	<b>PLC: Reflection &amp; Feedback</b>

<b>iLead Learning Walk</b>	
<b>20 minutes</b>	<b>Use the notetaker document to take notes.</b>
<b>Class Visit</b>	
<b>10 minutes</b>	<b>Reflective Questions (Facilitator: iLead Coach)</b>
<b>Quick Reflection</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>What did you notice?</b></li> <li>• <b>What was surprising to you?</b></li> <li>• <b>What practices do you have in comment?</b></li> <li>• <b>What did you learn?</b></li> </ul>