THE EXAMINATION OF A MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHER PREPARATORY

PROGRAM THROUGH THE LENS OF INVITATIONAL LEADERSHIP

A Dissertation

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In Partial Fulfillment

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Doctor of Education

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by

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The undersigned, appointed by the Dean of the Graduate School, have examined the

dissertation entitled

THE EXAMINATION OF A MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHER PREPARATORY

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Presented by Christina L. Price-Richardson,

A candidate for the degree of Doctor of Education

And hereby certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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Dr. Barbara N. Martin, Major Advisor

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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT

Conducted have been studies on the development of adolescent students, the leadership style of middle school teachers, and the diversity of student. However, individual studies have not addressed the complex skills necessary for an effective middle school teacher. Today's teachers face rapid developmental changes of adolescents, increased expectations, and face the challenge of being unprepared to meet the needs of diverse students. Preparing these teachers needs to begin as early as possible in preparatory programs. By building programs specific for middle school educators, universities can prepare teachers to be inclusive and culturally aware. Therefore, this study used a social justice lens to examine invitational leadership principles in a middle school education program at a public university. Using the principles and domains of invitational leadership identified by Purkey and Novak (2016), the researcher focused specifically on the inclusion of caring, respect, trust, optimism, and intentionality in the program as well as the use of people, places, policies, programs, and processes for creating an inviting culture in the program. The results concluded the program was effective at including the principles and domains of invitational leadership by role modeling, building relationships within the community of learners, and offering collaborative opportunities to the students.

SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION TO DISSERTATION

Introduction

Middle school students have a reputation for being a challenging group of learners (Brineger, 2010). Kay and Wolf (2017) postulated, "Adolescence is frequently described as an emotionally charged, tumultuous time in one's social, emotional, and physical development and is highly influenced by peers and other outside forces" (p. 26). Battling physical changes in their bodies while riding an emotional roller coaster, teenagers can be a hard audience for educators to appeal to when trying to build positive relationships and, to every student's dismay, create buy-in for academic goals and standards (Williams, 2012). Compounding the delicate nature of a classroom full of mood swings and pubescent angst is the array of diverse backgrounds, identities, and cultures of each student. In addition, Gee, Beno, Lindstrom, Lind, Post, and Hirano (2020) highlighted "the importance of leveraging students' funds of knowledge—or the culturally relevant knowledge and assets they bring into the learning environments" (p. 234).

According to a report by the United States Census Bureau, more than 50% of children under the age of one year are non-white (Mitchell, 2016). Another study by the Human Rights Center (n.d.) found 61% of students aged 13-17 that identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) hear negative comments about their identity at school. As these marginalized students enter white, heteronormative classrooms, academics is not their first concern (Gee et al., 2020). As a result, the need to address diversity in our student population is a growing issue for teachers. As Rowan, Bourke, L'Estrange, Brownlee, Ryan, Walker, and Churchward (2021) noted, "Teachers consistently report working with diverse learners as one of the most challenging aspects

of their work… " (p. 115). Notwithstanding, being responsible for the success of all students, educators must meet the changing demographics with policies and practices rooted in social justice principles (Larson, 2010, Rowan et al, 2021). Brown and Rodriguez (2017) also contended,

> Many . . . predominantly white and middle-class teachers are unprepared to teach an urban public school population increasingly comprised of low-income children of color due to lack of cultural competencies, low expectations of and lack of caring for students, and racial/ethnic, linguistic, and class biases. (p.75)

Therefore, by providing equitable opportunities that are inclusive of diversity in a supportive environment, teachers can maximize learning for all students in the United States.

The specific challenge for middle school educators is the navigation of the typical social and emotional issues inherent in a preteen student combined with the intentional acceptance of the social diversity that makes up every classroom in this country (Brineger, 2010; Kay & Wolf, 2017; Rowan, et al., 2021). For educators to teach these students, they must build a mutually trusting relationship (Tosolt, 2010). This vital first step begins when teachers establish a safe environment and show every student their unconditional support (Williams, 2012). Researchers (Purkey & Novak, 2016; Walker & Martin, 2021) have identified teachers that use invitational leadership value this inclusive climate and work hard to practice the tenets of this leadership theory.

Specifically, invitational leadership (Purkey & Novak, 2016) is conducted from the belief that based on intentionality all people, policies, processes, programs, and places

associated with schools and the students should reflect care, trust, respect, and optimism. Since teachers are the essential leaders of their classrooms, implementing these core beliefs at the middle-level grades can be the difference for a student struggling with confidence, self-identity, or any other obstacle encountered by young students in their preteen years **(**Hayes, Ryan, & Zseller, 1994; Kay & Wolf, 2017). In the school hallways overpopulated with faces of diversity and intimidating middle school expectations and procedures, the adult that warmly smiles from the door of an inviting, protective classroom can be a haven for an overwhelmed youth (Akos, 2002). Being one of those inviting teachers does not come naturally. It is an intentional decision these educators make (Purkey & Novak, 2016).

Unfortunately, the demeanor a teacher comfortably adopts in the classroom is what was role modeled for them when they were students themselves (Huss, 2004). Traditionally, the focus of middle school teachers has been on their subject area and preparing students academically for high school, thus the term *junior high school* was coined (Middle schools, n.d.). However, with a fast-moving change in the cultural landscape, educators should now evaluate their priorities for preparing middle school students to be contributing members of a diverse community within their schools by focusing on social justice education (Brown & Rodriguez, 2017; Huss, 2004; Martin & Miller, 2017).

Not typically taught in the curriculum or mentioned in textbooks, invitational leadership for social justice has been absent from teacher and leadership training programs (Bohanon, 2018; Martin & Miller, 2017). Yet the onus of preparing competent educators for the reality of a diverse classroom is on the universities (Akiba, 2011). And

as Rowan, et al, (2021) argued, "Very few systematic reviews… have focused explicitly on questions relating to how teacher education can best prepare future teachers to work with learners identified as diverse" (p. 117). This means a transformation in how education professors' view teaching (Furman, 2012) is needed. It is no longer just about the methods of classroom management and lesson planning but should now focus on the awareness and understanding of marginalized groups and how they learn and are invited into the learning process (Rowan et al, 2021). These programs cannot continue to prepare future teachers in traditional, higher education methods that are not reflective of the reality of teaching in the 21st Century (Haberman, 2005, Rowan et al, 2021).

Statement of the Problem

Problem of Practice

In a society where power has traditionally been held by white, heterosexual, non-disabled men (Johnson, 2018), the 21st century has seen a shift in the awareness of this imbalance (Howard & Ulferts, 2020; Mullen, 2010). Yet awareness is often interpreted as resolve, especially in our teacher education programs (Juarez, Smith, & Hayes, 2008). Addressing the issue by adding only a required social justice course (Rowan, et al., 2021), novice teachers are graduating unprepared for the diversity of students filling their classrooms. Invitational leadership skills can help support all students, but as a study conducted by Martin and Miller (2017) discovered, educators are unaware of how invitational leadership principles could address social justice in schools. The researchers posited this was due to the absence of these teachings in teacher and leadership preparatory programs (Martin & Miller, 2017).

The middle school culture would benefit from the principles of invitational leadership (Purkey & Novak, 2016; Walker & Martin, 2021). Youth at this level in their physical and emotional development are beginning to question and experiment with differing identities for themselves (Kay & Wolf, 2017). Whether openly or secretly experimenting with self-expression that challenges the normative, middle school students are in desperate need of acceptance and support (Hayes, Ryan, & Zseller, 1994; Kay & Wolf). The lucky ones find this through family and friends. Other students struggle with language barriers, culture shock, or a disability that marks them as marginalized in our society. These middle school age students need the safety of an intentional caring and inviting classroom of a culturally responsive teacher (Rowan, et al, 2021). Thus, the responsibility to prepare these teachers falls on the preparatory programs, and this investigation will examine the practices of such a program seeking to provide effective culturally responsive teaching practices to its candidates.

Existing Literature Gap

Numerous research studies (Brown & Knowles, 2014) have identified the instructional methods used in current middle school classrooms. The logistics of the middle school structure and the nuances of data collection, goal setting, and assessment are well established and practiced (Kinney, 2015). These are the same areas pre-service teachers are immersed in during course work and field experiences. An area that needs more research is how teacher preparation programs are responding to the cultural shift happening in our classrooms (Rowan et al, 2021). At the intersection of a middle school student's academic success and their strong social/emotional development is a teacher that should be specifically trained to be

inviting of all students. Because of the rapid growth in classroom diversity (Rowan et al, 2021), a gap in the literature has developed between traditionally effective teacher training and the rising need for culturally responsive educators ready to enter their careers as invitational leaders of a rapidly changing student population.

Purpose of the Study

From a teacher's perspective, there is no *normal* or *average* student. Every individual comes with a unique expression of diversity and a long list of identifiers that can range from learning preferences to socio-economic status. Before a teacher can be responsive to the needs of these students, they must accept and understand the complexity of diverseness as well as the impact a changing society has on student growth and development (McEwin, Dickenson, Erb, & Scales, 1995).

The modern role of the teacher extends beyond the curriculum expert and now requires mindfulness, dedication, and resilience (Akiba, 2011). Middle school teachers especially need to support young adolescents as individuals with ideas and plans for an optimistic future (McEwin et al., 1995). For this reason, middle-grades teacher preparation programs must bring acceptance to the vast array of diversity issues, as well as the skills and behaviors essential to the proactive creation of a safe learning environment for all students regardless of identification, circumstance, or status. This study focused on the training of pre-service middle school teachers in the pedagogy of social justice and culturally responsive teaching through invitational leadership principles. The purpose of this research study was to examine the teaching and training in the middle school teacher preparatory program at a four-year university in Missouri by identifying invitational leadership principles integrated in the program's curriculum and

field experiences, as well as invitational leadership methods used by faculty that role model social justice pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. Which invitational leadership principles (Care, Respect, Trust, Optimism, and Intention) are being taught by university faculty in the middle school teacher education program as perceived by the program's faculty and alumni?

2. How are the university faculty ensuring the most intentionally inviting environment using the 5 Ps: People, Places, Policies, Programs, and Processes?

3. Is there a difference between the perceptions of middle school teacher education undergraduate students and alumni on how the middle school preparatory program's use of the 5 P's (People, Places, Policies, Programs, and Processes) influences the overall culture of the program?

Conceptual Frameworks

Aiming to fully understand the significance of this investigation, presented are two separate frameworks: social justice leadership (Shield, 2004; Theorharis, 2007) and invitational leadership (Purkey & Novak, 2016). This research had an emphasis on the connection of teacher preparation programs and how the use of invitational leadership can create an inviting ethos for the pre-service teachers as they prepare to teacher in diverse classrooms. Presented below are the two conceptual frameworks.

Social Justice Theory

Social justice education is about providing all students with an equitable education focused on the learner, not the curriculum as in traditional education models

(Bohanon, 2018; Social Justice Education, n.d.). This student-centered approach has a positive impact on all students, especially those from underserved and marginalized backgrounds (Bohanon, 2018). Rodríguez, Chambers, González, and Scheurich (2010), concurred that a systemic pattern has long been established:

> We only have to look at who is in our prisons (predominantly men of color), who are the poor (predominantly women, children, and folks of color), who are predominantly at the bottom of the economic hierarchy (women, children, and folks of color), who have the worst paying jobs, who cleans the hotel rooms and who stays in them, who gets bullied the most (girls, feminine boys, and LGBT students), who commits suicide at a higher rate (LGBT students), whose school achievement is the lowest (students from low income homes and students of color), who lives within the worst housing and gets the worst health care (low income families and families of color) and on and on to see the inequity and injustice (p. 152).

The support of a socially-just learning environment is paramount, especially for middle school students (Martin & Miller, 2017). Teachers must respond with intentionality to address student feelings of helplessness and a loss of control over their bodies, emotions, and choices (Bohanon, 2018). These teachers understand the impact of addressing oppression through social justice education (Bohanon, 2018; Larson, 2010). The positive impact can be seen in the mental and emotional health of middle school students in targeted minority groups. They desire a safe, inviting school where they are accepted and supported to thrive in classrooms and not be overwhelmed by the fear and anxiety of not fitting-in with their peers in the majority

population (Larson, 2010). It is essential that the principal and the teachers sustain a commitment to equity and justice for all (Theorharis, 2007).

Yet, as important as social justice is to our students, it is only effective if teachers intentionally practice these approaches in their classrooms (Martin & Miller, 2017; Walker & Martin, 2021). The responsibility for developing multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills for teaching diverse students is on teacher education programs (Akiba, 2011). However, Juarez et al. (2008) postulated that these programs may not be adequately preparing future teachers for the reality of what student diversity truly looks like and what social justice education means.

To address the shortcomings of White teachers serving in culturally diverse classrooms (Bohanon, 2018; Larson, 2010), teacher preparation programs must infuse social justice theory into the training of young educators that have historically been white females from a middle-class background with little knowledge of minorities and marginalized people (Juarez et al., 2008). But in a country of systemic inequity and chronic injustice, establishing social justice practices in university programs is challenging (Rodriguez et al., 2010). Pre-service teachers are traditionally trained on classroom instruction with little attention paid to the growing diversity in America's classrooms (Bohanon, 2018). Thus, teacher education programs proclaim they promote equality, inclusion, and multiculturalism, not only in their student population but also in their teacher preparation curriculum (Juarez et al., 2008). It is imperative these programs start by teaching future educators to be self-reflective of their own experiences (Martin & Miller, 2017). Only then can they begin to understand how social factors such as race and class affect their students' well-being and acknowledge their personal, implicit bias,

and privilege to become the person they need to be for their future students (Bohanon, 2018). This is important since social justice training begins with how the education instructors in these preparatory programs role model and set professional standards for their undergraduate students (Juarez et al., 2008). In a country where education has been politicized and weaponized with test scores that define a teacher's worth, middle school students need teachers that can navigate them through the maneuverings of the teenage years with priority on ensuring a safe space to be themselves (Bohanon, 2018). Universities need to prepare future teachers who are capable of not only delivering curriculum standards, but can intentionally engage each learner, regardless of their social membership (Larson, 2010).

Invitational Leadership Theory

Another conceptual framework for this study was invitational leadership theory. Different from the traditional view of leadership that is built on a foundation of power, invitational leadership is grounded in respect with an emphasis on collaboration and acceptance (Egley, 2003). The foundation that invitational leadership is built included intentionality, caring, optimism, respect, and trust, collectively referred to as I-CORT by Purkey and Novak (2016).

Teachers, as leaders of a classroom, must have a learner-centered desire to reach all students with equal opportunities (Larson, 2010). When implemented in an educational setting, invitational leadership theory (Purkey & Novak, 2016) shapes a school that contributes to learning by prioritizing respectful relationships between every administrator, faculty and staff member, and student (Lynch, 2012). Everyone is invited to be successful through an intentionally welcoming school culture (Egley,

2003). Focusing on the "five domains" of invitational leadership, Purkey and Novak (2016) identified the defining roles in a school climate as people, places, policies, programs, and processes. By addressing each one of these five principles, along with the five domains with the focus of intentional caring (Purkey & Novak, 2016), schools can establish an environment welcoming of diversity, where differences are honored while offering equity and equality to every student (Akiba, 2011; Lynch, 2012).

<div align="center">**Design of the Study**</div>

Methodology and Methods

A mixed methods research design was utilized in this examination of the university's middle school teacher education program. As stated by Creswell (2014), "Mixed methods is chosen because of its strength of drawing on both qualitative and quantitative research and minimizing the limitations of both approaches" (p. 218). This mixed method design was appropriate for use with data collection in diverse fields such as education since quantitative results can be explained by incorporating individual perspectives through qualitative data and quantitative data (Creswell, 2014). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) also asserted the importance of fully analyzing both qualitative and quantitative data in mixed methods studies when they stated, the researcher is "interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 6). The use of the mixed methods research design can build connections between both types of research data allowing for a more robust understanding of results in any educational issue (Almalki, 2016).

Using the critical lens paradigm gave the researcher the opportunity to administer the mixed design study in a way that creates a path to change (Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, using such a critical paradigm allowed the researcher "to promote the deconstruction and critique of institutions, laws, organizations, definitions and practices for power inequities and inequities of effectiveness" (Guido, Chavez, & Lincoln, 2010, p. 9). Specifically, Creswell (2015) defined mixed methods research as:

> an approach to research in the world in the social, behavioral, and health sciences in which the investigator gathers both quantitative (closed ended) and qualitative (open ended) data, integrates the two, and then draws conclusion based on the combined strength of both sets of data to understand research problems. (p. 2)

Study Setting

The university examined in this study was the University of Central Missouri (UCM) in Warrensburg, Missouri. Warrensburg is a suburban community with a population of 20,000 (Visit Warrensburg, n.d.). Founded in 1871 as a teaching college, UCM now has a student enrollment of 10,000 in its four academic schools offering 150 undergraduate programs (Fast Facts, 2021). The College of Education consists of two schools. The School of Professional Education and Leadership (SPEL) offers seven programs and the School of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) offers 13 programs. The Middle School-Junior High Education program is in the SoTL (College of Education, 2021) and is the focus of this inquiry. Offering specialized

training for teaching grades 5-9, pre-service teachers can earn a Missouri teaching certification in seven different subject areas (Middle School Education, 2021).

Participants

The researcher conducted a single-stage purposeful sampling of participants (Creswell, 2014), as the researcher had access to the names of the participants and was able to sample people directly. Participants were purposefully chosen because of their affiliation with the middle school preparatory program at UCM. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested purposeful is the most beneficial sampling in trying to gain qualitative insight for research. Moreover, purposeful selection can provide an in-depth understanding of the problem, while providing answers to the proposed research questions (Creswell, 2014). Specifically, this study included the four university professors (n=4) that represented the middle school program and were teaching undergraduate courses and/or supervising field experiences in both the fall and spring academic semesters at UCM. These individuals were chosen because, at the time, they were the faculty responsible for ensuring pre-service middle school teachers met the requirements for state certification and prepared for successful classroom careers.

Another group of participants were the currently enrolled undergraduate students including student teachers as well as the alumni of the UCM middle school program. All students currently enrolled in the program and attending classes or student teaching (n=40) were invited by the researcher through their assigned university email address. Participation was voluntary and not connected to any academic progress in the program. A total of 11 students chose to participate. Alumni of the middle school program who were currently employed as middle school teachers

were identified with assistance from all the faculty members of the program (n=38). They were extended an invitation to participate through their assigned school district email address. All 38 chose to participate. No parameters limited the subject area, grade level, or school demographics of the sampling.

Additionally, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested that purposeful sampling should include selection criteria that will provide a rich experience while producing enough coverage of the phenomena that one is studying. In this study, the researcher engaged a two-tiered sample (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). One tier was the selected university preparatory program, and the other tier being the participants involved in the study.

Data Collection Tools

Creswell (2014) offered the use of numerous types of qualitative collection procedures and within this investigation interviews, focus groups, and document analysis. This variety of data collection enhances the triangulation of the qualitative data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Additionally, the researcher, who was also a faculty member in the middle school program of this study, was positioned as an insider for all data collection methods. The involvement of the researcher was carefully documented and shared to be completely transparent (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Moreover, ethical issues in data gathering were addressed by seeking approval from the University of Missouri IRB and the IRB office at UCM (see Appendix A). Gatekeeper letters, (see Appendix B), were sent to the chairperson of the School of Teaching and Learning at the study site and a signature was obtained before any data collection or contact with all participants. Furthermore, the online survey for the undergraduate and alumni groups were

disseminated after final IRB approval and interviews and focus groups informed consents were signed prior to each (see Appendix C).

Interview Protocol

To collect qualitative data on the perceptions of the middle school program faculty on which invitational leadership tenets were being taught and role modeled, a semi-structured interview (see Appendix D) was conducted with each faculty member, as recommended by Seidman (2013). Further, Seidman (2013) suggested "the heart of interviewing research is an interest in other individuals' stories because they are of worth" (p. 9). Interviews were conducted through a Zoom meeting via a private link set-up and sent by the researcher. The research questions served as the guide in writing interview questions. These 45-minute interviews were conducted at an agreed-upon time between the participant and the researcher. The open-ended questions asked each participant to reflect specifically on their instructional methods and to describe any intentional practices for including invitational leadership principles in the course materials or as role modeling for the students. Content validity was established by using an interview structure that allowed participants "to make sense to themselves as well as the interviewer," while making sure it is the participants' ideas that are being represented (Seidman, 2013, p. 27). Additionally, the researcher used a panel of content experts who were not included in the study to review the interview instrument and provide information on the representativeness, clarity, factor structure, and comprehensiveness of the measure (Rubio et al., 2003). The instrument was modified based on feedback. Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed for accuracy. The researcher also took notes in the event that the recording device failed.

Focus Groups

Two focus groups were assembled for qualitative data collection according to the guidelines from Krueger and Casey (2015). The participants were additional alumni of UCM's middle school program that were serving as contracted classroom teachers in area schools. This method allowed the researcher the opportunity to hear their personal stories describing their experiences in the program and how, if at all, it has influenced their classroom leadership style.

As recommended by Krueger and Casey (2015), each of the two focus groups were restricted to between four and six participants. Lasting 60-90 minutes, both focus groups were conducted using a virtual meeting website.

The open-ended questions (see Appendix E) that guided the conversation allowed participants to consider their own experiences and interpretations of the teaching methods and learning activities used by the middle school program faculty to incorporate or role model invitational leadership principles (Seidman, 2013). The focus group format was selected for these participants since they all had the same instructional faculty in the middle school program yet experienced their careers in different school districts.

Documents

To thoroughly triangulate the qualitative data as suggested by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), a document analysis was conducted. Each course in the middle school program had a syllabus defining the student learning outcomes to be achieved during the course. An examination of those documents looked for invitational leadership principles embedded in the program's core standards. The overall analysis was conducted using the

document analysis tool found in Appendix F. Designed by the researcher, this tool was meant to examine the contents of each syllabus, identifying the purpose of the course, and invitational synonyms or phrases found in the descriptions of the course competencies and goals. Due to the relationship the researcher had with the faculty members in this study, field notes through class observations were not used for data collection to preserve professional respect and trust.

Quantitative Data Collection

Quantitative data was collected using an online survey format as recommended by Fink (2017). This tool probed currently enrolled students (n=40) and the alumni (n=38) of the program about their perceptions of the invitational leadership tenants being taught and role modeled in the middle school program at UCM. A link for an anonymous, open-ended questionnaire was sent individually to the students' university assigned email address from the researcher's university assigned email account. Research question three served as the guide in constructing the questionnaire. The questionnaire format was selected as a collection tool for the currently enrolled students in the program since it allowed for the safety of anonymity, in hopes for more sincere responses. Completion of the questionnaire was voluntary and did not influence a student's standing in the middle school program.

This survey was a modified version of the existing *Inviting School Survey-Revised* (ISS-R) (See Appendix G). Originally developed as a tool for schools to gauge stakeholders' perceptions of their culture, this 50-question survey used a 5-point Likert-scale to assess the perceived presence of the five tenets of invitational leadership: people, programs, processes, policies, and places (Smith & Purkey, 2015)

through the principles of intentionality, caring, optimism, respect, and trust,

collectively referred to as I-CORT by Purkey and Novak (2016). The survey was

modified, with the author's permission (see Appendix G), to specifically address the

culture in the middle school education program at UCM. The responses from the

students (n=11) and alumni (n=38) were compared to each other to find similarities

and differences in perception of the use of the principles of invitational leadership of

intentionality, caring, optimism, respect, and trust, collectively referred to as I-CORT

by Purkey and Novak (2016). Survey responses were confidential, and the identities

of the participants were kept anonymous by the researcher as recommended by Fink

(2017).

The modified ISS-R survey required reliability and validity assessment. To

ensure reliability, the researcher utilized a test-retest model (Fink, 2017). Over the course

of two weeks, the survey was administered to 15 undergraduate students in the

elementary education program who were not participants in this middle school program

study. After the initial survey, it was determined if major changes to the format or

questions on the survey were required. This initial assessment allowed the researcher to

establish the overall and topical Cronbach alpha scores for internal reliability. The

Cronbach scale measured how the questions relate to one another with a high score of 1

showing perfect consistency reliability, >.80 is a good reliability .70 is considered

adequate, and >.60 would be considered moderate (Field, 2013). The modified ISS-R

survey used in this research measured a .95 Cronbach alpha score demonstrating good

reliability for data collection with this tool.

Data analysis

All qualitative and quantitative data analysis for this study was conducted by the researcher. The qualitative data from the focus groups and interviews were simultaneously reviewed, (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, as the researcher progressed through the layers of interviews and focus groups, it was anticipated for the recording to be transcribed and reviewed identifying preliminary themes to test if they reemerge. A portion of this verification involved each member of the focus group or interview to check the transcriptions which allowed them to verify their ideas were appropriately captured (Kruger & Casey, 2015). Explicitly, when the individual faculty interviews were conducted using a virtual platform, a screen recording captured the data during the interview as well as the researcher's smartphone audio recorder as a secondary device. In-person interviews and the focus group proceedings were captured using both the researcher's smartphone audio recorder as the primary device and the researcher's tablet audio recorder as a secondary device. During the interviews and focus group meetings, field notes were written by the researcher to record the setting, interactions, and non-verbal communication of the participants (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Following each interview and focus group session, all audio recordings were transcribed using an independent, professional service. Individual responses were anonymously marked. When analyzing the transcripts, frequent and common descriptive phrases or adjectives used by the participants were coded and organized in terms of research questions to determine which of the five principles of invitational leadership were being taught and/or role modeled by the faculty in the middle school education program at UCM, along with the analysis of the five domains (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). With this coding, the

researcher was able to identify and compare the perceptions of the faculty, the graduates of the program, as well as the current students. Similarly, this data was compared to the evidence uncovered during the document analysis. This specific examination determined if the invitational leadership principles were written or implied through the program's goals and curriculum.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative data collected from the modified ISS-R survey used an analysis of variance method (ANOVA) for research question three to determine if a significant statistical difference in each of the five principles of invitational leadership, or dependent variables, existed between the independent variables, the undergraduate students and program alumni (Green & Salkind, 2003). The ANOVA is a parametric statistical test that allows for testing of more than one dependent variable in the same analysis, thus the use of the ANOVA test was appropriate for data analysis (Field, 2017). With the students sorted into the two predetermined groups, each score for each subscale or principle was evaluated for significant differences.

Credibility of the Study

Creswell (2014) noted that it is essential to note any biases the researcher has regarding the topic of location of the inquiry. As noted earlier, the researcher was a faculty member of the middle school program at UCM at the time of the research. By noting such bias and carefully monitoring any tainting of the data the possibility of impact should have been reduced (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Another potential bias when collecting data concurrently was that one form of data collection might bias the other when collected from the same participants (Creswell, 2014). To minimize this

potential bias, the researcher reorganized the items on the survey. Also, the questions used in the focus group interview were not identified by labels related to the invitational leadership principles or domains. Using a mixed design methodology, the credibility of the study was further improved.

Limitations and Assumptions

This study was limited by the proximity of the researcher as a faculty member in the middle school program examined in this study. The researcher was cautious of this during data collection but the pre-existing relationship with the researcher and the participants was noted in this study. Another limitation was the participants themselves. Since invitational leadership represents accepting and embracing all people unconditionally, some participant's responses to the researcher may have reflected a conflict between their personal values and the acceptance of people from marginalized groups that disagree with this value system.

Considering these limitations, some assumptions were made in this study. First, the researcher assumed all participants from the middle school program responded when invited to participate and then followed through with the data collection. It was also assumed that all participants answered openly and honestly during the data collection.

Design Controls

To reduce bias with data collection and interpretation, the researcher implemented a myriad of design controls. As Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested, interview and focus group questions were open ended to maximize honest discussion regarding teaching practices. The survey instrument established reliability and validity, which, again, controlled for any bias. And finally, the coding adhered to a consistent theme

creation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) as they aligned with the principles found in invitational leadership.

Definition of Key Terms

The following key terms were defined to guide in the understanding of constructs within this inquiry.

Alumni: An individual completed a four-year, college-recommended course of study, completed student teaching, passed the designated assessment test, and graduated with a bachelor's degree in a field of education and was issued an initial certificate to teach (DESE, 2021b).

I-CORT: the foundational principles of invitational leadership that include intentionality, caring, optimism, respect, and trust (Purkey & Novak, 2016).

Invitational Education: a theory of leadership and change offering "…concrete, practical, safe, successful, and democratic solutions for problems that routinely harm organization and people within them." pp. vii (Purkey & Novak, 2016, p. vii)

Middle School Preporatory Program: a program designed specifically to prepare undergraduate students for teaching in the middle school environment (UCM, 2021).

The 5 P's of Invitational Education: refers to people, places, policies, programs, and process which are present in all schools and impact the overall culture of the school to make it invitational (Purkey & Novak, 2016).

Undergraduate: a student in the university's educator preparatory program from which, upon completion, candidates are eligible for state teaching certification (DESE, 2021a).

Significance of the Study

As more awareness and attention is given to mental health, teachers are put on the frontline to support and identify struggling students. In a middle school, almost every student can fall victim to depression or anxiety at any time with consideration to the situation, the day, and their stage of brain development (*This we believe*, 2010). For middle-grade educators, deciding if an emotional episode is *normal* teen behavior or a sign of something more serious can be a daunting task. When a teacher has adopted the skills to be culturally responsive to all students, the paramount relationship required to understand and support emotional obstacles is present (Villegas, 2007).

Preparing middle school teachers to be intentionally inviting and supportive of all students, teacher preparation programs must stray from the traditions of one-size-fits-all training (Juarez et al., 2008). Novice teachers entering their careers, as well as the students in their classes, are being done a disservice when universities are not responding to the culture shift of society. Most middle school teachers enter education because they feel a calling. They care about preteen students and their success (Villegas, 2007). Teacher preparation programs need to capitalize on that intrinsic motivation by equipping them with the tools to truly be game changers in our middle schools. This research study illustrated how one university is preparing middle school teachers specifically in how to effective work in a diverse school setting using culturally responsive teaching strategies.

Summary

Filled with excitement and determination, middle school teachers enter their classrooms at the beginning of the year ready to face the challenges of standardized testing, data collection, and student growth. With their degree proudly hanging on the wall, they are confident they can deliver the curriculum through engaging activities. Yet there is disconnection in the audience those activities are being created. In a classroom full of learners, there is not a single instructional method, activity, textbook, or spoken language that will meet the needs of every student. Teachers must intentionally (Purkey & Novak, 2016) examine the culture of their classrooms to build a welcoming, positive, and supportive learning environment.

Through invitational leadership principles (Purkey & Novak, 2016), teachers can collaborate with students and build a community of trust and acceptance of their differences. With inclusive policies, programs, and processes, middle school teachers can lead students through the challenges of growing up. But first, teachers should be introduced to the ideas inherent to invitational leadership and provided the environment to experience and practice the skills themselves. These professional development opportunities initially begin at the university level in their teacher education programs. This is where pre-service teachers are still having their own student experience while growing into young professionals. The best learning is to be in a preparatory program with experts that can role model inclusive instruction while discussing the complexities of a middle school brain and how to best support it with inviting practices. Combined with field experiences and student teaching, novice middle school teachers will enter

their classrooms ready to challenge themselves and their preteen students with

culturally inclusive beliefs and skills.

SECTION TWO

PRACTITIONER SETTING FOR THE STUDY

Introduction

The setting for this study was the University of Central Missouri (UCM), a large public institution located in Warrensburg, Missouri. Within this section, the history of UCM will be explained, offering an organizational and leadership analysis, and then concluding with research implications and a summary.

Background of the Organization

One of the oldest universities in the state, The University of Central Missouri has evolved since its humble beginnings in the 19th century. The General Assembly approved the creation of the Second Normal School District on March 20, 1870, and soon after, Warrensburg was chosen for Normal School No. 2 on April 27, 1871. Opening its doors to 30 students, Normal School was established for the specific purpose of training Missouri's teachers (UCM's History, 2021). Focused on teacher education, Normal School was rebranded to Central Missouri State Teachers College in 1919. This was the first of many name changes for the growing institution as the goals and nature of its purpose evolved (Murphy, 2019). The most recent came in 2006 when the University of Central Missouri brand was debuted with the proud motto "Education for Service" (UCM's History, 2021). Today, the UCM campus spreads across 1,561 acres (UCM Fact Book, 2021) to provide nearly 10,000 students from across the country and around the world with an outstanding education through academic programs, student support, and affordable access for everyone (UCM's History).

The university now contains four specialized colleges of study including the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, the Harmon College of Business and Professional Studies, the College of Education, and the College of Health, Science, and Technology.

Yet still remembering its roots from 150 years ago as a training school for Missouri teachers, the College of Education at UCM has approximately 80 percent of their alumni teaching in Missouri schools that are represented in more than 75 percent of the state's school districts (UCM College of Education, 2021). Professionally accredited for their teacher education program longer than any other higher education institution in the state, UCM is focused on preparing quality teachers. Offering degree programs in bachelors, masters, education specialist, and a cooperative doctoral degree (Murphy, 2019), many programs and courses are offered online to accommodate a 21st-century student (UCM College of Education, 2021).

Organizational Analysis

The University of Central Missouri has a mission to "transform students into lifelong learners, dedicated to service, with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to succeed and lead in the region, state, nation and world" graduating with the "knowledge and skills to succeed and lead" (UCM Mission Statement, 2021). To support this mission, the COE at UCM prepares strong teacher candidates for careers in growingly diverse school districts looking for potential faculty members with the education and experience to offer culturally responsive and inviting teaching for all students.

As an institution, UCM has 444 full-time faculty members. The majority of this faculty is white (79%) males (51%) over the age of 50 years old (52%). In the spring of 2021, this faculty was educating an undergraduate student enrollment of 8,096 students. The majority of these students were white (79%), females (56%) between the ages of 20 and 24 years old (47%), and originally from Missouri (89%). First-generation students made up 41% of the student body (UCM Fact Book, 2021). When looking specifically at

the faculty demographics for the COE, there are 66 full-time faculty, 95% are white, 71% are female, and 64% over 50 years old (UCM Fact Book, 2021). These individuals are charged with upholding a rich legacy of training some of the best educators in the state for grades pre-kindergarten to 12th grade.

The university's COE works closely with the P-12 education system since it is the training grounds for the professionals that will fill the spots in their structure with teachers, administrators, and counselors. The P-12 school system is organized and operated in a structural frame like the Mintzberg five-sector model (Bolman & Deal, 2013). From the federal and state to local levels of governance, they use the vertical coordination of specialized teams with well-defined roles and clear goals. The emphasis is on rules, procedures, and standards all to ensure the achievement of the students with predictable results usually measured in terms of standardized assessments (Bolman & Deal). Based on the district, state, and national comparisons of these test scores, leaders apply top-down pressure to increase the results. In response, district leaders charge their building administrators with finding methods to make their teachers more effective in the classroom to have a greater impact on student achievement. In response, these leaders train their existing faculty in the latest research-based instructional strategies and learning activities while filling vacancies with graduates from teacher preparation programs known for training knowledgeable, skilled educators.

Bolman and Deal (2013) explained that to be an effective structure, it must align to the current circumstance of the organization's goals and/or objectives, faculty, and environment. The goal of the COE is to train the educators to fill the vacancies within the P-12 structure. In the structural frame, groups are built to serve their customer and to

complete a flow of work (Bolman & Deal). The students enrolled in the COE are the paying clientele, enticed and retained through a completed flow of work that starts with recruitment and the enrollment process. For several years, students' progress through their coursework and field experiences in preparation for the requirements of certification and a teaching career. As an outcome, students earn a degree in education with the potential to be certified by the state to teach.

For all of these steps to occur, members that comprise the structure's group are aligned with the clearly defined objectives and goals of the organization. Members of a functional group in a structural frame have specific knowledge or skills so are assigned to roles that best fit the organization's goals (Bolman & Deal, 2013). The COE faculty is comprised of three types of educators including researchers, scholars, and practitioners. Even though each group member has a different role in the structure, according to Bolman and Deal (2013), the group is required to hold themselves collectively accountable. One of the objectives of the COE is to train effective teacher candidates with the knowledge and skills to educate a diverse group of learners in a safe learning environment. The faculty as a whole must agree and work to supports the goals of the organization.

The teaching profession, although functioning within a structurally framed organization, is more similar to Bolman and Deal's (2013) symbolic frame. Classroom teachers serve as a leader and a learning facilitator. They enjoy the ritual of teaching and the growth of student learning regardless of the structural results in test scores or graduation rates. Teachers understand that what happens in their classrooms and what is produced by their students is important to organization leaders but, for the teacher,

production is not as important as the meaning gained from relationships and how it is expressed by the students thriving in a safe, caring environment. Classroom leaders know that for students to make connections between academic, social, and emotional context, physical spaces must feel welcoming, learning activities are collaborative and inclusive, and instructional strategies are modified and varied in response to the needs of each student. All of this happens while instilling values and teaching acceptance within the community of learners. Every decision made by a teacher has meaning and every choice in a teacher's classroom is established for a positive learning environment, from the stage design of the seating arrangement to the choreographed dance of classroom management (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

Leadership Analysis

When analyzing the educational tools being role-modeled and taught to future teachers, invitational leadership (Purkey & Novak, 2016) emerged as a suitable theory to study the COE's program characteristics, specifically in the middle school program. Initially considered was authentic leadership principles, which build strong relationships with followers (Northouse, 2016), but when applying this idea to the role of a classroom teacher as the leader and the students as the followers, invitational leadership (Purkey & Novak) focused more on building a more robust relationship by emphasizing equity and inclusiveness (Martin & Miller, 2017).

In another leadership theory considered, the directive leadership style of path-goal theory, the teacher carries the onus for creating the learning environment through the creation of routines, required tasks, and the establishment of strict rules (House, 1996). Supportive behaviors from the teacher are for the purpose of meeting the needs of the

students (Northhouse, 2016). Since this style of leading is more of a prescriptive process, using it as a broad classroom leadership style neglects the priority of cultural responsiveness to a diverse student body from varied circumstances. In contrast, invitational leadership embraces the idea of each follower being treated as a unique individual and that all persons are intentionally invited into a safe, caring relationship with the leader as well as the other followers (Purkey & Novak, 2016). By focusing on invitational leadership and its fundamental elements of intentionality, caring, optimism, respect, and trust, teachers and students are empowered to practice equity and inclusiveness of each other in a socially just learning space (Monahan, 2017; Purkey & Novak, 2016).

Implications for Research in the Practitioner Setting

Accepting all students with their unique backgrounds, beliefs, and character traits is essential for a successful teacher. By examining the leadership methods (Monahan, 2017; Purkey & Novak, 2016) used in training future educators, teacher preparation programs can make needed adjustments to their core standards and field experiences provided to their students. This contribution of a relevant leadership structure could improve an already successful teacher education program. Additionally, by preparing new teachers to be socially just and culturally responsive, preparation programs are making an impact on the P-12 structure by offering strong candidates able to meet the high demands of teaching in a diverse community (Martin & Miller, 2017). As a leader in teacher training, school districts will continue to rely on UCM to fill their faculty positions, thus offering another benefit to students that commit to the University for their education.

Summary

In summary, UCM has a history of training Missouri's teachers as well as a reputation for training them well. In a society shaped by inequity and injustice, school districts are looking for candidates that will meet the deafening cry for culturally aware educators that can lead classrooms full of diverse learners. Those entering a career in education today have a pivotal task. By not equipping them with the leadership skills necessary for a successful career, their teacher preparation program did them and their students a disservice.

SECTION THREE

SCHOLARLY REVIEW

Introduction

In a society where being different should theoretically be celebrated, it is the hardest thing for most young teenagers to do. They spend their days in school, navigating the emotional and social roller coaster of adolescents with little care for academics (Tomlin, 2016). With the onslaught of social media, this struggle has grown to epidemic proportions (Brown, Calvin, & Yeo, 2017). This is also the age when most teenagers are beginning to experiment with new identities for themselves with an increased number of middle-grade students admitting they identify differently than the *normal* teenager, including challenging topics in schools such as sexual preference and gender identity. A study done in 2011 surveyed 2,730 middle school students in grades 6-8 and found that 3.8% of students identified as lesbian, gay, or bisexual, and 1.3% identified as transgender (Shields et al., 2013). Similarly, students also face racial/ethnic diversity in a nation where half of the student population is non-white (Mitchell, 2016). However conversely, in most middle school classrooms, the teachers are white and have little, if any, experience or training to successfully address cultural inclusivity (Juarez, Smith, & Hayes, 2008).

As middle-grade students try to navigate changes in their bodies, minds, and social groups, the best place for these students to feel safe at school is in the welcoming and inviting space of a caring classroom (Tomlin, 2016). Viewed as an advocate for some student groups, the teachers that create these inviting classrooms are the connection some students need to be successful. Free from judgment and ridicule, students seek out these teachers to bring calm and focus to their tumultuous school day (Tomlin). How teachers establish this positive relationship with students and a safe classroom

environment is not limited to their words and actions, but in the authentic belief that every student is important in their uniqueness. Such teachers embrace every student regardless of background, identity, or challenge (Williams, 2012). Seen as leaders in the school, the approach these teachers take when opening their classrooms and interacting with students is what sets the stage for sanctuary. Inviting students to be their authentic selves, teachers intentionally provide role modeling for faculty, staff, and student body on how to be unconditionally accepting of everyone, not only at school but in society as a whole (Purkey & Novak, 2016).

The focus of this scholarly review is to examine literature that establishes invitational leadership (Purkey & Novak, 2016) practiced by middle school teachers as the most effective approach to meeting the needs of middle school students. This will provide the foundation for the problem of practice when examining how inclusive is a middle school teacher preparatory program at a public four-year university. To understand the impact of a middle school teacher, this review will first investigate the characteristics of the middle school student (Brown & Knowles, 2014; Kinney, 2015; Morin, 2020) followed by a historical examine at the methods for educating these learners (Kaye, 2015). A review of societal influences on the middle-level learner as well as the role of a classroom teacher within a middle school will be identified. Further, an investigation of the research on the training of pre-service middle school teachers in a traditional university teacher preparatory program (Carpenter, Flowers, Mertens, & Mulhall, 2004; Peters, 2006) will help determine the processes being incorporated in the curriculum and instructional methods of the faculty. Finally, presented will be the theoretical framework of leadership, as the researcher funnels down to the conceptual

framework used in this investigation. Within that section of this review the researcher will compare the styles of path-goal and authentic leadership eventually revealing the strength of using invitational leadership (Purkey & Novak, 2016) in preparatory programs for middle school students.

The Middle-Level Learner

Middle school students, also referred to as young adolescents, are children between the ages of 10-15 years old, and are considered by most educators to be the most challenging group of learners (Association for Middle Level Education [AMLE], 2010). Often characterized by their vast developmental and intellectual changes, they are walking contradictions of themselves and can test even the most graceful and flexible of any dedicated teacher (Brown & Knowles, 2014; Kinney, 2015; Morin, 2020). This age is different from the elementary student they identified as a couple of years ago and still different from the high school student they will soon transition into (Wormeli, 2016). Not to be replicated again in their lifetime, middle school students truly find themselves amidst a journey (Sørlie, Hagen, & Nordahl, 2020). They are experiencing accelerated physical, emotional, and cognitive growth while navigating heated social development and peer judgment (AMLE; Brown & Knowles; Kinney; Morin; Wormeli, 2016).

Physical Growth

In addition, a typical, middle school student is experiencing growth spurts that are confusing, even for them. They feel self-conscious as their bodies betray what they have grown to trust in previous years. Middle school students experience seemingly random physical aches as both their height and weight begin to rapidly increase (Brown & Knowles; Morin, 2020). This swift growth forces an increased appetite and a need for

more sleep (Brown & Knowles; Kinney, 2015). Compounding these new symptoms, the onset of puberty leads to hormone fluctuations causing young adolescents to waiver between exhausted or energetic. These conflicting energy levels do not always coincide with the desire or need for rest or activity (Morin, 2020). Even for students that want to be active, the ongoing muscular and skeletal development can lead to frustration and confusion when poor motor coordination affects their typical athletic skills (Kinney, 2015), along with the cognitive growth occurring.

Cognitive Growth

One of the markers of a middle school student is their self-centered tendencies. Typically viewed as a negative stereotype, it is during this period of self-awareness that middle grade students begin to develop the ability to access their needs and self-advocate when needed (Morin, 2020). They begin to consider their future, making realistic goals for themselves. This provides them to practice organization, multi-tasking, negotiating limits, and discussing moral issues as they plot a course for success. Additionally, making needed adjustments along the way is becoming a part of their developing problem-solving skills (Brown & Knowles, 2014; Morin, 2020).

Due to the bulk of their brain development occurring in the prefrontal cortex during the teen years, this is a time of intellectual growth and achievement levels (Kwon & Lawson, 2000). Students are becoming technologically savvy, intellectually engaged, and capable of more formal thought (Brown & Knowles, 2014; Morin, 2020). Accompanying this stage of growth, the brain is experiencing an increased rate of pruning and myelination, a sorting process to either discard or solidify past experiences, thoughts, ideas, and learned information (Kwon & Lawson, 2000). During this evolution,

the emotional part of the brain can still overcome cognitive growth, making involuntary decisions for these middle level learners. As a result, a concept that is not making obvious connections to a student's interests will be perceived as irrelevant and subsequently dismissed (Kinney, 2015). Often triggered by the awkward and rapid development of their bodies and thoughts, the most obvious struggle to outsiders is the emotions.

Emotional Growth

Infamous for being highly emotional, the hormonal changes occurring during physical development cause middle level students to exhibit extreme reactions in minor situations. They spend their days swinging through moods ranging from either authentic elation or genuine depression (Brown & Knowles, 2014). The resulting emotional exhaustion is a common complaint from students of this age (Morin, 2020).

Some grapple with mixed feelings when they begin to see an adult looking back in the mirror but still enjoy the activities, hobbies, and sense of humor of a child. This is the time when individuation takes place, the transfer of their emotional attachment from their parents to their peers (Hay & Ashman, 2003). They want the belonging and company of their friend groups but are highly sensitive and quick to feel slighted or excluded (Brown & Knowles, 2014; Kinney, 2015). In contrast to this need for peer acceptance, teenagers seek out privacy by demanding their alone time as they develop the ability to handle their growing independence.

During these years of emotional development, young teenagers judge everyone, especially their peers, while harshly comparing themselves to everyone (Kinney, 2015; Somerville, 2013). Usually misunderstood by adults, this judgment helps develop a sense

of empathy. It is at this stage middle school students find a passion for social justice issues. They enjoy grappling with global issues and debating differing points of view with those that will engage them like the adult they believe they are at times (Brown & Knowles, 2014; Morin, 2020).

Social Development

Adding to the journey of physical, cognitive, and emotional growth, adolescents are trying to find where they fit in and with whom they can feel safe. Within this age group, an informal yet defined social hierarchy can be identified. Some students put forth great effort to be included in the *cool* group, even if the members are not a comfortable match for the child (Kinney, 2015). During this time, changes in friendships are common for teens as they experiment to solidify their values, beliefs, and identities while fulfilling the drive for peer acceptance (Brown & Knowles, 2014; Sørlie et al., 2020).

With this comes the tendency to argue and possibly reject adult standards, choosing instead the social trends and fads that will win approval and acceptance of their peers, the same ones they brutally judge (Hay & Ashman, 2003). However, they need these friends as they explore new feelings and practice new social structures (Sørlie et al., 2020). A popular topic of discussion among peers is their growing interest in sexual and romantic relationships. Uncomfortable discussing these thoughts with adults, teens rely on their peers for information and guidance (Brown & Knowles, 2014; Morin, 2020). Coupled with their ever-present, usually unmonitored connection to technology, middle grade students may not always receive the safest advice from their network of friends. Bouncing between being overly shy and intensely social, middle-level learners rely on

their strong social connections to navigate their world (Brown & Knowles; Kinney, 2015; Morin).

Young adolescence is a rapid change to all aspects of a child's world. Sorting through identities that will ultimately define their future adult identity, they are searching for support with issues such as academics, peer acceptance, puberty, and gender identity and attraction (Brown & Knowles, 2014). Middle grade students spend their days peppered with drama and overreaction in themselves and their peers and what can make these experiences less frustrating for students is having adults that understand them and their behaviors rather than attacking or judging them (AMLE, 2010; Brown & Knowles, Kinney, 2015; Wormeli, 2016).

Educating the Middle Level Learner

In 1888, President Charles Eliot of Harvard University lead the movement to change the traditional school structure from eight-year elementary schools and four-year high schools to a six-year elementary and six-year high school split (StateUniversity.com Education Encyclopedia, n.d.). Along with this division came the factory-model system in schools based on the car industry model of production that was an efficient use of time and resources (Brown & Knowles, 2014). Within the school structure, the factory-model implemented a bell-driven schedule with one teacher instructing a grade level of students about the same subject with the same method at the same pace (Brown & Knowles, 2014, Horn & Evans, 2013). Through the curriculum taught to these students, the seventh and eighth-grade levels began to be seen as the introduction to high school, ushering in the junior high school movement from 1910-1925 when the first junior high schools were

created separately from the high school buildings to accommodate this group of younger student learners (AMLE, 2010).

By 1960, four of every five adolescents attended school in a specific junior high school building. These schools included the same structure, routines, and rules as the high school buildings they resembled. In 1966, a school district superintendent named Donald Eichorn wrote a book that advocated for the idea of the specialized middle school structure. Referring to Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development, the book illustrated the need for awareness of early adolescent development in designing a suitable educational program (StateUniversity.com Education Encyclopedia, n.d.). Thus began a middle school movement that was a departure from the factory-model of educating adolescents (Kaye, 2015). Defined by more than a name change from *junior high* school to *middle* school, this philosophy redefined what it meant to educate the middle-level student. The focus became on the whole student, not just the academic success of the individual learner.

Middle School Student Fundamentals

Rooted in the belief that all adolescents deserve an education designed specifically for their success, the Association for Middle Level Educators (AMLE) (2010) outlined four fundamental aspects that drive a quality education for middle school students. AMLE now affirmed that young adolescents are required to have an education that has the following essential attributes: developmentally responsive, challenging, empowering, and equitable (AMLE, 2010).

Developmentally responsive

In 1963, at the beginning of the middle school movement, William Alexander, as one of the founders of this movement, posited the need for schools that not only promoted learning but took into consideration the developmental needs of young adolescents (Kinney, 2015). The belief was that by being more responsive to the rapid physical and mental growth at this stage, middle schools would accommodate developmental uniqueness through a commitment to the whole child, not solely academic (Wormeli, 2016). This should be the lens for every decision that affects students maintaining instructional and physical accommodations developmentally appropriate for all middle level learners of all diversities, and in all contexts (Simpson, 1999). Since traditional, single-style instruction has been proven to be ineffective for many middle level students, district decision-makers need to be committed and knowledgeable about this age group and that create best practices rooted in educational research (Kinney, 2015, Tomlinson, 1995). Teachers especially need to be flexible when responding to their students. The early establishment of acceptance and belonging are basic requirements for a middle school classroom, creating a safe environment for students to grow and develop (Hayes, Ryan, & Zseller, 1994). Once the climate can be trusted by students, teachers will find more success with their curriculum content and delivery strategies by offering learning spaces that offer attractive options, collaboration spaces, and awareness of social interactions with peers and adults (Eccles at al., 1993; Tomlin, 2016; Williams & Downing, 1998; Wormeli, 2016). The difference between educating an elementary or high school student is the prerequisite knowledge of early adolescent development and

the teacher's skill to apply that knowledge for the holistic success of their middle school students (Kinney, 2015).

Challenging

Just as one style of teaching methods or learning activities is not effective for all middle school students, having one curriculum is also not practical for meeting the needs of diverse learners (Tomlinson, 1995). A successful middle school curriculum should challenge learners, be personally relevant, and explore new ideas while integrating past experiences (AMLE, 2010). Teachers can provide this through rigorous instruction and learning while holding high expectations for every student without exception. After this culture of achievement is established, students will meet the challenge with motivation in both academics and behaviors. High expectations are a motivating factor for middle school students, and they will change their behavior to fulfill the standard that adults hold for them (Carpenter, Flowers, Mertens, & Mulhall, 2004; Peters, 2006). Students will then begin to develop and enhance their rigor with the confidence and ability they are experiencing (Kaplan, 2017).

Unfortunately, a popular belief amongst middle level educators is that there are only two types of teachers, compassionate or rigorous, but not both. They also believe their students do not want a rigorous teacher (Napper, 2019). The result is a lowering of expectations by the teacher and an unmotivated, unengaged student (Carpenter, et al., 2004). Yet, students need and deserve the best from every adult in their lives. Therefore, a focus is needed on establishing trust and building strong relationships with students. Both teacher and student will be willing to push each other through any challenge (Napper, 2019).

Empowering

Empowering middle school students to have a stake in their education and control of their learning is significant in adolescent development (AMLE, 2010). Through the elementary grades, school is a prescriptive list of behaviors, assigned tasks, and precise expectations. Yet a successful middle school will offer opportunities for student choices appropriate to the developmental levels of preadolescents (Eccles et al., 1993). These choices need to go beyond the traditional selection of classes and which extracurricular activities to join (Powell, 2001). This begins with an inviting learning environment that encourages input from every student, providing them with noticeable influence on the school culture and allowing increasing responsibility for themselves and others (Voltz, 1999). This is most beneficial when it occurs in a small, safe community through teaming, cooperative learning, and strong student/teacher relationships (Eccles et al., 1993). Students can be made aware of how their development is impacting their behaviors and abilities. Teachers can explain the reasons for the teaching methods or learning strategies being utilized in the classroom (Kommer, 2006). Students can then be advised through the process of setting, communicating, and achieving the goals they set for themselves (Carpenter, et al., 2004). By engaging students in this within the safety of the learning community, teachers can provide young adolescents with the knowledge and skills necessary outside of the school structure (AMLE, 2010; Carpenter, et al., 2004; Powell, 2001).

Not all efforts need to be formal engagements as illustrated by a district superintendent in Indianapolis, Indiana. Seeking the voice of middle school students, Nikki Woodson (2016) found success by simply sitting with the middle school students at

lunch and openly discussing their views on teaching and learning. Students just want to be heard and respected (Powell, 2001). Here they had the opportunity to share their suggestions with an influential adult for making their middle school experience a positive one. By prioritizing the value of student input and working together with the student stakeholders, Woodson (2016) was able to gather information for future decisions and solidified the adult/student relationship with those students.

Equitable

Middle schools are full of energetic, curious, and diverse students. They come from different races, ethnicities, and religions. They represent different socio-economic levels, family structure, and gender. They are exploring new versions of themselves while maintaining their socially accepted version of self. It is paramount for middle schools to be equitable. Equity does not mean treating all students the same (Brown & Knowles, 2014). Since the majority of students in American schools are Euro-American, middle class, native English speakers, the notion of treating all students the same is a misrepresentation of equity (McDaniel, Nechchea, Rios, Stowell, & Kritzer, 2001). Educators may believe their classroom is equitable and culturally responsive when in reality they are still teaching the same content, the same way, at the same pace (Tomlinson, 1995). In fact, most middle school structures and systems are not designed to support students from poor, minority, and non-English speaking backgrounds (McDaniel et al., 2001). This prevents ethnically diverse students from making relevant connections between school and life experience (Brown & Knowles, 2014).

To establish a culturally responsive climate, equity must take its place at the top of the priority list for middle school educators. Diverse students, all students, deserve a

learning community built on basic principles of justice and fairness (McDaniel et al., 2001). Acting as advocates for every student's right to learn, teachers need to intentionally address the needs of each individual, not the class as a whole or students grouped based on diversity (AMLE, 2010; Kommer, 2006). With respect for cultural pluralism, the willingness to collaborate with all students, and a commitment to adjust instruction, expectations, and a normed belief system as needed, middle level students will have a more comfortable school experience and respond with a positive attitude toward these changes (Brown & Knowles, 2014; Kommer, 2006; McDaniel et al., 2001; Voltz, 1999).

As a blueprint for the achievement of the four essential attributes discussed above, AMLE (2010) defined 16 characteristics as their core views for an effective middle school. This research study focused on three of these characteristics including leadership, environment, and advocacy.

Leadership

Critical to the success of a school is the people who serve as leaders (Lynch, 2012). Leadership in a middle school includes any of the decision-making adults, usually the administration team and the faculty. On daily basis, these adults have interactions that can influence a student's life. They serve as role models and advocates (Gerrick, 1999). For this reason, AMLE has clarified the need for middle school leaders to be well trained and educated to be considered qualified to teach middle school students (AMLE, 2010). Simply knowing and understanding the complexities inherent in adolescents is not enough. Leaders must exhibit a full commitment to their students regardless of the challenge, diversity, or personal beliefs (Williams, 2012). This is because leaders must

collaborate to promote change, eliminate obstacles that hinder student learning, and understand the real-world connections between what they are practicing in their building and classrooms and the lives of their students in the community (Mullen, 2010).

Environment

Just as the leadership in a middle school is vital to its success, a positive environment in which those leaders can thrive with students is also essential. If a classroom or school building does not feel inviting, inclusive, and safe it will not be able to spark excitement for student learning or teacher instruction (AMLE, 2010; Brown & Knowles, 2014). The environment must be authentic with a student-centered focus to address individual needs while always including every student without exception (Bailey, 2005). Teachers with intentional, well-defined expectations and standards for student behavior, relationship interactions, and academic rigor have established a learning community where adolescents are comfortable exploring their differences and including all students in the classroom culture (Bailey, 2005; Peters, 2006).

Advocacy

Combining the essential components of leadership and environment, middle school students benefit from having a trusted adult advocate they can turn to for support (AMLE, 2010). Teachers fill the role of student advocate with intentional, caring behaviors that invite students to be a member of a safe learning environment (Williams, 2012). Since young adolescents still need to be cared for, they will seek out the people offering that individual attention (Sitler, 2008). Effective student advocates know that the teacher-student relationship is key. This caring relationship requires trust and mutual respect (Brown & Knowles, 2014; Strahan, Smith, McElrath, & Toole, 2001). To

establish this relationship, teachers take an interest in each student, wanting to know about their interests, talents, and extracurricular activities. With this information, teachers can help students set realistic personal, academic, and social goals to navigate the middle school structure (Brown & Knowles, 2014; Sitler, 2008; Strahan et al., 2001).

Middle school is difficult for students and experiencing the early teen years is also difficult for them. It is the caring educators that help navigate these challenging times. Educating the middle level learner is complex (Brown & Knowles, 2014). There is no easy path, shortcut, or replacement for dedicated teachers knowledgeable in adolescent development that can establish meaningful student relationships in an inviting classroom where every student is empowered through a personally challenging curriculum (Brown et al., 2017). Educating middle level learners is different from teaching elementary or secondary students (AMLE, 2010). These students are right in the middle and deserve the best education possible.

The Challenges to Educating Middle Level Learners

Middle school students can be a challenge for even the most experienced teachers. In addition to the challenging nature of a young teenager, middle school teachers are tasked with educating students that are caught in a social and emotional tug-of-war (Brown et al., 2017). Exacerbating the difficulty for teachers, middle level learners are more diverse, both culturally and academically than at any other time in the past (Tomlinson, 1995). Teaching these students requires the balance of society's influence on middle school behaviors and choices (Brown et al., 2017). In this light, it is a dangerous assumption that one teaching style will benefit all students (Tomlinson, 1995).

In a culture defined by reality television and video games, a middle school teacher's biggest competition is the ever-present social media outlets (Peters, 2006). With a simple swipe and a click, young adolescents can be included in the daily activities of their favorite pop-culture personality. Channels on Instagram, YouTube, or Twitter sites push current trends and fads as middle level students use this information as a measuring tool for how they compare with others (Brown et al., 2017; Ehmke, 2016; Peters, 2006). Since social media is a public platform, sharing is not just for public figures. Anyone can publish a post they deem informative or entertaining including details of a life that may or may not be accurate (Brown et al., 2017). This manipulated reality is harmful to youth when they are still trying to find their place in the world they live in (Peters, 2006). When that reality is skewed, it is like aiming at a moving target.

This is detrimental since middle school students are vulnerable to judgment and comparison by nature (Kinney, 2015). With a strong desire to belong, some students will portray themselves differently to fit in with the defined norm seen on television, in the movies, or other media sources (Cleveland, 2011; O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011). To avoid rejection by their peers, adolescents may also avoid creating personal posts that open their lives to judgment. When a post is not considered funny or popular, middle grade students will retreat rather than try again and risk failure (Cleveland, 2011). These students spend their time browsing other people's social media accounts, wishing for the bravery and confidence to compete for *likes* on a post of their own (Brown et al., 2017).

Adolescent friendships are also hostage to social media. Built on a thread of cyber-chats, messages shared on a screen lack genuine emotion and context necessary to develop empathy. Unable to see or hear the effects their comments have on another

person, middle level students lack the understanding and skill necessary for powerful communication between people (Ehmke, 2016). Personal interaction has been replaced by the 24-hour-a-day stranglehold of social media (O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2011). Held hostage by friend requests, followers, streaks, and retweets, the virtual friendships of young teenagers are causing anxiety as they try to keep up with them all. Even worse to a middle level learner is when their social stream falls quiet and the reality of being ignored or shunned is painfully clear (Ehmke, 2016).

Conversely, the influence of social media is not all negative. One of the positive impacts social media has had is the awareness of the diversity that builds culture. According to Brinegar (2010), students at the middle school level, 10-15 years old, continues to grow more diverse every year. As these students from underrepresented populations grow more accepted in our classrooms, all middle school students begin to explore their own identities. Searching for qualities that define themselves, students feel more comfortable expressing characteristics of their ethnicity, religion, family heritage, gender, or sexual preference (Brinegar, 2010). This proud ownership can become the common ground to forge relationships and belonging in a new peer group (Rich & Schachter, 2012).

One of the largest growing subpopulations in our nation's schools is immigrant youth (Brinegar, 2010; Juvonen, Kogachi, & Graham, 2018). For middle school students, the two largest barriers of this status are language and culture in their classrooms (Brinegar, 2010; Erdogan, 2019). Linguistic challenges in the classroom include speaking, writing, reading, or listening comprehension problems making it difficult if not impossible to learn what the teacher is presenting. Cultural difficulties include

differences in role expectations by both the teacher and the student, institutional and academic standards or norms, cultural assumptions by the teacher or classmates, and generalizations by tokenizing the immigrant student (Erdogan, 2019). These obstacles can seem daunting to a middle school student already struggling with their comfort in themselves. Placed in a new landscape where they are a stranger can prove exhausting even for the strongest of teenagers.

With the growth in the diversity of the middle school population, a group that is experiencing a newfound strength is the lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) students. Few studies have been conducted to provide accurate population data. Even the most rigorous national studies do not survey participants under the age of 18. To compound the lack of information on this student group, there have been no published results to estimate the size of the transgender population at the middle school level (Shields et al., 2013).

In 2013, Shields et al. posited the reason for the shortage of research on LGB middle level students is the hesitancy of the students willing to publicly identify themselves in one of these categories, even on anonymous surveys. Many students have grown accustomed to protecting their identity for self-preservation in environments of discrimination, stigma, and abuse. Other influences on data collection include the students' interpretation of the survey questions being asked. Based on individual cognitive, emotional, and cultural factors, each student will respond through the lens they have developed through their experiences (Shields et al., 2013).

The data that has been collected helps educators build estimates that show 3.8% of middle level students identify as LGB while 12.1% indicated they were *not sure* about their sexual orientation. The self-reporting population appears to increase with age

(Shields et al., 2013). This supports the observed trend in schools increases the types of diversity teachers must embrace in their classrooms. As with all adolescent students, LGBTQ students are navigating the typical stresses of their identity and belonging. Like most underrepresented students, they are searching for these factors without role models, adequate information, or valuable support systems needed to talk about their thoughts and feelings (Bailey, 2005).

Combining the social media influence and the increase in diversity, another major challenge of educating the middle level learner is peer bullying and cyberbullying (Ockerman, Kramer, & Bruno, 2014). Traditionally falling into one of three categories, bullying includes physical assault, verbal attacks or social harassment, the American Medical Association declared these behaviors a public health concern in schools (Graham, Bellmore, Nishina, & Juvonen, 2009; Ockerman et al., 2014).

In a study of students in grades 5-8, physical bullying was found to be the least common while verbal bullying ranked highest, with more than 60% of the participants reported using this tactic (Ockerman et al., 2014). These data can be viewed as a symptom of the middle grade students' innate search for their confidence. To create their identity, teenagers will verbally harass their peers by insulting them and putting them down so they feel more secure in themselves. At the same time, adolescents tend to *gang up* on each other and chose allegiance to one side of a conflict to fulfill their need for social acceptance and belonging (Ehmke, 2016).

With the increase of access to technology, bullying now has a fourth form. Cyberbullying allows students to engage in communication with their peers that would normally be too intimidating in face-to-face interaction. A study by Ockerman, Kramer,

and Bruno (2014) found 15% of middle level learners' ages 10-15 years reported either being the target of cyberbullying or acting as the bully. This was especially true of girls who tend to be more passive in their face-to-face disagreements (Ehmke, 2016). This same study found the most common form of cyberbullying included calling names through text messaging and sending nasty jokes by virtual chats. Appealing to middle school students for the perceived power and anonymity a screen name can provide, cyberbullying is dangerous for the targets as feelings of hopelessness and powerlessness overwhelm an emotionally fragile teenager (Ockerman et al., 2014).

As school personnel becomes more aware of student diversity (Shields et al., 2013) in middle school, trauma has also made its way to the top of acknowledged student conditions. Traditionally underestimated or contributed to choice, the impact of adverse experiences in a child's upbringing can be directly attributed to their school performance (Cord, 2020). Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) have a wide range of markers and continue to accumulate as these students grow. Deprived of food, affection, and love, witness or victim to drug abuse, mental illness, or crime, and severe loss are examples of adverse experiences calculated in an ACE score (Cord, 2020; Sitler, 2008; Tomlinson, 1995).

Young teenagers with complex trauma in their life, either past or present, struggle with trust so they avoid relationships and often isolate themselves (Frydman & Mayor, 2017). When viewed in a classroom setting, these students appear unmotivated and disengaged. Often labeled as lazy or careless, teachers frequently assume these traumatized students as just not trying very hard (Sitler, 2008).

Students in a culturally diverse group can be included in the battle with multiple traumas including PTSD and culture shock in racism, prejudice, and discrimination. Resulting in extreme shyness and loneliness, building relationships seem almost impossible to these middle level students (Brinegar, 2010). There is a dire need for teacher awareness of these students and the difficulties they face every day (Tomlinson, 1995).

As educators witness the varying degree of diversity among middle level learners' culture and trauma, their students also have various preferences and needs in the ways they learn best (Tomlinson, 1995). Unfortunately, historical teaching strategies lack the differentiation and individualization paramount in a child's education. With the importance of learning standards, standardized tests, and data collection, a significant number of students are at a disadvantage. Exacerbated by any other traumas, students are academically and emotionally overstressed (Căprioară & Micu, 2017).

The expectations to improve test scores has led teachers to shun other aspects of their classroom environment as well as their pivotal role in a middle schooler's experience (Sitler, 2008; Williams, 2012). In a study conducted by Căprioară and Micu (2017), middle level students, between the ages of 11-14 years, spend 8-10 hours on school activities. Now more than ever, educators need to act intentionally to counter the stress of all their students. This becomes harder with tired and demotivated students (Căprioară & Micu, 2017).

According to Ehmke (2016), a brain under stress is unable to learn well. Witness to their child's disengagement or lack of connectedness to school, parents may respond with alternative methods of education such as homeschool or online programs (Căprioară

& Micu, 2017). Yet this can cause even more stress for an impressionable teenager as they are removed from their friends and daily routine. The result can be a spiral into risky behaviors, depression, or in extreme cases, suicide (Ehmke, 2016).

Frequently, the contemporary school culture has an emphasis on test performance (Căprioară & Micu, 2017) but not learning. The cost is a well-rounded education of emotional, social, and academic experiences necessary for healthy middle school brains to develop (Sitler, 2008). Considering the pressure the school system puts on its students, teachers need to be more cognizant of their duty to support their students' diverse needs and the environment in which that is accomplished.

Without teachers that intentionally create a safe and welcoming space in schools, students can develop a myriad of behavioral and mental issues. Some of the more common symptoms of a struggling middle school student include academic failure, frequent absences, or dropping out completely (Bailey, 2005; Căprioară & Micu, 2017; Ehmke, 2016). Also common are eating disorders, isolation, depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, poor body image, loneliness, and internet addiction (Brown et al., 2017; Ehmke, 2016; Graham et al., 2009). For this reason, teachers need to take a role in their students' lives to support them every day, regardless of the situation.

With the vast array of student diversity in middle school classrooms (Căprioară & Micu, 2017), the ability to teach can easily become secondary to the necessity of meeting student needs. Coupled with the challenges these students face at home, on social media, and in society, teachers are forced to deepen their relationship building, broaden their acceptance and accommodation for diversity, and sharpen their instructional style to meet all students where they are academically, socially, and emotionally (Tomlinson, 1995).

Preparing the Middle Level Educator

As leaders in a middle school classroom, teachers play a crucial role in the learning environment as well as the academic and personal development of their students (Wenzel & Roberts, 2014). Unfortunately, most middle school educators have not been properly prepared to create an inviting classroom necessary for diverse learners to feel safe to seek the support they need (Brinegar, 2010; Marchitello & Trinidad, 2019). Underrepresented groups of minority students are the most obvious in need of teacher support. This includes children with trauma, those with immigrant status or are non-English speakers, those with various religious beliefs and practices, and the ones experimenting with their gender identification. For these middle level students, the teacher is the one they will turn to for guidance during the most challenging times in adolescence (Tomlinson, 1995). Even for those students that seem to be adjusting well and show no signs of outward struggle, teachers need to role-model awareness and support by creating a community of acceptance for every student by every student (Bailey, 2005; Sitler, 2008).

With diversity within our classrooms on the rise, teachers are tasked with identifying individual needs and then responding without personal judgment or hesitation to provide for those needs in a safe learning environment (Bailey, 2005; Ehmke, 2016; Tomlinson, 1995). Successful teachers understand the complexities of a middle school and the students it serves. Since this requires a unique skillset and understanding of the nature of a middle-level learner, these educators must be committed to learning about diversity in student populations and development (AMLE, 2015; Tomlinson, 1995).

With so much at stake, the training and education of middle school teachers are critical (Howell, Faulkner, Cook, Miller, & Thompson, 2016; Weisberg, 2018).

There is widespread inconsistency in what some degree programs consider requirements of a well-trained middle school teacher. This is reflected in the lack of specialized degree programs for the middle-grade levels (AMLE, 2015). A majority of practicing middle level teachers do not have the specific education and training necessary for their role with young adolescents (Allen & McEwin, 2001). Most training programs offer undergraduate degrees in elementary education with general training in young learners, or a degree in secondary education with an emphasis in a specific high school course (Conklin, 2007). Generalizing either of these two degrees to the middle school education major is a disservice to the crucial aspects needed for a successful middle school teacher (AMLE, 2015).

Fortunately, many states have adopted programs designed specifically to prepare pre-service teachers with the knowledge, disposition, and skill for a career educating young teenage learners (AMLE, 2019). In compliance with state and federal law, public school teachers receive their training and earn certification through an accredited institution; usually a four-year university (Howell et al., 2016). Even in the 21st century, most four-year public universities are traditional in their instruction. Led by a faculty of highly educated scholars, the curriculum is disseminated through research and theory in the field of education (Lowery, Roberts, & Roberts, 2012). Programs dedicated to the middle school movement do offer courses taught by professors with experience in grades 5-8 and role-model successful instructional methods. This practice leads to the gradual

improvement of middle schools through the specialized preparation of middle level educators (Akiba, 2011; Allen & McEwin, 2001).

However, there are inherent flaws in some programs. Contradictory to the specialized training of a middle school teacher, an out-of-date curriculum fails to challenge stereotypes and biases (AMLE, 2015; Marchitello & Trinidad, 2019). For this reason, diversity in early field experiences is essential to pre-service training. With good intentions, teacher preparation programs often assign field placements in schools serving a more homogeneous group of students rather than with diverse populations (Marchitello & Trinidad, 2019). Acknowledging that teaching how to build a relationship with a middle level learner cannot be taught in a sterile, university environment, collaborating with practicing middle school teachers in real classrooms allows education students to genuinely interact with students. Implementing several field visits before student teaching allows for exposure and practice in responding to diverse teenagers in an authentic environment (Allen & McEwin, 2001; DeMink-Carthew & Bishop, 2017; Marchitello & Trinidad, 2019).

Showing diversity in these small doses will not have a long-term effect on future educators since most education students come from white, middle-class families. Even when compounded with a social justice curriculum, influencing change in a future teacher's disposition must be targeted and ongoing (Marchitello & Trinidad, 2019). Social justice education is paramount for these education students to learn how to be not only accepting, but also inviting for all students (Bohanon, 2018). By increasing an educator's cultural awareness, they can respond intentionally to student differences (Marchitello & Trinidad, 2019; Tomlinson, 1995). Nevertheless, social justice education

and cultural awareness cannot be taught without the context of education. Teachers being able to adjust for diversity and the individual needs of every student, in a safe, inviting learning environment is essential for student success (Marchitello & Trinidad, 2019). Thus, the need for focused leadership for middle age level teachers to achieve this social justice inviting learning environment.

Theoretical Framework of Leadership

As schools are continually pressured to improve test scores that measure student achievement, administration and classroom teachers are always evaluating their practices to ensure they are serving their students as effectively as possible. This includes a collective responsibility for not only the students and their families, but also members of the community, and the school policies that affect everyone (Căprioară & Micu, 2017). With a traditional focus on curriculum and assessment methods, student growth has proven minimal, especially in lower socioeconomic districts (Larson, 2010). Teachers have the charge to adapt to their students, as to effect change in student performance, the focus needs to shift away from what teachers are teaching their students to how teachers lead their classrooms to empower students academically, emotionally, and socially (Brinegar, 2010; Lynch, 2016). Using an educational leadership framework to examine this idea, teacher practices and dispositions are viewed through an inviting lens. This section of the review of the literature will examine the leadership theories of authentic leadership, path-goal leadership, and invitational leadership to determine the most appropriate conceptual framework for middle school teachers to lead a socially just classroom comprised of widely diverse students.

Authentic Leadership

As a more recent educational leadership style, authentic leadership theory reveals how leader behaviors promote a transparent relationship between leader and followers. One important aspect of this theory is that authentic leaders develop this leadership style over time (Northouse, 2016). This is important in teacher preparation programs that train pre-service teachers to be classroom leaders, with emphasis on classroom management skills and assessment techniques. To become truly authentic leaders, these skills would continue to strengthen as their teaching career progressed. Another quality of an authentic leader is an awareness of their core values and a strong sense of purpose (Northouse, 2016). To measure these attributes, teacher candidates complete regular dispositional assessments throughout their training. Administered before student teaching, their purpose is to identify and monitor personal beliefs in educating students (Villegas, 2007), with the focus of these beliefs evolving. Finally, authentic leaders employ all of these strengths to build genuine relationships with their followers (Northouse, 2016). In any classroom, relationships between teachers and students, as well as amongst students, are key. AMLE (2010) believed these positive relationships are one of the foundational components of an effective middle school. When applying authentic leadership principles to a middle school setting, there are alignments with some of the characteristics required to teach the middle-level learner, however, there is not a focus on equity or inclusiveness within this leadership theory.

Path-Goal Leadership

Path goal is another educational leadership theory that examines the leader-follower relationship. Specifically, the path-goal theory has focused on the effect that

leaders have on the motivation and satisfaction of subordinates (House, 1996; Northhouse, 2016). According to this theory, educators should fill a specific role depending on the performance and motivation of their students. This will result in more empowerment and trust in the teacher (Huang, Iun, Liu, & Gong, 2010). The four possible leader behaviors that can describe a teacher's interactions with students include directive, supportive, participative, and achievement (Northhouse, 2016). In directive leadership, the teacher provides the structure for students by defining expectations of academic and behavioral performance. Some directive tasks include the establishment of routines, assigning required tasks, or implementing policies, rules, and procedures (House, 1996). Supportive behaviors are directed toward satisfying the needs and preferences of the students. Examples are displaying concern for student's well-being and creating a psychologically safe learning environment. Participative teachers encourage students to participate in decision-making. This is obtained by consulting with them, respecting their input, and considering their recommendations when operating a classroom (Northhouse, 2016). Finally, achievement-driven teachers seek to boost student performance. Some examples include setting challenging goals and seeking student buy-in (House, 1996; Northouse, 2016). Considering that a middle school teacher's role is that of overseeing students with significantly diverse backgrounds and with various levels of development and ability, path-goal is a reasonable theory to use as a lens to study middle school classroom leadership style. Given that the tasks related to managing a middle school classroom meet these criteria, it is expected to see these traits in the leadership style of effective teachers as they build committed students through

relationships. Again, however path-goal leadership theory does not address the issue of equity or an inclusive inviting responsive environment.

Although both authentic leadership and path-goal leadership are appropriate theories to examine preparatory middle school teaching programs, they both limit the view of the teacher-student relationship as a process with the desired outcome. Given that these theories focus exclusively on the personality of the teacher, they do not address the methods used in instruction or building relationships. Seeking an educational learning theory that will guide how to empower not only teachers but students as well, the researcher focused on a newer-established theory, more fitting to the middle school philosophy and one that focuses on equity and inclusiveness through an inviting setting.

Invitational Leadership

A primary focus in every classroom should be the individual education of each student. However, education means more than the isolated learning of knowledge (Monahan, 2017) and should include the setting in which the learning occurs. Invitational leadership, when used in a school setting, creates an environment that is conducive to learning by establishing intentional authentic relationships with every person in the building and respecting everything in the environment (Lynch, 2012; Purkey & Novak, 2016). Through a teacher's caring actions, no matter how small, a classroom can be transformed into a safe learning environment that welcomes all students as members of an inclusive community (Sitler, 2008). When this caring intention is practiced by teachers, administrators, and staff in a building, they are inviting every student to be successful through a welcoming school culture (Egley, 2003; Sitler, 2008). This outward display of unconditional support from all the adults helps students feel like

they are part of a community as they overcome the struggle associated with middle school (Brinegar, 2010). Invitational leadership provides such functional, and practicable methods to meet the needs of these middle school students (Purkey & Novak, 2015).

At the core of invitational leadership is the intentionality of establishing a socially-just environment that maintains cultural awareness (Monahan, 2017). Purkey and Novak (2016) defined five foundational elements of invitational leadership, collectively referred to as I-CORT. The elements within in invitational leadership are intentionality, caring, optimism, respect, and trust (Purkey & Novak, 2015). In the following sections, each of the elements will be discussed.

Intentionality

When classroom teachers adopt an inviting leadership style, they are making a conscious effort to extend an invitation to all students and welcome them into the learning environment, regardless of diversity. Purkey and Novak (2015) described an invitation as "offering something beneficial for consideration" (p. 6). For middle school students, this benefit can include opportunities their teachers developed for all students to participate in collaboration and sharing opinions, feelings, or perspectives through group discussions (Monahan, 2017). In a culturally responsive environment, teachers make these discussions and other learning activities more relevant to the students by intentionally incorporating diverse personal experiences and different cultural backgrounds of the students (Predmore, Kushner, & Anderson, 2017). For this reason, Monahan (2017) emphasized how crucial the ability to consider ideas from multiple perspectives is for teachers to establish their inviting environment.

Caring

Another essential element of invitational leadership that must be offered intentionally is caring. Middle school teachers specifically must exhibit unconditional acceptance of all students to build their cognitive, social, and emotional capabilities along with encouraging their ever-developing confidence (Usher & Pajares, 2006). Common for students with diverse experiences and cultural backgrounds, they feel teachers do not care for them and misunderstand their need for teacher and peer acceptance (Predmore et al., 2017). Invitational leadership points to caring as a prerequisite for supporting and motivating students but also emphasizes the necessity for cultural awareness and acceptance of students' unique situations (Monahan, 2017; Purkey & Novak, 2015). Through intentional caring behaviors, teachers will be prepared to encourage student learning and celebrate individual successes (Monahan, 2017).

Optimism

Through intentional caring for their students, middle school teachers should similarly be optimistic about their students' development (Monahan, 2017). These same teachers understand the differences between diverse students do not equate to deficiencies in their development (Predmore et al., 2017). This optimism is what sets the high standards for all students in an inviting classroom. The teacher and the students must believe bad situations can be temporary and replaced by better, permanent circumstances (Monahan, 2017). This is imperative for middle school students to remember because, without hope for growth and achievement during these developmental years, their turmoil can lead to negativity and resentment toward their future (Predmore et al., 2017). Fortunately, optimistic middle school teachers can invite

their students to explore their full potential in a culturally safe environment (Purkey & Novak, 2015).

Respect

In a culturally responsive classroom, respect for all students is fundamental (Predmore et al., 2017). This respect is mutual between the teacher and the students as well as between the students themselves. This is evidenced when all the participants acknowledge each other's presence and differences (Monohan, 2017). Since invitational leadership promotes collaboration and respect for students' contributions in the classroom, students and teachers will better understand each other and be willing to learn from diverse perspectives (Egley, 2003; Monahan, 2017).

Trust

As the final foundational element in invitational leadership, trust in the classroom is what builds respectful relationships necessary for the establishment of a safe, socially just learning environment for both students and the teacher (Monahan, 2017). This trust is developed over time as intentional invitations are sent to students for learning (Purkey & Novak, 2015). Based on the outcome of those invitations, students will determine their trust level in learning as well as their relationship with others in the classroom (Usher & Pajares, 2006). Teachers can contribute to building this trust in the classroom by role modeling and encouraging students to withhold judgment of their peers and practice appropriate social interactions while actively listening to the sharing of unique, diverse perspectives (Anderson, 2019; Monahan, 2017; Predmore et al., 2017).

Domains of the "5 P's"

All aspects of invitational leadership send positive messages of intentional caring that not only accept diversity but also celebrate and honor it (Lynch, 2012). Focusing on five interdependent domains of invitational leadership that impact school climate (Anderson, 2019), Purkey and Novak (2016) further described these principles as the "5 P's". Utilized in the learning environment, this includes people, places, policies, programs, and processes (Purkey & Novak, 2016).

People

Purkey and Novak (2015) stated a reminder for educators that all people are valuable and capable. Therefore, all people in an inviting school provide unconditional respect and caring through positive relationships with everyone. Since different cultural backgrounds between teacher and students can lead to misconceptions or confusion in a diverse learning environment (Predmore et al., 2017), teachers must focus on their students so they can understand individual circumstances and challenges to meet their needs and invite them to be a part of the learning community (Monahan, 2017).

Places

Another domain is places, identified as the best area to focus any efforts when needing immediate results. The goal of invitational leadership is to create a learning environment that invites all students into a safe, culturally responsive space where the inclusion of all individuals is celebrated through successful outcomes (Egley, 2003). At the classroom level, this environment is built through intentional relationships between everyone in the group (Anderson, 2017). The more diverse the student population, the greater the need for the teacher to act with intentionality to avoid miscommunication and

isolation of any student by their peers (Monahan, 2017; Predmore et al., 2017). A study conducted by Anderson (2017) found that a teacher's inviting practices do influence a student's overall perception of the learning environment. This positive perception is essential for successful learning (Anderson, 2017), especially for struggling middle school students, so they have a safe space to freely express and communicate their individuality and uniqueness knowing they are accepted by their teacher and their peers.

Policies

Policies refer to the rules, both stated and implied, that the teacher establishes for the management of student learning in the classroom. They must be intentional, reasonable, and fair to everyone to benefit diverse learners (Purkey & Novak, 2016). Effective invitational teachers can consider different circumstances and backgrounds to influence the creation of culturally responsive policies (Monahan, 2017). These policies should be focused on helping students be understanding and accepting of everyone while growing their control over the negative emotions (Anderson, 2019) associated with naturally judgmental middle school students.

Programs

For invitational leadership to be successful, programs should be rigorous and taught by highly qualified teachers (Purkey & Novak, 2016). Yet training middle school teachers to be highly qualified in the domains of invitational leadership has historically been absent from the curriculum of preparatory programs (Martin & Miller, 2017). Monohan (2017) highlighted invitational practices are influential in an educational program, a belief that supports the recommendation by Martin and Miller (2017) that all training programs must prepare their candidates to respond to diversity in our schools and

classrooms. Invitational leadership training with a social justice focus should be a key component in the education of future educators (Martin & Miller, 2017). This idea is also supported by Anderson (2017) that stated invitational leadership theory can influence teacher education programs, thusly introducing a change in schools where they are hired. Since teachers and students have vastly different backgrounds and experiences (Predmore et al., 2017), teacher education programs need to instill awareness, acceptance, and action early in their curriculum (Anderson, 2017).

Processes

The seemingly simple act of inviting is described as an ethical process of continuous interactions between human beings (Purkey & Novak, 2015). Since it is imperative that the processes are inclusive and collaborative (Purkey & Novak, 2016), it is vital in an invitational classroom that students have equal opportunity to interact with all members of the group and add to the class dialogue. This allows the teacher to gather information on each students' personal story to customize their invitation into the learning process (Monahan, 2017). This intentionality also invites all students to feel like a valuable part of the group. This has been shown to support the self-fulfilling prophecy and will increase academic confidence and personal wellbeing in students (Usher & Pajares, 2006).

Due to the ever-changing, fluctuating, sometimes volatile nature of a middle school student, the biggest impact on development and achievement will come from the intentional invitations the adults send to every student. As a response to AMLE's call for highly qualified leaders, safe, inclusive, and inviting environments, and adult advocates for every student in the middle school grades (AMLE, 2010), invitational leadership

addresses all these priorities and was selected as the conceptual framework for this inquiry.

Summary

As more attention is paid to the issues of diversity in society as a whole, the call for inclusive, safe schools for our students is loud and clear. Coupled with the rapid physical and psychological changes every middle school student experiences, having a supportive advocate and an encouraging space where they can feel accepted as their authentic self is crucial. Yet before a teacher can create this inviting culture in their classroom, they must be confident in all aspects of middle-level learning including the unique needs of the students, the intricacies of cultural inclusivity, as well as content knowledge, and classroom management. Creating a foundation to educate the whole student, invitational leadership skills can meet the needs of both these school leaders and the students they serve.

When examined as a combined vision, Purkey and Novak's (2016) invitational leadership aligned with the three AMLE characteristics are the conceptual frameworks in this research. Teachers, as the leaders in their classrooms, are the people component of invitational leadership and are also championed by AMLE to be highly educated and qualified to teach middle-level students. These teachers are the same ones that AMLE calls to serve as advocates for every student from all diverse populations. This is reflected in the I-CORT traits of being intentional, caring, optimistic, respectful, and trustworthy. Finally, AMLE declares the middle school environment must be inviting, inclusive, and safe, a notion echoed by the places domain of invitational leadership. These ideas support the need for teacher preparation programs that intentionally

incorporate invitational leadership principles in their curriculum can better prepare a

successful middle school teacher.

SECTION FOUR

CONTRIBUTION TO PRACTICE

Introduction

Teachers face numerous challenges in today's classrooms as student populations grow more diverse in race, ethnicity, culture, religion, gender identity, and sexual orientation (Rowan, et al., 2021). Middle school teachers have a unique circumstance as they strive to accommodate the myriad of diversities represented by the individuals sitting in the classroom desks while those same bodies are undergoing rapid physical changes accompanied by radical emotional swings (Williams, 2012). These middle school teachers are prepared in educator training programs and rely on this training as they navigate their way through curriculum, classroom management, and relationship building. This places a heavy weight of responsibility on university education programs to prepare their students for culturally responsive teaching in the formative middle school grade levels (Akiba, 2011).

In the review of literature for this study, ideas were uncovered that supported the use of invitational leadership tenets with a social justice orientation in teacher preparation programs. The research identified a lack of systematic reviews in teacher education to learn how to best prepare future teachers charged with supporting all learners regardless of diversity (Rowan, et al., 2021).

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this mixed-methods study:

1. Which invitational leadership principles (Care, Respect, Trust, Optimism, and Intention) are being taught by university faculty in the middle school teacher education program as perceived by the program's faculty and alumni?

2. How are the university faculty ensuring the most intentionally inviting environment using the 5 Ps: People, Places, Policies, Programs, and Processes?

3. Is there a difference between the perceptions of middle school teacher education undergraduate students and alumni on how the middle school preparatory program's use of the 5 P's (People, Places, Policies, Programs, and Processes) influences the overall culture of the program?

Connection to Conceptual/Theoretical Frameworks

In today's middle school classrooms, it is the responsibility of the teachers to adapt to their students in order to enhance student performance. Traditionally this was believed to occur through rigorous curriculum and assessments delivered to all students equally. Research (Brinegar, 2010; Marchitello & Trinidad, 2019) has shown this is not an effective teaching model, especially for middle level learners. Instead of focusing on what teachers are teaching their students, educators can reflect on how teachers are leading their students to achieve in all areas of development including academic, emotional, and social (Brinegar, 2010; Lynch, 2016).

To examine this paradigm shift, this study looked at the educational leadership frameworks of authentic leadership (Northouse, 2016), path-goal leadership (House, 1996; Northhouse, 2016), and invitational leadership (Purkey & Novak, 2016). By viewing middle school teaching practices and dispositions through a culturally and developmentally responsive lens, each of these frameworks had their strengths that could lead to a socially just classroom comprised of widely diverse students. Yet authentic leadership and path-goal leadership theories rest on a foundation of power while invitational leadership is grounded in respect with an emphasis on collaboration and

acceptance (Egley, 2003). This made invitational leadership the most appropriate theory to analyze middle school philosophy and one that prioritizes equity and inclusiveness within the learning environment.

Paired with social justice education, teacher training programs can teach their pre-service teachers about providing all students with an equitable education by being learner-focused, not curriculum-focused (Social Justice Education, n.d.). This socially-just, student-centered approach results in a positive environment and safe space for all students, especially those from underserved and marginalized backgrounds (Bohanon, 2018). For this reason, invitational leadership theory was used to analyze a university teacher education program through a social justice lens in this study.

Participants and Data Collection

The location of this study was at a four-year public university in west-central Missouri. The focus of the study was on the middle school/junior high teacher education program within the university's College of Education. The participants for the faculty interviews were purposefully chosen in a single-stage sampling (Creswell, 2014) by their employment as instructional faculty in the middle school teacher education program at the university.

The individual interview sessions were conducted in June of 2021, after classes had been dismissed for summer session. Three of the four interviews were done virtually at the request of the participants. One interview was completed in person at a satellite campus of the university. The faculty is comprised of one male and three female members. Two faculty members had more than 20 years of experience in education prior to joining the university. This time included middle school classroom teaching and

middle school administration. These same two participants have each been with the university's middle school program for more than 10 years. The other two faculty members had more than nine years of experience before moving to the university program. These years included middle school classroom teaching. Both faculty members have been with the university for more than five years. The details of each faculty participant are in Table 1.

Table 1

Individual Interview Participants

Faculty Member	Years in Education Prior to UCM	Administration Experience at the Middle School Level	Years at UCM
A	20-30	Yes	10-15
B	20-30	Yes	10-15
C	9-14	No	5-10
D	9-14	No	5-10

Note: n=4 faculty members

The participants for the focus groups were purposefully chosen in a single-stage sampling by their status as an undergraduate alumnus of the middle school teacher education program at the university (Creswell, 2014). The focus group sessions were conducted in June of 2021, after classes had been dismissed for summer session. Both focus groups were conducted virtually due to the challenges of varying locations of the participants across the state. The alumni of the middle school program is represented by three males and seven female members. One member openly identified as gay. Of the ten participants currently teaching in middle schools, five alumni have been teaching for 1-2 years, four have been teaching for three years, and one has been teaching for six years. The details of each alumni participant are in Table 2.

Table 2

Focus Group Participants

Alumnus	Focus Group	Graduation Year	Subject Taught	Years of Teaching
E	1	2020	Science	1
F	1	2018	Theatre	3
G	1	2019	Science	2
H	1	2020	Science	1
I	1	2018	Math	3
J	1	2014	ELA	6
K	2	2018	History	3
L	2	2019	ELA	1
M	2	2018	Math	3
N	2	2020	Math	1

Note: n= 10 alumni

The documents chosen for analysis included the syllabi of the courses taught by the faculty that participated in the individual interviews. Described in Table 3 are the documents analyzed.

Table 3

Program Documents Analyzed

Document	Type	Title	Source
1	Program Mission Statement	N/A	University Syllabus Template for the College of Education
2	Course Syllabus	Introduction to the Teaching Profession	Faculty
3	Course Syllabus	Fundamentals of Middle Level Education	Faculty
4	Course Syllabus	Middle Level Curriculum & Assessment	Faculty
5	Course Syllabus	The Engaging Middle Level Classroom	Faculty

6	Course Syllabus	Introduction to Language, Literacy, and Literature in the Middle Level Classroom	Faculty
7	Course Syllabus	Application of Content Area Literacy for Middle Level Learners	Faculty
8	Course Syllabus	Methods of Teaching Middle Level Language Arts	Faculty
9	Course Syllabus	Integrated ELA Curriculum and Assessment for Middle Level Learners	Faculty

The participants for the anonymous survey were purposefully chosen in a single-stage sampling (Creswell, 2014) by their status as a student currently enrolled in the undergraduate middle school education program or an alumnus of the undergraduate middle school education program at the university. The anonymous survey link was distributed to participants on July 8 through known school email addresses and the researcher's personal Facebook page. Utilizing the standard convenience sampling technique of snowballing described by Fink (2017), respondents were given permission to pass the link along to other individuals that qualified to participate. The survey was open for responses until August 2. As seen in Table 4, the survey yielded 49 total responses, 11 from students currently enrolled in the program and 38 from alumni of the program.

Table 4

Survey Response Participants

Participants	*n*
Current Students	11
Program Alumni	38

Note: n=49 survey participants

Presentation of the Data

The two qualitative research questions will be addressed in this section with the presentation of the data gathered from interviews, focus groups, and analysis of documents. The researcher coded the transcribed interviews and focus group discussions to find common themes between the perceptions of the faculty and alumni regarding the teachings of invitational leadership principles in the middle school teacher education program. Documents from the program were examined for evidence of the five invitational leadership principles.

Research Question One

Which invitational leadership principles (Care, Respect, Trust, Optimism, and Intention) are being taught by university faculty in the middle school teacher education program as perceived by the program's faculty and alumni?

Care

Considered by Purkey and Novak (2015) to be a prerequisite for supporting students, caring was mentioned by both faculty and alumni. Faculty C spoke of the faculty. "I would say that the vast majority of our faculty seeks to establish a mutual care and concern with our students." She also praised the middle school program for caring about all students and added the goal for this caring:

> I think that our program is probably among the best to ensure that students are able to be the weird and wacky humans that they are because we want them to be accepting to weird and wacky humans that are middle schoolers.

Faculty D expressed a similar sentiment when describing the faculty. "I would say that we do have the best of intentions of our students at heart."

In analyzing documents, the program's caring was described in the COE's mission statement as "faculty provides support and service… in meeting present and future challenges by developing communities that learn...." This statement is included as part of the COE's course syllabus template and was found on all eight syllabi analyzed for this study.

When the alumni were asked about the caring of the faculty, Alumnus F shared an emotional, personal story of an interaction with a specific faculty member:

> There was a time when I was really struggling and I came to the office and they dropped everything and just sat there and listened to me and sat with me while I cried and just told me how important I was as a person and how much they cared about me and I will cherish that.

Alumnus H shared a similar experience with a faculty member following the death of a close friend:

> When my friend died right in the middle of class or right in the middle of the semester and I was like, "Hey, I'm not going to be here Friday. My friend died," and then I showed up on Monday, being there, and she was like, "Are you sure you want to be here?" That was right after I lost my last dog too, so it was really, really important that she did that.

Alumnus E agreed that all of the experiences in the program were about making students feel comfortable and safe. "You had to build those relationships and I felt that was the most important part of teaching." As an example of how the faculty offered caring advice to their students to implement in their own future classrooms, Alumnus F shared how she shows her students that she cares about them:

I'm sure all of the professors talked about this but having a drawer of snacks in your room for kids who that's their need. In fact, I had one student who was on ADHD medication and was consistently late to school without breakfast, and that would make him sick because you're supposed to take those meds with food. And so he learned that he could come to my classroom, open up my file cabinet, and grab a granola bar. Eventually, the reason I found out is because I asked him because he was leaving every day to go puke in my class because he was sick from the medication.

Respect

Monohan (2017) stated respect is shown through the acknowledgment and acceptance of each other's differences and diversities. Faculty D believed this is taught in the program by the way faculty interact with each other. "Showing your students that you can be friends with your colleagues, I think that is huge." Alumni J and F both felt the interaction of the teachers is a benefit to the program. Alumnus J shared:

We were able to work together and communicate well with each other and I think that that's definitely something that was very visible amongst the staff at UCM, especially within the middle school department. They worked really well together and communicated and were able to kind of handle differences of ideas very professionally and I think that that kind of made all the difference.

Alumnus F then added to the conversation:

They were all unique and had something else to bring to the table. It wasn't like a cookie-cutter like they all did the same thing or acted the same way, by any means. But they all got along and brought their own thing, which was helpful.

Alumnus K also noted, "I thought you guys were always respectful and nice to each other."

Along with the faculty treating each other with respect, Faculty A believed the faculty treats the students in the program with respect:

> We simply treat them as individuals and realize that they're not all going to achieve at the same rate, to the same degree even, but they need to build on their strengths and try to work on the things that maybe they need improvement on.

Faculty C gave an example of how she purposefully shows her students respect through class discussions and assignments. She tells her students, "I don't need to change your mind, I need you to be informed in what you do." She then expanded on the idea of student respect to emphasize the need for training future middle school teachers to treat their students with respect for the uniqueness of their developmental stage:

> One of the biggest themes that comes up over and over again in our program is the need to build relationship with students. In order to build those relationships, you have to respect students and you have to meet them where they are. Because we are a middle grades program, our students have got to appreciate the weird, weird humans that are middle schoolers because they are so strange, and for them, between hormones and deciding who they're going to be as human beings, academics are not their primary focus in life.

Alumnus F experienced respect from a faculty member first-hand and described it as, "The first time really, in my post-high school life that I had been respected by somebody in that way, especially in a professional setting like that."

With a lasting impression, Alumnus M admitted he still respects the faculty's influence when he reflects on his own classroom practices:

I think looking back, like, "How would they do this?" and the kind of the stuff I do in the classroom sometimes is, "How would you guys react to a situation or maybe some of the poor choices that I've made or maybe some of the good activities that we did." I tend to look back on those things pretty regularly.

He also gave the middle school education program credit for building respect through awareness and acceptance of other diversities:

Being able to learn about how to approach different cultures and being appropriate and learning those kind of skills. That's the stuff that I probably took the most from because I've always known how to be nice and care for others and considerate and those kind of things. I think I've been okay with that but I think what the program did was really opened my eyes to other cultures and being somewhat aware, even past just the demographics and knowing how that works.

Trust

Teachers can build trust by role modeling respectful relationships (Monahan, 2017). Faculty A spoke of trust amongst the faculty as everyone works for the same goal in the best interest of their students:

I think the faculty does treat each other with respect and trust. I think it's a small faculty and so, it's necessary that they work closely together and cooperate, share tasks and I think the fact that it is relatively small is probably an advantage.

In her role, Faculty C considered it a show of her trustworthiness when her students are able to open up to her and ask her for professional advice:

I am privileged to hear that message because they know that there are faculty members who are trustworthy and that can help them navigate. So I occasionally get questions about, "This happened, how should I handle it?" and I'm able to say, "You know, if that happened to me, this is what I would express to that person." It helps them navigate that and they're going to need that mentoring role when they get into a classroom as well. They're going to have administrators who they just don't resonate with, so having some fallback ways to communicate effectively with people is an important skill for them to learn.

While a student in the program, Alumnus F felt a level of trust with a faculty member that helped her through a rough time. "I had really good moments with her and I feel like now, honestly, I could go to her for anything even though we don't necessarily talk every day or anything like that. Just really good, really good relationships."

Anderson (2019) explained teachers can also provide opportunities for students to practice nonjudgmental interactions with their peers while they share unique, diverse ideas. Alumnus L recalled practical advice from a faculty member:

I think it was [Faculty C] who said, "Most of the time, when you show someone a little bit of yourself, that's how you're going to get to know people." So, like, willing to tell them about yourself and tell them little stories and stuff. That's definitely, I think, how I've created a welcoming environment into my classroom.

Faculty C described how she implements collaborative, cross-curricular projects so her students can build trust in each other's content knowledge, just as they would in their careers as teachers:

They do an interdisciplinary unit plan where they have somebody from each of the different content areas, and that's really challenging, but it's what they're going to be expected to do if they're fortunate enough to wind up at a middle school that does team planning. So being able to go, "Oh, math person," as the science person, "this seems like a good math way. How can we collaborate on that?" I think really is a quality that will serve them well when they get out into the field. Even initiating those conversations is an important skill for them to have.

Alumnus F remembered teamwork projects forced them to trust themselves and their peers' roles in the success of the group:

I specifically remember when we were doing units of instruction in one of our classes or something, it was laid out for us, like, we need to write down what each person is doing and everybody has to have an equal role or an equitable role at least.

Optimism

Optimistic teachers invite their students to explore their full potential (Purkey & Novak, 2015). Faculty C believed this is demonstrated in the middle school program:

Dialogue with students at multiple points in their journey with us. Give them the opportunity to reflect, literally to reflect themselves as well as to have those supportive conversations and dialogues about things that we think might help them as teachers.

Faculty C promises to push her students. "If you do what I ask you to, you're going to do well because you're going to learn." Faculty A expressed his personal desire for his students in the program:

What I want is for them to be realistic about what they're going to face. I think they should know their content but I think it's probably more important that they understand what students are like and how they can help students achieve their potential and I want them to realize that their job is to adjust their teaching to their students and not the opposite.

Faculty A continued:

I feel that they have every opportunity to be successful. We're not just looking to reward the top students and cut the rest. We want everybody to be as good as they can be. So, I think that's a strength of the program.

As a former student of the program, Alumnus J shared how she applied what she personally experienced from the middle school faculty to her own practice:

I would say that the staff gives their students grace, so much grace, and I think that that's super. I mean, that's the biggest thing that I pass on to my students. When I had kids who were dealing with stuff, I was able to just to be like, "Well, okay, let's work through this and let's modify and let's do what we need to do to make sure that you're successful.

Alumnus M also uses his experience from being a student to understand his own students:

My biggest thing has probably been grace. I know that I was a horrible student sometimes so I just have those moments where I come back and I'm just like, "I know that these kids are going through things and learning relationships," and knowing what they're going through for having that patience.

Intention

When a teacher acts with intention, they purposefully create opportunities for students to engage with others in sharing ideas, opinions, and experiences (Monahan, 2017). Faculty B described the programs' intentional efforts. "Through cooperative learning and relationships, we are creating a community of learners." Faculty D encourages her students to use every opportunity as a learning opportunity for middle school students:

> Every student is different. You have to be prepared to meet students where they are, whether that is on the highest of levels or the lowest of levels. It is up to you to take responsibility for their understanding of your expectations of them. They also are in a very weird place in their lives developmentally, so you are going to be everything from a counselor to a nurse, to a mom, to a parent, to a friend, appropriately, and you just have to have the mindset that every day is going to be different, whether you want it to be structured and the same. That's just not how it works in the middle school classroom.

Faculty C shared a similar belief:

> Recognizing that you are a part of their life and creating academic explorations that really allow them to enter that where they are comfortable and where they can see something that is real and meaningful for them is very important. Having that drive to make learning a personal, hands-on engaged experience, I think, is beneficial, not only to the students, but also to the teachers, because when kids are engaged, your life gets so much easier.

Both Faculty D and Faculty C expressed their purposeful selection of materials as a way to ensure every student can see themselves in that work. Faculty D explained her use of intentionality through a classroom activity:

> I do an activity before every class called *Take Sides*. I would read, not a controversial statement, but just a statement about the textbook. Then the students had to go on one side of the classroom if they agree, and one side of the classroom if they disagree, and then they had to intermingle with themselves and decide why they agree with the statement or why they disagree. That gave my students an opportunity to work with people that they didn't necessarily choose to work with. It's more based on opinion and thoughts and I think that that really helps with including all students as well.

Also utilized in her courses, Faculty D selects content-based fiction to teach her future teachers how to be intentional with their middle school students:

> Divided into content areas, I had them read content-based fiction. All of those books, we really try to make a multicultural activity, so we can lead our students to selecting literature in their classrooms that every kiddo can see themselves in. I think that's very important right now, especially in our ever-changing society that a student can pick up a book and they can find themselves in it.

Similarly, Faculty C discovered, "A really small change to an assignment got my students thinking about whose voices are not being heard, and how to include voices other than the ones that are always there."

Alumnus K felt the expressed purpose of the middle school program was to learn how to intentionally build relationships with students. He shared, "I thought we were

taught to be very inclusive of everyone and even more inclusive for some." He continued:

> In [Faculty B's] class, it was all about teaching the students that weren't like everyone else. I thought that was a big part and that one's kind of stuck with me. So, yeah, I think we have really been taught well to include everyone.

Alumnus M admitted it was not until after he had his own classroom that he finally understood why the program faculty required student data research for some assignments:

> I think the big thing for me was, I didn't understand why we had to include demographics. I was just not aware. I was like, "Why are we having to do this?" I was like, "We just need to make sure we care about people. That's all that really matters."

A lasting memory for Alumnus N was learning:

> If you are a teacher, you need to be adaptable. If I'm young and approachable, these kids come to me. Being adaptable and being like, "Well, this is new. What the heck do I do?" I use that a lot. Just knowing someone's going to come say something ridiculous to my face. I need to be able to address it. You guys prepared me for that more than anything.

Alumnus E chimed in with her experience being adaptable as a new teacher navigating virtual schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic. "Virtually, you have to be intentional so they actually come on to your meetings and actually ask you for help. Because they don't know who you are until they come on and see you."

When the alumni were asked about their use of intentional practices they learned in the middle school program, Alumnus G stated:

I know at UCM we learned how important it is to learn their names quickly. So
before I started, I got the yearbook and I learned all their names, and that really
helped me going in the first day knowing everybody's name. And then we did the
"get to know you" things in the beginning. We designed virtual lockers and then
we shared why we picked to put different things in our locker and how that
described us.

Alumnus M also mentioned the learning of student names and then added:

The intentionality of the names and positive reinforcement, positive feedback. I
always use religiously in my classroom, three positives to one negative or
something. That's used all the time and just making sure that we don't just say,
"Good job." I'm specific about my feedback that I give and those kind of things
worked wonders. When it's specific, you can kind of see that glimmer or spark in
their eyes and that's nice.

Research Question Two

How are the university faculty ensuring the most intentionally inviting environment using
the 5 Ps: People, Places, Policies, Programs, and Processes?

People

For a school to be considered inviting, students are valued and made to feel
capable through the positive relationships built with others (Purkey & Novak, 2015).
Students are invited to be a part of the learning community (Monahan, 2017). A course
objective listed on a syllabus, Document 5, served as an example of the goal for
educators to prioritize people in their classrooms. It stated, "The teacher candidate will
develop an understanding of individual and group motivation and behavior to create a

positive learning environment that encourages student engagement, positive social interaction, and self-motivation."

When sharing their experiences in the middle school program, the alumni agreed that the faculty forged strong relationships with the students as well as within their student group. Alumnus M remembered, "Relationships were pushed from day one. That was always the most important thing." Then Alumnus N commented on the relationships she established while in the program:

I have people that I still talk to consistently from the education department. When we did assigned group projects, I was never like, "Oh, I'm stuck with them." It was always, "Okay. Cool. I'm working with them today." That was really cool.

Alumnus L agreed the group work played a major role in establishing bonds with her classmates:

Once we were with our little group, that's when I definitely started feeling closer to people and like I really knew them for sure. Freshman year I didn't really get to know anyone that well but once I was in the middle school specific, I really did get close to everyone and I really liked, loved my time with them.

Faculty A voiced his belief and an example of how he knows that the students grow together:

They kind of form a cohort and they work together over a period of about three semesters. So, they're sharing a lot of the same classroom experiences and the experiences out in the field. My experience with them is they're very aware of what each other are doing. An example would be if we find out about a job opening and we send it out. I did that recently and I got emails back, "Oh, I've

already taken a job here and so and so has taken a job here." I mean, they told me

about other people too, not just themselves. So, they do, I think, form

relationships.

Faculty D, who serves as the social media coordinator for the COE, also mentioned the relationships students build with their peers while in the program:

There are definitely relationships built in our classes that are unique and lifelong.

Being a social media person, I get pictures and things sent. When we were having

students send in their job announcement posts, there were girls on vacation

together on the beach, announcing their jobs, and they weren't friends before our

class. That's pretty cool. That networking is huge, and the fact that they can have

someone to lean on when they are those first or second-year teachers that are

overwhelmed. Still having relationships with some of my past students, how they

all work together in a grade, I think that's pretty cool, especially when it comes to

middle school, I think it's huge. Because that's not necessarily the case in all

programs. So, I think that's pretty unique to us.

Alumnus H shared how he believes his experience as a student helped build relationships

with his own students. "I definitely built really good relationships and I definitely

learned a lot of that at UCM. Last year, my fifth hour class would come and see me

every day during lunch. So I mean, that really helped me."

When the researcher asked of the focus group, "What are some of the main things

you feel you gained from the middle school program that you have incorporated into your

classrooms? What did you graduate ready with?" Alumnus N immediately responded

with, "Building relationships." Then Alumnus K joked by adding, "Yeah, absolutely.

Relationships has been the number one thing. It's all about relationships. Not that they don't care about the curriculum. That is just nothing compared to relationships that you have to build." A similar comment from Faculty A supported the alumni's perception of their relationships with faculty. "I think kids like their teachers in the middle school program. I think they have good relationships with the people that teach them."

Places

All students deserve a learning environment where they feel safe and supported. This can be established in the classroom through the intentional relationships built with all the members of the group (Anderson, 2017). As a reflection of this, Alumnus K emphasized, "You've got to have a good relationship. You've got to have a good environment, not necessarily with your students, but even with your peers." Analysis of Document 2, a course syllabus, uncovered an objective for how the middle school program is informing its education students to "understand the teacher's role in creating a learning environment that encourages positive social interaction." Similarly, on a different syllabus, Document 9, the course description included the statement, "the classroom can offer refuge and hope for mid-level learners who continue to struggle." Faculty A believes the program is sending the right message to its students:

> I think it's stressed that it's important that they create a positive learning environment. I think that what you'll find in the middle school program is that teachers will do ice breaker activities or other getting to know you activities with their students. They will encourage a lot of cooperative and use a lot of cooperative learning and activities in their classes.

Viewing his classroom as a positive space for his students, Alumnus M models after his middle school education classes. "Having that be a safe environment first by having stuff in place and having consistency that really changed my classroom environment." In agreement, Alumnus L stated she also felt the program faculty created a welcoming environment that she could duplicate in her own classroom. "They just felt comfortable. I don't even know exactly what they did. I think it was more like creating like that welcoming environment for the students." Alumnus G and Alumnus I, both non-traditional students when they were in the program, appreciated the effort from the faculty made to connect with them. Alumnus G shared her experience:

> They made me feel included. I went into school full-time. I was married. I had three kids already. I graduated 20 years before that from high school. So I was not sure what I was walking into and expected to see a bunch of 18-year-old, barely out-of-high-school kids. But not only the faculty, but also the group that I was with, really did include me in stuff and I didn't feel like the old person that was just there. All of them were very welcoming and definitely made that time in my life easier.

Then Alumnus I added to the conversation:

> I agree very much. I walked in feeling, "I'm just going to get through. I'm going to get this degree so I can go to work," and expecting to be very uncomfortable with being the age of everybody's moms. I'd say, 30 minutes into the first class, I just knew I was at home. All the students, not just the teachers, but all my fellow classmates, I felt like a teammate with 18 to 22-year-olds. I felt like I was part of their team and not some outsider.

Speaking to a question about a positive learning environment, Alumnus N and Alumnus M shared common memories of the fun they had in their classes while in the program. Alumnus N explained, "I always felt comfortable there. Those were my favorite classes because I knew I was always going to have a good time. I was going to learn something but I was going to have a good time." Alumnus M agreed and added that the fun times in the program showed future teachers "how to have fun in a classroom with our activities that we do." He continued, "We did a lot. We focused a lot on engaging the kids and I think that's probably what I tried to take away the most."

Policies

Whether a policy is written or implied, they are created to be fair for all students, yet inviting teachers to consider special circumstances and diverse needs of the students when enforcing these rules and procedures (Monahan, 2017; Purkey & Novak, 2015). When discussing the policies for student attendance and late or missing assignments, the faculty are unanimous in their belief that future teachers should be held accountable for getting to class and meeting assignment deadlines.

First, addressing the topic of attendance for students in the program, Faculty A shared, "My experience as a principal is, I want teachers who show up and I want teachers who have a sense of responsibility for their position. So, I want kids to show up to class." He then continued:

> I feel students understand that attendance matters and I feel that they kind of want that to be meaningful. I mean everything situation is different. If you're hurt by a policy or the way a policy's implemented you're not going to like it but I think the majority of students are supportive of requiring attendance.

Faculty C agreed with the professional expectation of attendance by sharing, "For me, attendance is expected, period. If something is going on in life and you can't be there, let me know, and my students have my cell phone number. They text me." She did address exceptions to this policy. "I do have students who have had health concerns. If I know what's happening, I can accommodate it, but I need to know what's happening." Faculty C continued by justifying an attendance policy for college students. "I feel it's really important to be there, because I also am a social constructivist, so I think we learn by doing and doing with others." When asked her perception of how students feel about this policy, Faculty A shared:

> I have not had any pushback from students about it, so I'm assuming that they find it to be fair. To me, "studenting" is your job, and you show up to work. I will say if I had students who did complain to me openly about the expectation that they attend my class, I would be concerned about their future employment.

Faculty D addressed the practice of individual faculty attendance policies for program students. "I think that as a department, as a school, we need to have an attendance policy that is set because when one professor or instructor is super lenient, and one is super strict, it sends a very mixed message." She justified this statement by adding:

> I bring my "A-game" every class, and I expect them to want to see it and if they don't, then that's on them for missing the instruction. I feel like at this point in their college career, they need to have some priorities.

On the topic of assignment due dates, faculty agreement about these policies came with individual anecdotes of when they personally accommodated students that needed the extra support. For example, Faculty C admitted:

While I have a stated policy, my reality is much more flexible. If I know what's happening, I can help. If a student doesn't tell me what's happening, I'm going to be super frustrated, but I will probably still help and, once they get help once, they know to just let me know what's going on after that.

Faculty D shared a stricter philosophy for her students:

I do not accept late work. I don't accept missing work. I don't have time to chase people down. Also, I think that if we're preparing our students to then be teachers, we have to set an expectation that there are deadlines to be met. You cannot walk into a future classroom and say, "I'm really sorry. I forgot to plan the lesson last night," or, "I don't know where I put this," or, "I didn't have the book in time." Didn't work like that. So, my policy is, I don't accept late work, unless there's extenuating circumstances I hear from before. But I do listen for those extenuating circumstances.

Faculty A shared his view on assignment policies:

I think if you're going to make an assignment, it has to be something that's important that students do. So, there really can't be missing assignments unless there are grade consequences. As far as late work goes, just only speaking for myself, if it's important enough to assign it, then I think we have to accept it late. I don't believe in cutting grades for something being late. It needs to be assessed on the same standard you assess everybody else's work.

Believing in role modeling for future teachers, he supported his practice by adding, "I think the reason that I have that policy is because when they are teachers I want them to do that in their schools."

In support of teachers having individual freedom with policies in their classroom, the alumni shared frustration with the enforcement of districtwide or building polices. Believing teachers should have student-focused policies, Alumnus L shared a personal experience while a student in the program:

I remember you guys in the middle school, when I had problems or issues, you guys were willing to let me have some time. I had ankle surgery one year and I was out for a week and I didn't want to do anything for another week and you guys were like, "You know what, no problem. Just get it to me." I had no problem.

Alumnus M had a similar experience with the policies in the program:

I learned a lot of grace from you guys and taking that time, like things happen. I had a lot of stuff that happened in college where I was just like, "I'm not willing to do this right now." The fact that I had teachers that were willing to give me a break, I feel like grace is a big thing that I try to have in my classroom and just making sure that the students know, "I'm going to work with you. I'm going to help you out. Let's get caught up." Those kind of things happen all the time and I feel like that's because of the relationships and what my teachers did at UCM. So, thank you, guys.

Alumnus K believes in a concept taught by the faculty in the middle school program:

You guys told me, "What is the difference between an assignment that's turned in at 11:59 and one that's turned in at 12:01? There is none. There is no difference." So, in cases like that, I get it. Now, if it's two weeks late, that's different.

In the document analysis of all eight course syllabi, they all defined the faculty members' personal policy regarding, examinations, attendance, assignments, and late work. These four areas are required sections according to the COE's syllabus template, but the philosophy for how each policy is enforced may differ between the faculties.

Programs

Highly qualified instructors (Purkey & Novak, 2015) that can prepare their candidates to respond to diversity with awareness, acceptance, and action (Anderson, 2017) while teaching in education programs that train teachers to be invitational leaders. As an example of how the middle school program offers these highly qualified leaders, Faculty D spoke of the caliber of professional experiences brought to the education program:

> I think one of the biggest pros to our middle school program is that the majority is taught by people who have been there, and we've done it and we know how things work and we know what things don't. I do believe that in our classes, students see that we are innovative teachers, and we're working on programs, and we're ever changing our curriculum to meet the needs of our students now so they can mirror that when they're trying to meet the needs of their students in the future.

Faculty A intentionally role models his best practices for his students because when they are teachers, he explained, he wants them to do that in their classrooms:

> My experience with teaching in the middle school classes and observing other professors teach in middle school classes is that it's partly curriculum, partly we know certain things we're going to talk about, but a lot of it is modeling the things that we think they should be doing. They need to see college professors doing the

things that we expect them to do and I think you see that in the middle school

program, modeling what we should see in the middle school classroom. So, I

think we kind of teach by doing, not just by telling that they should do it.

In addition to highly qualified faculty, Martin and Miller (2017) suggested education

training programs should equip their students to be culturally responsive and inclusive in

their classrooms. A reflection of this recommendation is found in the COE's mission

statement, Document 1, "The teacher education program prepares individuals as

professional educators for an ever-changing, culturally diverse population." This

statement is part of the COE's syllabus template and is included on all eight course

syllabi analyzed for this study.

Supporting this mission, a course objective found in the syllabus, Document 3,

stated, "Identify similarities and differences of desirable student activity programs for

middle level education as they relate to the developmental stages of the transescent

including emotional, social, physical, and intellectual growth."

Referring to the teaching and modeling of inclusive practices in the middle school

program at UCM, Faculty A expressed his opinion:

One of the things that we always talk about in the middle school program is the

diversity of students. I'm not talking just about gender or race or something like

that, but just learning styles and the emphasis on meeting individual needs. So, I

think we do teach students to be inclusive of all people and I do think that the

instructors in the middle school program practice what they preach in terms of

being accepting of students.

Faculty A then added, "I do think it would be great if our students had more formal instruction in diversity and dealing with diverse students."

In support of this idea, though not embedded in the curriculum of the program courses, a student-lead organization sponsored by Faculty C called Leading Educator Advocates for Diversity (LEAD) is an example of this inclusivity awareness and training. Both Alumnus L and Alumnus F were student officers and believed only good came from their involvement in this club. Alumnus L credited her experiences in LEAD for helping build her awareness for diversity:

> I actually was the vice president of the Diversity and Education Club when I was at UCM. I even went to the main conference in Tennessee which is a diversity in education conference. I definitely think things like that did shape it.

Alumnus F described her personal experience in the program:

> I really loved being involved in that. I felt like I learned a ton. We even got to go to a conference in Birmingham, the Peace and Social Justice Studies Conference, me and a couple other people I was in class with. I felt like my mindset changed while I was in the UCM program, as far as inclusivity and diversity issues. I feel like before, I was like, "Eh, you know, it's important to love all people, sure, yeah, yeah," but I really understood it and learned about it and it totally changed my perspective on all of those issues. So very, very well done as far as UCM's programs go.

To contrast the praise students had for the LEAD program, Alumnus J responded to Alumnus F by sharing her frustration for the lack of diversity training and experiences in the middle school program:

It's funny because I'm kind of on the opposite end of that. I don't really feel like being inclusive of all people was something that was really focused when I was in the program. You're taught how to differentiate for students with IEPs or struggling students and kind of scaffolding. But working with students, LGBTQ students, students of different races, things like that, I think in my experience, most everywhere I went, I just felt like it was mostly white middle-class schools and I felt like I didn't really get a good sample of variety of different students and the different issues that different groups of people face. I don't really feel like we talked anything really about that and a lot of some of the more common issues that kids face these days. In my classes, I don't really feel like it was addressed at all.

In defense of the program's efforts to address diversity, Alumnus I responded with:

There's just so much that you can do in the classroom though. I remember talking about all this stuff in undergrad. But where I teach, there is a lot of lower kids, both economically and academically. Some of the stuff that I learned about is it's the kids' environment and their living situations. It is nothing that I expected while I was being taught about it in undergrad.

Faculty C addressed how she incorporates diversity awareness in her courses:

In my classroom, I try to teach them to be respectful, to build relationships, to learn about different cultures and different ways of being in the world, and not necessarily to prize their own experience or way of seeing over others. They learn a lot about other cultures, but they learn the importance of representation in the classroom.

Different from her peers in the response to inclusion and diversity taught in the program,

Faculty B highlighted the recent addition of trauma-informed care to the curriculum.

"That not only benefits our students with dealing with their own trauma, but raises

awareness of the impact of childhood trauma. Then they need to think about developing

their own professional safety net for their students."

Processes

The learning process in an invitational school is inclusive and collaborative in

nature (Purkey & Novak, 2016) and all students feel valued as members of the group

(Usher & Pajares, 2006). In the middle school program at UCM, the learning process for

the students is through the teaching process of the faculty. Alumnus H explained he

learned the most from the role modeling:

> There was definitely a lot of role modeling at UCM. It was all a lot of leadership.
> It was all really about role modeling how to do it. I took a lot from the educators.
> I think it was a lot of role modeling and that's probably what I learned most about
> was how to teach by leading from UCM.

By modeling teaching methods and learning strategies for future teachers to apply in their

own classroom, Alumnus J weighed in on this process:

> [Faculty B] did an outstanding job at every time we did any kind of activity in
> class, we did a different type of cooperative learning activity. It really gave us a
> sound set of strategies that we could go and use in our classroom easily because it
> was just that was so engrained into our classes. It was always, "We're going to go
> over these skills and give your ideas on what you can use in your classroom."
> That was probably the best thing. I really loved it.

Alumnus K also voiced a similar perspective of the relevant learning processes:

> I think the way you did it, just not the simple fact that you did teach us, but the way you did it was you practiced it with every assignment that we did. I think every assignment, we had some group member or we had some type of partner. I think that was a good way to get to know people around you so you can become comfortable with them. I think that started way back with the first class I had and then it continued all the way throughout our classes. I think just modeling it. Teaching how to teach through teaching, if that makes sense.

A comment from Faculty D supported the alumni's descriptions of the faculty's teaching process as role modeling. "I think, just showing them how to be teachers is huge in showing them how to be leaders, because that's what we are in the classroom." More evidence of the role modeling of the teaching process was found in the analysis of course syllabi, Documents 5, which details student goals for learning some practical processes in teaching middle school students. Included in document 5 were:

Teacher candidates will understand:

- how to provide learning opportunities that are adapted to diverse learners that supports the intellectual, social, and personal development of all middle level learners.

- how to develop a variety of active engagement instructional strategies and assessments which promote middle level students critical thinking, social, and problem solving skills.

- how to use a variety of instructional and technological resources to promote student engagement.

- how to design cooperative learning structures to promote middle level students' critical thinking, social, and problem solving skills.

Alumnus N described her realization that the faculty's teaching was a model for her future role as an educator:

> For me, it was a big jump to figure out I stopped being a student and was starting to be a teacher in classes and viewing you guys as models like, "Okay. This is how she's doing it so that's maybe something I should do." That jump for me was really hard but I think just watching you guys as teachers and thinking, "Okay. I'm a teacher so this is a good thing to be paying attention to." I appreciated it.

Alumnus L quickly agreed with this perspective and then credited the field experience component as a pivotal process in the program. "I would say the field experience. There was definitely a switch for me like [Alumnus N] was talking about modeling after professors and cooperating teachers. There were a couple things I directly borrowed or stole from you guys."

When discussing field experience required in the middle school program, Faculty C shared, "I think field experiences change things immensely because being able to physically engage with students really makes a world of difference." She continued to describe how she prepares her students for field experiences in diverse classrooms:

> I openly talk to my students about transformative learning theory. When things happen that are uncomfortable, you can either ignore them or you can learn from them and refine your understanding of the world. College is a great time to refine it. It may not fundamentally change it, and it doesn't need to, but if you're paying attention while you're learning, you're going to learn.

Research Question Three

Is there a difference between the perceptions of middle school teacher education

undergraduate students and alumni on how the middle school preparatory program's use

of the 5 P's (People, Places, Policies, Programs, and Processes) influences the overall

culture of the program?

This quantitative research question will be discussed with the presentation of the

data gathered through an anonymous survey. The data collection tool presented

participants with 50 statements describing the middle school teacher education program.

Sixteen statements described the people, seven described the program, eight statements

regarded processes, seven referred to polices, and 12 described places. Participants

utilized a 5-point Likert scale to express their level of agreement or disagreement with

each statement. On the scale, a score of one indicated strong disagreement with the

statement, a score of three communicated neither agreement nor disagreement, and a

score of five showed strong agreement with the statement.

The researcher used an independent t-test to identify significant differences in

perception between the two groups of participants regarding the tenants of invitational

leadership taught in the program. Analysis of t-test data (see Table 5) showed a

significant difference in the areas of people, programs, and policies while no significant

difference was found regarding places and processes.

Results for people show (students: $M = 4.45$, $SD = 0.276$; alumni: $M = 4.62$,

$SD = 0.184$). Therefore, it is revealed that the difference between groups is statistically

significant ($t(30) = 2.066$, $p = 0.048$). Results for programs show (students: $M = 4.25$,

$SD = 0.363$; alumni: $M = 4.60$, $SD = 0.075$). Therefore, it is revealed that the difference

between groups is statistically significant (*t* (12)=2.516, *p* =0.027). Results for policies

show (students: *M* =4.44, *SD* =0.251; alumni: *M* =4.68, *SD* =0.071). Therefore, it is

revealed that the difference between groups is statistically significant (*t* (12)=2.422,

p=0.032). Results for places show (students: *M* =4.11, *SD* =0.427; alumni: *M* =4.21,

SD=0.301). Therefore, it is revealed that the difference between groups is not statistically

significant (*t* (22)=0.724, *p* =0.477). Results for processes show (students: *M* =4.17,

SD=0.529; alumni: *M* =4.54, *SD* =0.397). Therefore, it is revealed that the difference

between groups is not statistically significant (*t* (14)=1.577, *p* =0.137).

Table 5

t-test Group Statistics

5Ps of Invitational Leadership	Current Students n=11		Alumni n=38				
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	t	P	df
People	4.45	0.276	4.62	0.184	2.066	0.048	30
Places	4.11	0.427	4.21	0.301	0.724	0.477	22
Policies	4.44	0.251	4.68	0.071	2.422	0.032	12
Programs	4.25	0.363	4.60	0.075	2.516	0.027	12
Processes	4.17	0.529	4.54	0.397	1.577	0.137	14

Note: n=49 participants, *p<.05*

Discussion of Findings

During the analyzes of question one, a single sentiment kept repeating in the

responses from both the faculty and the program's alumni: the importance of building

relationships. When asked about their experience in the program, participants all pointed

to the importance placed on building relationships with their future students. The

principles of care, respect, trust, optimism, and intentionality served as underpinning for

the stories shared as evidence for the middle school education program's priorities. The

researcher found that, even though alumni could not always articulate how the faculty taught these principles nor how they provided a safe learning environment, they were positive the faculty did teach them because of the relationships they remember being built between the faculty, between the students, and between the faculty and students. The depth of relationships described by the alumni are a result of the faculty making intentional efforts to role model the best way to teach middle school students, not just lecture or assign a reading about it.

Concerning research question one taught in the middle school program are all of the principles of invitational leadership. According to Williams (2012), teachers that are invitational leaders use intentionality in their development of caring relationships and a safe learning environment while filling the role of student advocate. Both the faculty and alumni addressed the teachings and experiences in the program as positive and impactful for future middle school educators. All participants viewed how integral the building of relationships was in the success of the program. The following section will explore each principle of invitational leadership and the alignment to building relationships.

Care

Caring teacher-student relationships are the foundation for a positive environment (Brown & Knowles, 2014). When Faculty C described the dynamic between the program's faculty and its students, she described it as one of mutual care and concern. Additionally, Alumnus E summarized her take-away from the program as an understanding for how care is a necessity when building relationships with students. Bolman and Deal (2013) supported this perspective when they asserted how teachers understand the meaning gained from relationships and how they thrive in a

caring environment. In invitational leadership, caring is central to building relationships (Purkey & Novak, 2016). Alumnus N said she appreciated how everyone genuinely cared about each other in the middle school program and now, as a teacher, wants her students to feel that in her own classroom.

Respect

Research by Strahan, Smith, McElrath, and Toole (2001) declared that the foundation for caring relationships is mutual respect. Mentioned was another critical component of invitational leadership, respect. Regarded as a recurring lesson that is both practiced and taught in the program, Faculty C revealed her belief that, "In order to build relationships, you have to respect students." Faculty C later shared how the message of respect is taught in the program to future teachers when she said, "I try to teach them to be respectful, to build relationships, to learn about different cultures and different ways of being in the world." An example of this came from Alumnus M, who shared he always felt respected in the relationships with his peers and teachers. A self-described member of the LGBTQ+ community, he believed his experience was a result of the established environment rather than the intentional teaching about respect. "I don't know if it was necessarily exactly what was taught so much as how I was treated. As someone from that community, I do think the way that I was interacted with through the program was very respectful." As a testament to his experience, Alumnus M mentioned how he has returned to UCM twice to continue working on advanced education degrees.

Additional contributions to support the idea of respectful relationships as an integral part of the middle school education program include statements from both Faculty A and Alumnus K when they described the faculty relationships with each other

as respectful. Alumnus F revealed a story that illustrated the faculty's respectful handling of a personal situation that did not involve the program but regarded as a priority and supported her when she needed it.

Trust

When teachers consistently use care and respect when engaging with students, the next step to establishing strong relationships with students is trust (Napper, 2019). In the focus group, Alumnus F spoke favorably about a faculty member that she now considers a trusted friend based on the handling of a personal situation when she was a student. She described the resulting bond as a good relationship. The experience of Alumnus F is not unique among students of any age, many that have backgrounds leaving them victimized and thus, struggling to trust others and avoiding personal relationships (Frydman & Mayor, 2017). Before educators can teach these students, mutual trust must be established (Tosolt, 2010). To demonstrate the teaching of this idea in the middle school program, Alumnus L remembered being told that as a future teacher, she had to be able to show others, especially her students, a piece of herself. Being vulnerable and inviting students in is how they learn they can trust their teacher and eventually their peers. These trusting relationships with their peers and teachers will be beneficial for students (AMLE, 2010). In the middle school program, Faculty C believes she is that trusted person for the students because of the honest conversations she has had with them. She is confident the students know that there are faculty members that can help through difficult situations and are trustworthy. This is an example of how, through invitational leadership, building a community of trust occurs when teachers and students connect (Purkey & Novak, 2016).

Optimism

To be optimistic in an invitational classroom, the teacher and the students trust that bad situations will get better (Monahan, 2017). Through this bad time, the teacher is showing caring and respectful behaviors to strengthen that positive feeling among students. As an example of how the middle school program reflects optimism, most of the faculty shared exemptions to stated policies or modifications to procedures when students needed the extra support. Alumnus J lived this experience as a student and expressed gratitude for the grace the faculty showed during some difficult times. Although this support was not offered as an intentional teaching moment, it did result in one. Alumnus J continued by describing how she used that relationship with the UCM faculty to be more mindful and attentive when her own students need additional support. Williams (2012), who asserted that a teacher's words and actions alone do not establish relationships nor a safe environment, supported this practice. It is born from the teacher's genuine belief and treatment that every student is important and every circumstance is unique. From Faculty A's perspective, the relationships between the faculty and the students in the program are positive. He wanted every education student to have the same opportunity to succeed.

Alumnus K was grateful for this opportunity as a student in the program so he could change his history of poor decisions. He wanted to be able to tell others, specifically young students, that they can be successful despite their past. Alumnus K gave credit to the program for teaching him, as a young teacher, how to include all students, including those that need the most support and guidance. Everyone in a welcoming classroom is invited to be successful in a safe, inclusive culture (Egley,

2003). Alumnus K's optimism was rooted in his past, developed while in the education program and supported Villegas' (2007) statement that most middle school teachers enter their field to help preteen students be successful.

Intentionality

Decisions and actions need to be intentional in the classroom. This is in contrast to decisions and actions that are reactive to a situation. In fact, teachers are required to establish a safe learning environment for their students (Williams, 2012). In order to be, successful, inviting teachers build relationships and a positive culture through intentional activities, opportunities, and examples. During data collection interviews, several faculty members shared personal examples of how the program intentionally assigns shared group projects or cooperative learning activities. Faculty B defined the goal for students is to build relationships with their peers to create a community of learners. When Alumnus M was in the program, he approached these assigned tasks through the lens of a middle school teacher. He could see the benefits of relationships in everyday life. He stated, "Those are everyday things you need to be a leader, so I use that in my everyday life in my classroom."

These intentional classroom experiences were especially helpful when it came to the alumni as new teachers experimenting with classroom management plans. Alumnus J knew the key was in those relationships and understood they needed to be established first since it would determine the tone for the entire year. Alumnus F also pointed to building relationships for her successful classroom management style. With a different circumstance to exercise the same concept, Alumnus E shared how she learned the importance of building relationships with her students in a virtual classroom setting

during the COVID-19 pandemic. She described how intentional she had to be with every student joining her virtual classes' every day. Alumnus E's experience rings true with AMLE (2010) that stated teachers need to intentionally address individuals, not groups, and act as an advocate for students' learning.

Research question two determined, not what was taught in the middle school education program, but how invitational leadership principles were being taught? This question focused on the use of tools and processes for teaching, not the content. After analysis of the qualitative data, there was evidence of three methods used consistently in the program. These methods included role modeling, collaborative work, and field experiences.

Role Modeling

Both the faculty and alumni participants voiced their belief that the behaviors and practices the faculty role modeled in the program was a strength. According to research, this is a key factor for preparatory programs (Juarez et al., 2008). With similar perceptions, both Faculty A and D spoke to the importance of showing young teachers how to teach in a middle school classroom and how to be leaders in an educational setting. Faculty A stated, "...a lot of it is modeling the things that we think they should be doing…," indicating a focus on the methods and actions of a teacher while guiding a class of learners. This is paramount since the future teachers in a preparatory program will serve as role models themselves for their middle school students (Gerrick, 1999).

The alumni shared in their focus groups about the lessons they learned in their courses by watching their instructors. Alumni N and H both believed their role as a student was to examine the role of a teacher. Alumnus N shared her inner thoughts as she

would sit in class and think, "...this is how she's doing it so that's maybe something I should do." While expressing his perspective, Alumnus H identified role modeling as his biggest take-away from the program when he said, "...what I learned most about was how to teach by leading from UCM."

Instructional modeling was not the only mention of role modeling shared by the alumni groups. Alumnus J watched how well the faculty worked together and mirrored that in building the professional relationships in his career. Another lesson the faculty modeled was to be inclusive of everybody. Purkey and Novak (2016) spoke of the intentionality of faculty being accepting of all students and allowing them to be safely themselves. Alumnus I provided a first-hand experience with this from when she was a student in the program. Although she was much older in age than the traditional college student was, she knew she was part of the team and said, "...I'm sure that's because of the way the teachers' role modeled for them." This is an example of why teachers' role model unconditional acceptance and encourage appropriate social interactions amongst students. For this to be possible, teachers should engage with their students and learn about their diversities and uniqueness (Monahan, 2017). Alumnus N took notice. "You guys showed me you need to show interest in your students."

Teachable moments are another way of role modeling. When the alumni shared personal stories about how faculty interacted with them while they were struggling or supported them through bad circumstances, they always concluded with a comment about how that created such an impact that they still carry that experience with them and reflect on it when faced with a student in crisis. In their focus groups, Alumnus L shared about assignment modifications for a surgery during the semester, Alumnus K had a problem

with an assignment being a minute past the deadline for submitting, and Alumnus M

appreciated the faculty supporting him through times when he felt he could not commit to

his role as a student. These participants all valued the role modeling of the faculty for

how to meet a student's needs. With the same amount of care, the faculty role modeled

the handling of their students' personal issues. Alumnus F was touched when a faculty

member was willing to sit while she cried through a personal issue and Alumnus H

appreciated the excused class time while attending a friend's funeral. These stories were

being shared long after they occurred but with no less emotion in the retelling. These

situations illustrate the impact of teachers on their students, and the lasting impression the

faculty had on these young teachers in a moment not replicated through a curricular

lesson.

Collaborative Learning

As a part of role modeling an inviting learning environment, the faculty

incorporated class activities that required group interaction. Research suggested small,

safe groups are the optimal method for encouraging input from every student (Eccles et

al., 1993). Explaining the use of cooperative learning and activities in the education

courses, Faculty A declared the faculty "is modeling what we should see in the middle

school classroom." As an example of the faculty's intentional inclusion of this learning

format, one of the course syllabi, Document 5, specifically states the goal to teach

students "how to design cooperative learning structures to promote middle level students'

critical thinking, social, and problem-solving skills." A statement from Alumnus J

supported this when she credited one of the faculty members for having new cooperative

activities and learning skills applied to a middle level classroom. Both Alumni L and N

commented on the frequency of group projects and Faculty C pointed out the best way to develop leadership skills is "by having students do so many collaborative work projects."

Another benefit supported by research for this type of learning is the positive classroom culture. When inviting teachers establish a safe learning community where students are comfortable, they can explore each other's differences and include everyone (Bailey, 2005; Peters, 2006). A comment from Alumnus M indicated his understanding of this dynamic. "We all had our differences, but we could all still collaborate and that's what I think was good about pairings and groups and trying with different people." As an exhibit of these collaborative experiences while in the program, Alumnus G shared a question asked of her in a job interview. She reported they asked, "...how do I view cooperative learning and how would I incorporate it into my classroom." She explained how her exposure to this concept helped her answer the questions confidently and credited it for securing her current teaching position.

Field Experience

The faculty in the middle school program understood how important role modeling is for preparing future middle school teachers. They also understood the most beneficial training comes when the students step out of the university classroom and into real experiences. Faculty C supported a "personal, hands-on, engaged experience," and deemed it important for students to experience to new understandings. Faculty A placed importance on how these opportunities offer the students a shared experience allowing peer support.

One of the features of the middle school program is the field placement for three semesters prior to student teaching. Local, public middle schools host these visits. These

opportunities are valuable to the training of future middle school teachers as Faculty D pointed out that experience is what moves learning forward even if they leave with "just a small taste" of a middle level classroom. It was this small taste when Alumnus N started to feel like she was transitioning from being a student to becoming a teacher. She described a moment when she realized, "Oh, my gosh, next year I have to teach!" These eye-opening field experiences supported and gave future educators a glimpse of authentic middle level teaching and learning before student teaching (Allen & McEwin, 2001; DeMink-Carthew & Bishop, 2017; Marchitello & Trinidad, 2019).

In addition, class field trips organized by the faculty are valuable. Aware of the tendency for preparatory programs to place students in schools with a less diverse student population (Marchitello & Trinidad, 2019), Faculty C regularly set up trips for students to visit schools with more diversity than the local schools that traditionally host field placements. In addition, as the facilitator for the LEAD program, Faculty C provided student officers of the organization with the opportunity to attend national diversity conferences. Alumni F and L described attending these conferences as pivotal in their awareness and knowledge of inclusivity in the classroom. They believed it made them better teachers for middle level learners.

Student teaching is always the big "test" before becoming a certified teacher. Essential due to the development of necessary skills, this final semester is when students apply their training. Alumnus M identified that realization when he shared, "Oh, gosh. I'm the one in charge. I have to take over." There is no substitute for collaboration with master middle school teachers and genuine interactions with middle school students (DeMink-Carthew & Bishop, 2017).

The 5 Ps

Research question three collected quantitative data and measured for difference in perceptions between program alumni and currently enrolled students. After analysis of the data, the ranking of people and policies was the highest and second highest influence on the culture of the program, but a caveat existed because they switched between the groups. The current students' ranked people first followed by policies, while the alumni ranked policies first and people next. Experiences of each group of participants can possibly attribute to this difference. Students ranked people the highest because they are currently in the middle school program and have close relationships with their peers and the faculty. The alumni of the program have distance from their time in the program and may have lost some of the personal connection to their peer group or faculty. These current circumstances could also explain the rank for policies. Where alumni ranked policies higher than people, their perception of the policies influence on the program have a greater importance now that they are practicing in their own middle school classrooms. Because in schools, the impact of following polices is important. In comparison, current students ranked policies below people because their current experience is with the people in the program. Although they perceived the policies as impactful, they used a student lens as opposed to the teacher lens of the alumni.

These same two principles of people and policies, plus programs comprised the ranked top three areas and the three principles that showed a significant difference in perception. The alumni group showed a higher mean than the current students and this could be a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The students that completed the survey began their first semester in the program in the fall semester of 2020. To lessen the

spread of the corona virus, the university put protocols in place that included no field experiences, no field trips, no in-person group work, seating six feet apart in classrooms, and face masks had to be always worn on campus. Most classes moved to an online format. This may have had an overall negative influence on their experience and explained the lower mean compared to the alumni that had fond memories of the program and the principles that create the program's culture.

The other two principles of processes and places and were ranked respectively at the bottom by both groups and did not show a significant difference in perception between the groups. Again, the alumni did have a higher mean in these two areas compared to the current students.

Conclusions

In response to research question one, a conclusion is that both the faculty and the alumni perceived all five principles of invitational leadership are being taught in the middle school education program. The teaching of these principles was through the intentional efforts of the faculty to build inviting, inclusive relationships with their students. The faculty also role modeled respectful relationships with their colleagues and encouraged safe, peer relationships between students.

In response to research question two, a conclusion is that the faculty of the middle school education program used role modeling, collaborative learning, and field experience to create an intentionally inviting environment. With an emphasis on the process of teaching students in the program how to be inviting teachers, the faculty intentionally role modeled best practices, created small, safe learning groups, and incorporated relevant field experiences outside the university classroom.

In response to research question three, a conclusion is that yes, there is a significant difference in the perception of program alumni and the students currently enrolled in the program regarding people, policies, and programs. Conversely, there is not a significant difference in the perception regarding processes and places. Perhaps the lower mean scores for the current student participants can be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic and the negative impact university protocols had on the perceptions of this group.

Recommendations

Based on the existing research and data collected in this study, recommendations are made for both practices in the middle school education program and for further research studies for invitational leadership.

Recommendations for Practice

First, the program needs make an intentional effort to include specific diversity training to all students. Added should be at least one required course in Diversity and Social Justice to the program of study for middle school education majors framed within the tenets of invitational leadership. This will broaden student awareness and knowledge in terms of the impact to various types of diverse populations in our society and thus, our nation's schools. This is the foundation for defining the goals of invitational leadership.

Next, the program needs to build trauma informed care understandings and activities into the curriculum. Understanding that diversity is more than demographics, middle school teachers need to be aware of how to connect with all students, including those from traumatic situations. When teachers are invitational leaders, intentionally they

know their students well they can meet their individual needs to feel welcome and safe in the learning environment.

In addition, the program's faculty needs to be intentional by coordinating field experiences and field trips to middle schools outside the local geographic area. Exposure to classrooms with diverse middle school populations will provide authentic practice for new teachers to develop inviting practices and a safe learning environment for all middle school students.

Additionally, the program's faculty needs to be intentional in identifying and applying invitational leadership skills in the college classroom. Responses from study participants showed a heavy reliance on trusting what the faculty was doing. There was no mention of the teachers pointing out what they were doing, why they were doing it, and how it would benefit them in a middle school classroom. The transference of methods for teaching adults to teaching middle school students is not always apparent to young professionals, so intentional inviting behaviors should occur.

Finally, the program needs intentional recruiting efforts of students from diverse backgrounds. As our classrooms fill with diversity of varying types, the teachers should represent these populations as well. By visiting high schools and talking with students about the impact their personal stories could have on middle school students can accomplish this challenge.

Recommendations for Scholarship

Research on the effect of implicit bias of the leader on invitational leadership needs to transpire. When a teacher is unaware of their biases, those become a variable and possible obstacle for creating a safe, inclusive learning environment for all

students. This study could be conducted from the perspective of a Caucasian, Christian, cisgender teacher's implicit bias or perhaps from the perspective of a teacher from an underrepresented population and how they fulfill the invitational leadership principles and tenants with students from differing backgrounds including Caucasian, Christian, cisgender students. In the following section will be the presentation given to the middle school preparatory program.

Presentation

THE EXAMINATION OF A MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHER PREPARATORY PROGRAM THROUGH THE LENS OF INVITATIONAL LEADERSHIP

1

INTRODUCTION

2

More than 50% of children
under the age of one year are non-white
(U.S. Census Bureau)

61% of LGBTQA+ students
age 13-17 report being harassed at school because of their identity
(Human Rights Center)

40% suburban / 67% urban
middle school students have been a victim of violence
(Education Law Center)

3

"

"Teachers consistently report working with diverse learners as one of the most challenging aspects of their work…."

Rowan, Bourke, L'Estrange, Brownlee, Ryan, Walker, and Churchward (2021)

4

Problem of Practice

- Teacher preparatory programs are graduating novice teachers that are unprepared for diverse classrooms.

- Invitational leadership skills can help support all students but educators are unaware of how invitational leadership principles can address social justice in schools.

5

"

"Very few systematic reviews… have focused explicitly on questions relating to how teacher education can best prepare future teachers to work with learners identified as diverse"

Rowan, Bourke, L'Estrange, Brownlee, Ryan, Walker, and Churchward (2021)

6

Existing Literature Gap

Due to the rapid growth in classroom diversity, a gap in the literature has developed between traditionally effective teacher training and the rising need for culturally responsive educators prepared to meet the needs of a changing student population.

7

CONCEPTUAL and THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

8

Social Justice Theory

- equitable education for all students.
- focused on the learner, not the curriculum
- beneficial for all students, especially those from underserved and marginalized backgrounds

9

"We only have to look at
who is in our prisons (predominantly men of color),
who are the poor (predominantly women, children, and folks of color),
who are predominantly at the bottom of the economic hierarchy
(women, children, and folks of color),
who have the worst paying jobs,
who cleans the hotel rooms and
who stays in them,
who gets bullied the most (girls, feminine boys, and LGBT students),
who commits suicide at a higher rate (LGBT students),
whose school achievement is the lowest (students from low income
homes and students of color),
who lives within the worst housing and gets the worst health care (low
income families and families of color)
and on and on to see the inequity and injustice." (p. 152)

10   Rodríguez, Chambers, González, and Scheurich (2010)

Invitational Leadership Theory

- grounded in respect

- emphasis on collaboration and acceptance of differences

- student-centered with equal opportunities for all learners

- respectful relationships between every member of community

- an intentionally welcoming school culture invites everyone is to be successful

11

METHODS

12

Study Setting

- University of Central Missouri
- College of Education
  - Middle School Education Program
- Warrensburg, Missouri

13

Participants

- faculty members in the middle school education program
- alumni of the program currently teaching middle school
- students currently enrolled in the middle school program

14

Data Collection Tools

- individual interviews with faculty members
- focus group discussions with alumni of the program
- document analysis of course syllabi submitted by faculty
- survey completed by alumni and currently enrolled students in the program

15

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

16

Results for RQ 1

Which invitational leadership principles (Care, Respect, Trust, Optimism, and Intention) are being taught by university faculty in the Middle School Teacher Education Program as perceived by the program's faculty and alumni?

For all five of the principles, data showed their teaching in the program through the practice of building relationships.

17

Results for RQ 2

How are the university faculty ensuring the most intentionally inviting environment using the Five Ps: people, places, policies, programs, and processes?

Identified 3 main methods used by the faculty:

- Role Modeling
- Collaborative Learning
- Field Experience

18

Results for RQ 3

Is there a difference between the perceptions of Middle School Teacher Education undergraduate students and alumni as to how the middle school preparatory program use the 5 P's (people, processes, places, policies, and programs) towards influencing the overall culture of the program to make it invitational?

5Ps of Invitational Leadership	Current Students		Alumni		t	P	df
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation			
	n=11		n=38				
People	4.45	0.276	4.62	0.184	2.066	0.048	30
Processes	4.17	0.529	4.54	0.397	1.577	0.137	14
Places	4.11	0.427	4.21	0.301	0.724	0.477	22
Policies	4.44	0.251	4.68	0.071	2.422	0.032	12
Programs	4.25	0.363	4.60	0.075	2.516	0.027	12

Note: n=49 participants, *p<.05*

19

IMPLICATIONS

20

Findings for RQ 1

Which invitational leadership principles (Care, Respect, Trust, Optimism, and Intention) are being taught by university faculty in the Middle School Teacher Education Program as perceived by the program's faculty and alumni?

It was found that all of the principles of invitational leadership are taught in the middle school program. According to Williams (2012), teachers that are invitational leaders use intentionality in their development of caring relationships and a safe learning environment while filling the role of student advocate. Both the faculty and alumni addressed the teachings and experiences in the program as positive and impactful for future middle school educators. It was also emphasized by all participants how integral the building of relationships was in the success of the program.

21

Findings for RQ 2

How are the university faculty ensuring the most intentionally inviting environment using the Five Ps: people, places, policies, programs, and processes?

Role modeling
- Both groups of participants discussed the role modeling of the faculty as a strength of the program.
- This is a key factor for preparatory programs (Juarez et al., 2008) since the students in a preparatory program will serve as role models themselves for their middle school students (Gerrick, 1999).

Collaborative learning
- The faculty incorporated partnering activities, group projects, and cooperative learning structures within the learning environment.
- Small, safe groups are the optimal method for encouraging input from every student (Eccles et al., 1993).

Field experience
- Students are assigned field placements, attend field visits, and enroll in student teaching as required components.
- These experiences give future educators a realistic engagement with middle level teaching and learning before student teaching (Allen & McEwin, 2001; DeMink-Carthew & Bishop, 2017; Marchitello & Trinidad, 2019).

22

Findings for RQ 3

Is there a difference between the perceptions of Middle School Teacher Education undergraduate students and alumni as to how the middle school preparatory program use the 5 P's (people, processes, places, policies, and programs) towards influencing the overall culture of the program to make it invitational?

Significant difference
- people
- policies
- programs

No significant difference
- processes
- places

23

RECOMMENDATIONS

24

Recommendations

- **Training:** Include specific diversity training to all students. Add at least one required course in Diversity and Social Justice to the program of study for middle school education majors.

- **Awareness:** Build trauma informed awareness into the curriculum.

- **Diversity:** Coordinate field experiences in middle schools outside the local geographic area to provide classrooms with diverse student populations.

- **Connections:** Identify invitational leadership skills when they are being incorporated in the college classroom to show students the connection between action and intention when creating an invitational classroom.

- **Recruitment:** Intentional recruitment of high school students from diverse backgrounds to enter teacher training programs.

25

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SECTION FIVE

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THE EXAMINATION OF A MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHER PREPARATORY

PROGRAM THROUGH THE LENS OF INVITATIONAL LEADERSHIP

The Examination of a Middle School Teacher Preparatory Program

Through the Lens of Invitational Leadership

Abstract

Studies have been conducted on the development of adolescent students, the leadership style of middle school teachers, and the diversity of student. However, individual studies have not addressed the complex skills necessary for an effective middle school teacher. Today's teachers face rapid developmental changes of adolescents, increased expectations, and face the challenge of being unprepared to meet the needs of diverse students. Preparing these teachers needs to begin as early as possible in preparatory programs. By building programs specific for middle school educators, universities can prepare teachers to be inclusive and culturally aware. Therefore, this study used a social justice lens to examine invitational leadership principles in a middle school education program at a public university. Using the principles and domains of invitational leadership identified by Purkey and Novak (2016), the researcher focused specifically on the inclusion of caring, respect, trust, optimism, and intentionality in the program as well as the use of people, places, policies, programs, and processes for creating an inviting culture in the program. The results concluded the program was effective at including the principles and domains of invitational leadership by role modeling, building relationships within the community of learners, and offering collaborative opportunities to the students.

Keywords: invitational leadership; teacher preparation; intentional

Introduction

In a society where power has traditionally been held by white, heterosexual, non-disabled men (Johnson, 2018), the 21st century has seen a shift in the awareness of this imbalance (Howard & Ulferts, 2020; Mullen, 2010). Yet awareness is often interpreted as resolve, especially in our teacher education programs (Juarez, Smith, & Hayes, 2008). Novice teachers are graduating unprepared for the diversity of students filling their classrooms. Invitational leadership skills can help support all students, but a study conducted by Martin and Miller (2017) discovered educators are unaware of how invitational leadership principles could address social justice in schools. The researchers posited this was due to the absence of these teachings in teacher and leadership preparatory programs (Martin & Miller, 2017).

The middle school culture would benefit from the principles of invitational leadership (Purkey & Novak, 2016; Walker & Martin, 2021). Youth at this level in their physical and emotional development are beginning to question and experiment with differing identities for themselves (Kay & Wolf, 2017). Whether openly or secretly experimenting with self-expression that challenges the normative, middle school students are in desperate need of acceptance and support **(**Hayes, Ryan, & Zseller, 1994; Kay & Wolf, 2017). The lucky ones find this through family and friends. Other students struggle with language barriers, culture shock, or a disability that marks them as marginalized in our society. These middle school age students need the safety of an intentional caring and inviting classroom of a culturally responsive teacher (Rowan, et al, 2021). Thus, the responsibility to prepare these teachers falls on the preparatory

programs, and this investigation will examine the practices of such a program seeking to provide effective culturally responsive teaching practices to its candidates.

Materials and Methods

A mixed methods research design was utilized in this examination of the University of Central Missouri's middle school teacher education program. The following research questions guided this study:

1. Which invitational leadership principles (Care, Respect, Trust, Optimism, and Intention) are being taught by university faculty in the middle school teacher education program as perceived by the program's faculty and alumni?

2. How are the university faculty ensuring the most intentionally inviting environment using the 5 Ps: People, Places, Policies, Programs, and Processes?

3. Is there a difference between the perceptions of middle school teacher education undergraduate students and alumni on how the middle school preparatory program's use of the 5 P's (People, Places, Policies, Programs, and Processes) influences the overall culture of the program?

Study Setting

The University of Central Missouri (UCM) is a public university in Warrensburg, Missouri. Warrensburg is a suburban community with a population of 20,000 (Visit Warrensburg, n.d.). Founded in 1871 as a teaching college, UCM now has a student enrollment of 10,000 in its four academic schools offering 150 undergraduate programs (Fast Facts, 2021). The Middle School-Junior High Education program is the focus of this inquiry. Offering specialized training for

teaching grades 5-9, pre-service teachers can earn their Missouri teaching certification in seven different subject areas (Middle School Education, 2021).

Participants

This study included the four university professors in the middle school program and were teaching undergraduate courses and/or supervising field. Another group of participants were the currently enrolled undergraduate students including student teachers as well as the alumni of the program. The researcher through their assigned university email address invited all students currently enrolled in the program. Participation was voluntary and not connected to any academic progress in the program. Alumni of the middle school program who were currently employed as middle school teachers were identified with assistance from all the faculty members of the program.

Data Collection Tools

The researcher was a faculty member in the middle school program of this study thus, was positioned as an insider for all data collection methods.

Interviews

To collect qualitative data on the perceptions of the middle school program faculty on which invitational leadership tenets were being taught and role modeled, a semi-structured interview was conducted with each faculty member. The open-ended questions asked each participant to reflect specifically on their instructional methods and to describe any intentional practices for including invitational leadership principles in the course materials or as role modeling for the students.

Focus Groups

Two focus groups were assembled for qualitative data collection. The participants were additional alumni of the middle school program that were serving as contracted classroom teachers in area schools. This method allowed the researcher the opportunity to hear their personal stories describing their experiences in the program and how, if at all, it has influenced their classroom leadership style.

The open-ended questions that guided the conversation allowed participants to consider their own experiences and interpretations of the teaching methods and learning activities used by the middle school program faculty to incorporate or role model invitational leadership principles.

Documents

Each course in the middle school program had a syllabus defining the student learning outcomes to be achieved during the course. An examination of those documents looked for invitational leadership principles embedded in the program's core standards.

Quantitative Data Collection

Quantitative data was collected using an online survey format. This tool probed currently enrolled students and the alumni of the program about their perceptions of the invitational leadership tenants being taught and role modeled in the middle school program at UCM. A link for an anonymous, open-ended questionnaire was sent individually to the students' university assigned email address. Completion of the questionnaire was voluntary and did not influence a student's standing in the middle school program.

This 50-question survey used a 5-point Likert-scale to assess the perceived presence of the five tenets of invitational leadership: people, places, policies, programs, and processes (Smith & Purkey, 2015), through the principles of intentionality, caring, optimism, respect, and trust, collectively referred to as I-CORT by Purkey and Novak (2016). The survey was to address the culture in the middle school education program at UCM. The responses from the students and alumni were compared to each other to find similarities and differences in perception. Survey responses were confidential, and the identities of the participants were kept anonymous.

Data analysis

The researcher conducted all qualitative and quantitative data analysis for this study.

Qualitative

Audio recordings with individual responses anonymously labeled were transcribed. From the transcripts, frequent and common descriptive phrases or adjectives used by the participants were coded and organized in terms of research questions. With this coding, the researcher was able to identify and compare the perceptions of the faculty, the graduates of the program, as well as the current students. Similarly, this data was compared to the evidence uncovered during the document analysis.

Quantitative

Quantitative data collected from the survey used an analysis of variance method (ANOVA) for research question three to determine if a significant statistical difference in each of the five principles of invitational leadership, or dependent variables, existed

between the independent variables, the undergraduate students and program alumni. The ANOVA is a parametric statistical test that allows for testing of more than one dependent variable in the same analysis, thus the use of the ANOVA test was appropriate for data analysis (Field, 2017). With the students sorted into the two predetermined groups, each score for each subscale or principle was evaluated for significant differences.

Results

Research Question One

Which invitational leadership principles (Care, Respect, Trust, Optimism, and Intention) are being taught by university faculty in the middle school teacher education program as perceived by the program's faculty and alumni?

Care

Considered by Purkey and Novak (2015) to be a prerequisite for supporting students, caring was mentioned by both faculty and alumni. Faculty C spoke of the faculty. "I would say that the vast majority of our faculty seeks to establish a mutual care and concern with our students." She also praised the middle school program for caring about all students and added the goal for this caring:

I think that our program is probably among the to ensure that students are able to

be the weird and wacky humans that they are because we want them to be

accepting too weird and wacky humans that are middle schoolers.

Faculty D expressed a similar sentiment when describing the faculty. "I would say that we do have the best of intentions of our students at heart."

In analyzing documents, the program's caring was described in the COE's mission statement as "faculty provides support and service… in meeting present and

future challenges by developing communities that learn...." This statement is included as part of the COE's course syllabus template and was found on all eight syllabi analyzed for this study.

Respect

Monohan (2017) stated respect is shown through the acknowledgment and acceptance of each other's differences and diversities. Faculty D believed this is taught in the program by the way faculty interact with each other. "Showing your students that you can be friends with your colleagues, I think that is huge." Alumni J and F both felt the interaction of the teachers is a benefit to the program. Alumnus J shared:

> We were able to work together and communicate well with each other and I think that that's definitely something that was very visible amongst the staff at UCM, especially within the middle school department. They worked really well together and communicated and were able to rather handle differences of ideas very professionally and I think that that kind of made all the difference.

Alumnus F then added to the conversation:

> They were all unique and had something else to bring to the table. It wasn't like a cookie-cutter like they all did the same thing or acted the same way, by any means. But they all got along and brought their own thing, which was helpful.

Alumnus K also noted, "I thought you guys were always respectful and nice to each other."

Faculty C gave an example of how she purposefully shows her students respect through class discussions and assignments. She tells her students, "I don't need to change your mind, I need you to be informed in what you do."

Alumnus F experienced respect from a faculty member first-hand and described it as, "The first time really, in my post-high school life that I had been respected by somebody in that way, especially in a professional setting like that."

With a lasting impression, Alumnus M admitted he still respects the faculty's influence when he reflects on his own classroom practices:

> I think looking back, like, "How would they do this?" and the kind of the stuff I do in the classroom sometimes is, "How would you guys react to a situation or maybe some of the poor choices that I've made or maybe some of the good activities that we did." I tend to look back on those things pretty regularly."

Trust

Teachers can build trust by role modeling respectful relationships (Monahan, 2017). In her role, Faculty C considered it a show of her trustworthiness when her students are able to open up to her and ask her for professional advice:

> I am privileged to hear that message because they know that there are faculty members who are trustworthy and that can help them navigate. So I occasionally get questions about, "This happened, how should I handle it?" and I'm able to say, "You know, if that happened to me, this is what I would express to that person."

While a student in the program, Alumnus F felt a level of trust with a faculty member that helped her through a rough time. "I had really good moments with her and I feel like now, honestly, I could go to her for anything even though we don't necessarily talk every day or anything like that. Just really good, really good relationships."

Anderson (2019) explained teachers could also provide opportunities for students to practice nonjudgmental interactions with their peers while they share unique, diverse ideas. Alumnus L recalled practical advice from a faculty member. "I think it was [Faculty C] who said, "Most of the time, when you show someone a little bit of yourself, that's how you're going to get to know people.""

Alumnus F remembered teamwork projects forced them to trust themselves and their peers' roles in the success of the group:

> I specifically remember when we were doing units of instruction in one of our classes or something, it was laid out for us, like, we need to write down what each person is doing, and everybody has to have an equal role or an equitable role at least.

Optimism

Optimistic teachers invite their students to explore their full potential (Purkey & Novak, 2015). Faculty C believed this is demonstrated in the middle school program:

> Dialogue with students at multiple points in their journey with us. Give them the opportunity to reflect, literally to reflect themselves as well as to have those supportive conversations and dialogues about things that we think might help them as teachers.

Faculty C promises to push her students. "If you do what I ask you to, you're going to do well because you're going to learn." Faculty A expressed his personal feelings for his students' success:

I feel that they have every opportunity to be successful. We're not just looking to reward the top students and cut the rest. We want everybody to be as good as they can be. So, I think that's a strength of the program.

As a former student of the program, Alumnus J shared how she applied what she personally experienced from the middle school faculty to her own practice. "I would say that the staff gives their students grace, so much grace, and I think that that's super. I mean, that's the biggest thing that I pass on to my students."

Intention

When a teacher acts with intention, they purposefully create opportunities for students to engage with others in sharing ideas, opinions, and experiences (Monahan, 2017). Faculty B described the programs' intentional efforts. "Through cooperative learning and relationships, we are creating a community of learners." Faculty D encourages her students to use every opportunity as a learning opportunity for middle school students:

Every student is different. You have to be prepared to meet students where they are, whether that is on the highest of levels or the lowest of levels. It is up to you to take responsibility for their understanding of your expectations of them. They also are in a very weird place in their lives developmentally, so you are going to be everything from a counselor to a nurse, to a mom, to a parent, to a friend, appropriately, and you just have to have the mindset that every day is going to be different, whether you want it to be structured and the same.

Both Faculty D and Faculty C expressed their purposeful selection of materials as a way to ensure every student can see themselves in that work. Faculty D explained her use of intentionality through a classroom activity:

> I do an activity before every class called 'Take Sides'. I would read, not a controversial statement, but just a statement about the textbook. Then the students had to go on one side of the classroom if they agree and one side of the classroom if they disagree, and then they had to intermingle with themselves and decide why they agree with the statement or why they disagree. That gave my students an opportunity to work with people that they didn't necessarily choose to work with. It's more based on opinion and thoughts and I think that that really helps with including all students as well.

Also utilized in her courses, Faculty D selects content-based fiction to teach her future teachers how to be intentional with their middle school students:

> Divided into content areas, I had them read content-based fiction. All of those books, we really try to make a multicultural activity, so we can lead our students to selecting literature in their classrooms that every kiddo can see themselves in. I think that's very important right now, especially in our ever-changing society that a student can pick up a book and they can find themselves in it.

Alumnus K felt the expressed purpose of the middle school program was to learn how to build intentional relationships with students. He shared, "I thought we were taught to be very inclusive of everyone and even more inclusive for some." He continued:

In [Faculty B's] class, it was all about teaching the students that weren't like everyone else. I thought that was a big part and that one's kind of stuck with me. So, yeah, I think we have really been taught well to include everyone.

Alumnus M admitted it was not until after he had his own classroom that he finally understood why the program faculty required student data research for some assignments:

I think the big thing for me was, I didn't understand why we had to include demographics. I was just not aware. I was like, "Why are we having to do this?" I was like, "We just need to make sure we care about people. That's all that really matters."

Research Question Two

How are the university faculty ensuring the most intentionally inviting environment using the 5 Ps: People, Places, Policies, Programs, and Processes?

People

In an inviting school, students are valued and made to feel capable through the positive relationships built with others (Purkey & Novak, 2015). Students are invited to be a part of the learning community (Monahan, 2017). A course objective listed on a syllabus, Document 5, served as an example of the goal for educators to prioritize people in their classrooms. It stated, "The teacher candidate will develop an understanding of individual and group motivation and behavior to create a positive learning environment that encourages student engagement, positive social interaction, and self-motivation."

When sharing their experiences in the middle school program, the alumni agreed that the faculty forged strong relationships with the students as well as within their student group. Alumnus M remembered, "Relationships were pushed from day

one. That was always the most important thing." Then Alumnus N commented on the

relationships she established while in the program:

> I have people that I still talk to consistently from the education department. When
>
> we did assigned group projects, I was never like, "Oh, I'm stuck with them." It
>
> was always, "Okay. Cool. I'm working with them today." That was really cool.

Alumnus L agreed the group work played a major role in establishing bonds with her

classmates. "Once we were with our little group, that's when I definitely started feeling

closer to people and like I really knew them for sure."

> Faculty D, who serves as the social media coordinator for the COE, also

mentioned the relationships students build with their peers while in the program:

> There are definitely relationships built in our classes that are unique and
>
> lifelong. Being a social media person, I get pictures and things sent. When we
>
> were having students send in their job announcement posts, there were girls on
>
> vacation together on the beach, announcing their jobs, and they weren't friends
>
> before our class.

Alumnus H shared how he believes his experience as a student helped build relationships

with his own students. "I definitely built really good relationships and I definitely

learned a lot of that at UCM."

> When the researcher asked of the focus group, "What are some of the main things

you feel you gained from the middle school program that you have incorporated into your

classrooms?" Alumnus N immediately responded with, "Building relationships." Then

Alumnus K joked by adding, "Yeah, absolutely. Relationships has been the number one

thing. It's all about relationship."

Places

All students deserve a learning environment where they feel safe and supported established in the classroom through the intentional relationships built with all the members of the group (Anderson, 2017). As a reflection of this, Alumnus K emphasized, "You've got to have a good relationship. You've got to have a good environment, not necessarily with your students, but even with your peers." Analysis of Document 2, a course syllabus, uncovered an objective for how the middle school program is informing its education students to "understand the teacher's role in creating a learning environment that encourages positive social interaction." Similarly, on a different syllabus, Document 9, the course description included the statement, "the classroom can offer refuge and hope for mid-level learners who continue to struggle." Faculty A believes the program is sending the right message to its students. "I think it's stressed that it's important that they create a positive learning environment."

Alumnus L stated she felt the program faculty created a welcoming environment that she could duplicate in her own classroom. "They just felt comfortable. I don't even know exactly what they did. I think it was more like creating like that welcoming environment for the students." Alumnus G and Alumnus I, both non-traditional students when they were in the program, appreciated the effort from the faculty made to connect with them. Alumnus G shared her experience:

> They made me feel included. I went into school full-time. I was married. I had
> three kids already. I graduated 20 years before that from high school. So I was
> not sure what I was walking into and expected to see a bunch of 18-year-old,
> barely out-of-high-school kids. But not only the faculty, but also the group that I

was with, really did include me in stuff and I didn't feel like the old person that

was just there. All of them were very welcoming and definitely made that time in

my life easier.

Then Alumnus I added to the conversation:

I agree very much. I walked in feeling, "I'm just going to get through. I'm going

to get this degree so I can go to work and expecting to be very uncomfortable with

being the age of everybody's moms. I'd say, 30 minutes into the first class, I just

knew I was at home. All the students, not just the teachers, but also all my fellow

classmates, I felt like a teammate with 18 to 22-year-olds. I felt like I was part of

their team and not some outsider.

Speaking to a question about a positive learning environment, Alumnus N and Alumnus

M shared common memories of the fun they had in their classes while in the

program. Alumnus N explained, "I always felt comfortable there. Those were my

favorite classes because I knew I was always going to have a good time. I was going to

learn something, but I was going to have a good time."

Policies

Whether written or implied a policy is created to be fair for all students yet

inviting teachers to consider special circumstances and diverse needs of the students

when enforcing these rules and procedures (Monahan, 2017; Purkey & Novak,

2015). When discussing the policies for student attendance and late or missing

assignments, the faculty are unanimous in their belief that future teachers are accountable

for getting to class and meeting assignment deadlines.

First, addressing the topic of attendance for students in the program, Faculty A shared, "My experience as a principal is, I want teachers who show up and I want teachers who have a sense of responsibility for their position. So, I want kids to show up to class."

Faculty C agreed with the professional expectation of attendance by sharing, "For me, attendance is expected, period. If something is going on in life and you can't be there, let me know, and my students have my cell phone number. They text me." She did address exceptions to this policy. "I do have students who have had health concerns. If I know what's happening, I can accommodate it, but I need to know what's happening." Faculty C continued by justifying an attendance policy for college students. "I feel it's really important to be there, because I also am a social constructivist, so I think we learn by doing and doing with others." When asked her perception of how students feel about this policy, Faculty A shared:

> I have not had any pushback from students about it, so I'm assuming that they find it to be fair. To me, "studenting" is your job, and you show up to work. I will say if I had students who did complain to me openly about the expectation that they attend my class, I would be concerned about their future employment.

On the topic of assignment due dates, faculty agreement about these policies came with individual anecdotes of when they personally accommodated students that needed the extra support. For example, Faculty C admitted, "While I have a stated policy, my reality is much more flexible. If I know what's happening, I can help."

Believing in role modeling for future teachers, Faculty A supported his practice by stating, "I think the reason that I have that policy is because when they are teachers, I want them to do that in their schools."

In support of teacher's having individual freedom with policies in their classroom, the alumni shared frustration with the enforcement of districtwide or building polices. Believing teachers should have student-focused policies, Alumnus L shared a personal experience while a student in the program:

> I remember you guys in the middle school, when I had problems or issues, you guys were willing to let me have some time. I had ankle surgery one year and I was out for a week, and I didn't want to do anything for another week and you guys were like, "You know what, no problem. Just get it to me." I had no problem.

Alumnus M had a similar experience with the policies in the program:

> I learned a lot of grace from you guys and taking that time, like things happen. I had a lot of stuff that happened in college where I was just like, "I'm not willing to do this right now." The fact that I had teachers that were willing to give me a break, I feel like grace is a big thing that I try to have in my classroom and just making sure that the students know, "I'm going to work with you. I'm going to help you out. Let's get caught up." Those kind of things happen all the time and I feel like that's because of the relationships and what my teachers did at UCM. So, thank you, guys.

Alumnus K believes in a concept taught by the faculty in the middle school program:

You guys told me, "What is the difference between an assignment that's turned in at 11:59 and one that's turned in at 12:01? There is none. There is no difference." So, in cases like that, I get it. Now, if it's two weeks late, that's different.

In the document analysis of all eight course syllabi, they all defined the faculty members' personal policy regarding, examinations, attendance, assignments, and late work. These four areas are required sections according to the COE's syllabus template, but the philosophy for how each policy is enforced may differ between the faculties.

Programs

Highly qualified instructors (Purkey & Novak, 2015) that can prepare their candidates to respond to diversity with awareness, acceptance, and action (Anderson, 2017) should teach education programs that train teachers to be invitational leaders. As an example of how the middle school program offers these highly qualified leaders, Faculty D spoke of the caliber of professional experiences brought to the education program:

> I think one of the biggest pros to our middle school program is that the majority is taught by people who have been there, and we've done it and we know how things work and we know what things don't. I do believe that in our classes, students see that we are innovative teachers, and we're working on programs, and we're ever changing our curriculum to meet the needs of our students now so they can mirror that when they're trying to meet the needs of their students in the future.

Faculty A intentionally role models his best practices for his students because when they are teachers, he explained, he wants them to do that in their classrooms:

My experience with teaching in the middle school classes and observing other professors teach in middle school classes is that it's partly curriculum, partly we know certain things we're going to talk about, but a lot of it is modeling the things that we think they should be doing. They need to see college professors doing the things that we expect them to do and I think you see that in the middle school program, modeling what we should see in the middle school classroom. So, I think we kind of teach by doing, not just by telling that they should do it.

In addition to highly qualified faculty, Martin and Miller (2017) suggested education training programs should equip their students to be culturally responsive and inclusive in their classrooms. A reflection of this recommendation is found in the COE's mission statement, Document 1, "The teacher education program prepares individuals as professional educators for an ever-changing, culturally diverse population." This statement is part of the COE's syllabus template and is included on all eight course syllabi analyzed for this study.

Supporting this mission, a course objective found in the syllabus, Document 3, stated, "Identify similarities and differences of desirable student activity programs for middle level education as they relate to the developmental stages of the transescent including emotional, social, physical, and intellectual growth."

Faculty A stated, "I do think it would be great if our students had more formal instruction in diversity and dealing with diverse students." Faculty C addressed how she incorporates diversity awareness in her courses:

In my classroom, I try to teach them to be respectful, to build relationships, to learn about different cultures and different ways of being in the world, and not

necessarily to prize their own experience or way of seeing over others. They

learn a lot about other cultures, but they learn the importance of representation in

the classroom.

Different from her peers in the response to inclusion and diversity taught in the program,

Faculty B highlighted the recent addition of trauma-informed care to the

curriculum. "That not only benefits our students with dealing with their own trauma, but

raises awareness of the impact of childhood trauma. Then they need to think about

developing their own professional safety net for their students."

Processes

The learning process in an invitational school is inclusive and collaborative in

nature (Purkey & Novak, 2016) and all students feel valued as members of the group

(Usher & Pajares, 2006). In the middle school program at UCM, the learning process for

the students is through the teaching process of the faculty. Alumnus H explained he

learned the most from the role modeling:

There was definitely a lot of role modeling at UCM. It was all a lot of

leadership. It was all really about role modeling how to do it. I took a lot from

the educators. I think it was a lot of role modeling and that's probably what I

learned most about was how to teach by leading from UCM.

By modeling teaching methods and learning strategies for future teachers to apply in their

own classroom, Alumnus J weighed in on this process:

[Faculty B] did an outstanding job at every time we did any kind of activity in

class, we did a different type of cooperative learning activity. It really gave us a

sound set of strategies that we could go and use in our classroom easily because it

was just that was so engrained into our classes. It was always, "We're going to go

over these skills and give you ideas on what you can use in your

classroom." That was probably the best thing. I really loved it.

Alumnus K also voiced a similar perspective of the relevant learning processes:

I think the way you did it, just not the simple fact that you did teach us, but the

way you did it was you practiced it with every assignment that we did. I think

every assignment, we had some group member, or we had some type of partner. I

think that was a good way to get to know people around you so you can become

comfortable with them. I think that started way back with the first class I had and

then it continued all the way throughout our classes. I think just modeling

it. Teaching how to teach through teaching, if that makes sense.

A comment from Faculty D supported the alumni's descriptions of the faculty's teaching

process as role modeling. "I think, just showing them how to be teachers is huge in

showing them how to be leaders, because that's what we are in the classroom."

Alumnus N described her realization that the faculty's teaching was a model for her

future role as an educator:

For me, it was a big jump to figure out I stopped being a student and was starting

to be a teacher in classes and viewing you guys as models like, "Okay. This is

how she's doing it so that's maybe something I should do."

Alumnus L quickly agreed with this perspective and then credited the field experience

component as a pivotal process in the program. "I would say the field experience. There

was definitely a switch for me like [Alumnus N] was talking about modeling after

professors and cooperating teachers. There were a couple things I directly borrowed or stole from you guys."

When discussing field experience required in the middle school program, Faculty C shared, "I think field experiences change things immensely because being able to physically engage with students really makes a world of difference." She continued to describe how she prepares her students for field experiences in diverse classrooms. "I openly talk to my students about transformative learning theory. When things happen that are uncomfortable, you can either ignore them or you can learn from them and refine your understanding of the world."

Research Question Three

Is there a difference between the perceptions of middle school teacher education undergraduate students and alumni on how the middle school preparatory program's use of the 5 P's (People, Places, Policies, Programs, and Processes) influences the overall culture of the program?

The researcher used an independent t-test to identify significant differences in perception between the two groups of participants regarding the tenants of invitational leadership taught in the program. Analysis of t-test data showed a significant difference in the areas of people, programs, and policies while found was no significant difference regarding places and processes.

Results for people show (students: M =4.45, SD =0.276; alumni: M =4.62, SD=0.184). Therefore, it is revealed that the difference between groups is statistically significant (t (30)=2.066, p =0.048). Results for programs show (students: M =4.25, SD=0.363; alumni: M =4.60, SD =0.075). Therefore, it is revealed that the difference

between groups is statistically significant (t (12)=2.516, p =0.027). Results for policies

show (students: M =4.44, SD =0.251; alumni: M =4.68, SD =0.071). Therefore, it is

revealed that the difference between groups is statistically significant (t (12)=2.422,

p=0.032). Results for places show (students: M =4.11, SD =0.427; alumni: M =4.21,

SD=0.301). Therefore, it is revealed that the difference between groups is not statistically

significant (t (22)=0.724, p =0.477). Results for processes show (students: M =4.17,

SD=0.529; alumni: M =4.54, SD =0.397). Therefore, it is revealed that the difference

between groups is not statistically significant (t (14)=1.577, p =0.137).

Discussion

As the qualitative data were analyzed to answer research, question one, a single

sentiment kept repeating in the responses from both the faculty and the program's

alumni: the importance of building relationships. When participants were asked about

their experience in the program, they all pointed to the importance placed on building

relationships with their future students. The principles of care, respect, trust, optimism,

and intentionality served as underpinning for the stories shared as evidence for the middle

school education program's priorities. The researcher found that, even though alumni

could not always articulate how the faculty taught these principles nor how they provided

a safe learning environment, they were positive the faculty did teach them because of the

relationships they remember being built between the faculty, between the students, and

between the faculty and students. The depth of relationships described by the alumni are

a result of the faculty making intentional efforts to role model the best way to teach

middle school students, not just lecture or assign a reading about it.

In regard to research question one, it was found that all of the principles of invitational leadership are taught in the middle school program. According to Williams (2012), teachers that are invitational leaders use intentionality in their development of caring relationships and a safe learning environment while filling the role of student advocate. Both the faculty and alumni addressed the teachings and experiences in the program as positive and impactful for future middle school educators. It was also emphasized by all participants; how integral the building of relationships was in the success of the program.

Research question two determined, not what was being taught in the middle school education program, but how invitational leadership principles were being taught. This question focused on the use of tools and processes for teaching, not the content. After analysis of the qualitative data, there was evidence of three methods used consistently in the program. These methods included role modeling, collaborative work, and field experiences. They will be discussed in the following section.

Role Modeling

Both the faculty and alumni participants voiced their belief that the behaviors and practices the faculty role modeled in the program was a strength. According to research, this is a key factor for preparatory programs (Juarez et al., 2008). With similar perceptions, both Faculty A and D spoke to the importance of showing young teachers how to teach in a middle school classroom and how to be leaders in an educational setting. Faculty A stated, "...a lot of it is modeling the things that we think they should be doing…," indicating a focus on the methods and actions of a teacher while guiding a

class of learners. This is paramount since the future teachers in a preparatory program will serve as role models themselves for their middle school students (Gerrick, 1999).

The alumni shared in their focus groups about the lessons they learned in their courses by watching their instructors. Alumni N and H both believed their role as a student was to examine the role of a teacher. Alumnus N shared her inner thoughts as she would sit in class and think, "...this is how she's doing it so that's maybe something I should do." While expressing his perspective, Alumnus H identified role modeling as his biggest take-away from the program when he said, "...what I learned most about was how to teach by leading from UCM."

Instructional modeling was not the only mention of role modeling shared by the alumni groups. Alumnus J watched how well the faculty worked together and mirrored that in building the professional relationships in his career. Another lesson the faculty modeled was to be inclusive of everybody. Purkey and Novak (2016) spoke of the intentionality of faculty being accepting of all students and allowing them to be themselves. Alumnus I provided a first-hand experience with this from when she was a student in the program. Although she was much older in age than the traditional college student was, she knew she was part of the team and said, "...I'm sure that's because of the way the teachers' role modeled for them." This is an example of why teachers' role model unconditional acceptance and encourage appropriate social interactions amongst students. In order for this to be possible, teachers should engage with their students and learn about their diversities and uniqueness (Monahan, 2017). Alumnus N took notice. "You guys showed me you need to show interest in your students."

Collaborative Learning

As a part of role modeling an inviting learning environment, the faculty incorporated class activities that required group interaction. Research suggested small, safe groups are the optimal method for encouraging input from every student (Eccles et al., 1993). Explaining the use of cooperative learning and activities in the education courses, Faculty A declared the faculty "is modeling what we should see in the middle school classroom." As an example of the faculty's intentional inclusion of this learning format, one of the course syllabi, Document 5, specifically states the goal to teach students "how to design cooperative learning structures to promote middle level students' critical thinking, social, and problem-solving skills.

Another benefit supported by research for this type of learning is the positive classroom culture. When inviting teachers establish a safe learning community where students are comfortable, they can explore each other's differences and include everyone (Bailey, 2005; Peters, 2006). A comment from Alumnus M indicated his understanding of this dynamic. "We all had our differences, but we could all still collaborate and that's what I think was good about pairings and groups and trying with different people."

Field Experience

The faculty in the middle school program understood how important role modeling is for preparing future middle school teachers. They also understood the most beneficial training comes when the students step out of the university classroom and into real experiences. Faculty C supported a "personal, hands-on, engaged experience," and deemed it important for students to be introduced to new experiences. Faculty A placed

importance on how these opportunities offer the students a shared experience allowing peer support.

One of the features of the middle school program is the field placement for three semesters prior to student teaching. Local, public middle schools host these visits as students. These opportunities are valuable to the training of future middle school teachers as Faculty D pointed out that experience is what moves learning forward even if they leave with "just a small taste" of a middle level classroom. It was this small taste when Alumnus N started to feel like she was transitioning from being a student to becoming a teacher. She described a moment when she realized, "Oh, my gosh, next year I have to teach!" These eye-opening field experiences are supported in the research to give future educators a glimpse of authentic middle level teaching and learning before student teaching (Allen & McEwin, 2001; DeMink-Carthew & Bishop, 2017; Marchitello & Trinidad, 2019).

The 5 Ps

Research question three collected quantitative data and measured for difference in perceptions between program alumni and currently enrolled students. After analysis of the data, it was found that the ranking of people and policies was perceived to have the highest and second highest influence on the culture of the program, but they were switched between the groups. The current students' ranked people first followed by policies while the alumni ranked policies first and people next as attributed to the experiences of each group of participants. Students ranked people the highest because they are currently in the middle school program and have close relationships with their peers and the faculty. The alumni of the program have distance from their time in the

program and may have lost some of the personal connection to their peer group or faculty. These current circumstances could also explain the rank for policies. Where alumni ranked policies higher than people, their perception of the policies influence on the program have a greater importance now that they are practicing in their own middle school classrooms. In comparison, current students ranked policies below people because their current experience is with the people in the program. Although they perceived the policies as impactful, they used a student lens as opposed to the teacher lens of the alumni.

These same two principles of people and policies, plus programs comprised the ranked top three areas and the three principles that showed a significant difference in perception. The alumni group showed a higher mean than the current students and this could be a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The students who completed the survey began their first semester in the program in the fall semester of 2020. To lessen the spread of the corona virus, the university put protocols in place that included no field experiences, no field trips, no in-person group work, seating six feet apart in classrooms, and face masks had to be always worn on campus. Most classes moved to an online format. This may have had an overall negative influence regarding their experience and explained the lower mean compared to the alumni that had fond memories of the program and the principles that create the program's culture.

The other two principles of processes and places and were ranked respectively at the bottom by both groups and did not show a significant difference in perception between the groups. Again, the alumni did have a higher mean in these two areas compared to the current students.

Conclusions

In response to research question one, it can be concluded from this study that both the faculty and the alumni perceived all five principles of invitational leadership are being taught in the middle school education program. The teaching of these principles were taught through the intentional efforts of the faculty to build inviting, inclusive relationships with their students. The faculty also role modeled respectful relationships with their colleagues and encouraged safe, peer relationships between students.

In response to research question two, it can be concluded from this study that the faculty of the middle school education program used role modeling, collaborative learning, and field experience to create an intentionally inviting environment. With an emphasis on the process of teaching students in the program how to be inviting teachers, the faculty intentionally role modeled best practices, created small, safe learning groups, and incorporated relevant field experiences outside the university classroom.

In response to research question three, it can be concluded from this study that yes, there is a significant difference in the perception of program alumni and the students currently enrolled in the program regarding people, policies, and programs. It can also be concluded that there is not a significant difference in the perception regarding processes and places. The lower mean scores for the current student participants can be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic and the negative impact university protocols had on the perceptions of this group.

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SECTION SIX

SCHOLARLY PRACTITIONER REFLECTION

I love school and I always have. As a student, I did not know if it was because of the learning, the social interactions, or just the comfort I felt in my role. As a teacher, I have the exact same feelings. I still love school but now I understand that it is because of the learning, the social interactions, *and* the comfort I feel in my role as an educator. It is even more fun when I get to be in charge of all of those things. My favorite part of my job was always having fun with my students. If I was not having fun, how could they? That would make for a long year.

As a teacher, there is an expectation to continue your education, which is unspoken but understood. I pushed through to earn my master's degree before I had my first child because I knew I was not the type of person that could parent, teach, and student at the same time. I also knew I would need to wait until the kids were grown and out of the house before even considering a doctorate degree. Working as an instructor in higher education also seemed like a great job, but again, something for later in life. After all, my professors were always old. I assumed I just had to wait until I was "old" enough. Therefore, I grew comfortable and confident in my role as a brave middle school teacher with a master's degree and tenure.

Assigned to every building committee, some district level committees, and offered many professional opportunities, I continued to learn how to be better for my students and for me. In 2015, I was assigned a student from the University of Central Missouri's middle school education program. The university needed teachers for their students to shadow for six weeks and my administrator placed

one of them with me. Another professional opportunity I could not say no to. Little did I know this one would change my life.

The university supervisor for these students, Lisa, would stop in to observe her student. As teachers always do, we talked and shared stories, realizing how small the teaching world really is as we discovered mutual friends. At the end of the six-week field experience, Lisa asked if I had ever thought about teaching at the university level. There was a need for an additional instructor in the middle school program and she wanted me to consider it. She let me know, she wanted me to teach others what I "do" with my middle school students.

That set the path for where I am today. It is why I applied to be in this program. It is why I took the GRE. It is why I left my family for two summers and every Wednesday evening for two years. It is why I am privileged enough to be writing this final chapter on my dissertation. Yes, it is a privilege. I have the best support system anyone could ask for and I know this would never have happened if it were any different.

As an instructor in the middle school program, I have an influence on my students as well as the students they will influence in their careers. That is a heavy responsibility that I do not take lightly. I want to be the best role model for my students because I want them to the best for theirs. I want the middle school program to be the best teacher training it can be for the districts trying to fill classrooms with progressive, excited new teachers. That is why I chose my own program as the focus of my research for this study. I want to know what we are doing well but, more importantly, what we need to do better.

Through this five year journey, I have learned so much. I will soon have the opportunity to use what I have learned. I am in the process of transitioning into the role of program coordinator for the middle school program, making the work I have done on this study even more timely. I feel I have come full circle. I am proud to set that example for my students as they venture out to their brave new careers as middle school teachers. Maybe someday I will see them in my office as a colleague. The most important lesson I have learned is that you never know where your journey will take you.

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Appendix A

MU **Institutional Review Board**
University of Missouri-Columbia
FWA Number: 00002876
IRB Registration Numbers: 00000731, 00009014

482 McReynolds Hall
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573-882-3181
irb@missouri.edu

May 26, 2021

Principal Investigator: Christina Lynn Price-Richardson
Department:

Your IRB Application to project entitled The Examination of a Middle School Teacher Preparatory Program Through the Lens of Invitational Leadership was reviewed and approved by the MU Institutional Review Board according to the terms and conditions described below:

IRB Project Number	2057802
IRB Review Number	316570
Initial Application Approval Date	May 26, 2021
IRB Expiration Date	May 26, 2022
Level of Review	Exempt
Exempt Categories (Revised Common Rule)	45 CFR 46.104d(2)(ii)
Approved Documents	REVISED 5/14 faculty interview consent to add IRB statement REVISED 5/14 focus group consent to add IRB statement REVISED 5/14 focus group recruitment to add Investigator name and contact info and to correct typo REVISED 5/14 faculty interview recruitment to add Investigator name and contact info REVISED 5/14 survey recruitment to add Investigator name and contact info Asks for consent to conduct this research in the middle school education program in the School of Teaching and Learning of the College of Education at the University of Central Missouri downloaded survey from Qualtrics interview questions for faculty Focus group questions

The principal investigator (PI) is responsible for all aspects and conduct of this study. The PI must comply with the following conditions of the approval:
• No subjects may be involved in any study procedure prior to the IRB approval date or after the expiration date.
• All changes must be IRB approved prior to implementation utilizing the Exempt Amendment Form.
• The Annual Exempt Form must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval at least 30 days prior to the project expiration date to keep the study active or to close it.
• Maintain all research records for a period of seven years from the project completion date.

If you are offering subject payments and would like more information about research participant payments, please click here to view the MU Business Policy and Procedure: http://bppm.missouri.edu/chapter2/2_250.html

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

Thank you,
MU Institutional Review Board

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL MISSOURI.
LEARNING TO A GREATER DEGREE

External Protocol Review
5/26/2021
Protocol Number: 1922

Dear Christina Price-Richardson:

Your research project, 'The Examination of a Middle School Teacher Preparatory Program Through the Lens of Invitational Leadership', was approved by the University of Central Missouri Human Subjects Review Committee (IRB) on 5/26/2021. You may collect data for this project until **5/26/2022**. Your informed consent is also approved until **5/26/2022**.

If an adverse event (such as harm to a research participant) occurs during your project, you must IMMEDIATELY stop the research unless stopping the research would cause more harm to the participant. If an adverse event occurs during your project, notify the committee IMMEDIATELY at researchreview@ucmo.edu.

The following will help to guide you. Please refer to this letter often during your project.

- If you wish to make changes to your study, submit an "Amendment" to the IRB Committee. You may not implement changes to your study without prior approval of the IRB Committee.
- If the nature or status of the risks of participating in this research project change, submit an "Amendment" to the IRB Committee. You may not implement changes to your study without prior approval of the IRB Committee.
- Near your expiration date (5/26/2022) for collecting data, if you have not finished collecting data:
  - submit your project application to the IRB Committee (include any revisions and/or amendments approved since you submitted your application initially)
  - AND submit a "Renewal Report" to the IRB Committee.
- When you have completed your collection of data, please submit the "Final Report" to the IRB Committee.

If your protocol contained a consent form and the consent form was approved, you will receive an additional email. The email will contain a copy of your consent form with an approval stamp in the top right corner. Do not begin data collection until you receive a copy of your consent form with an approval stamp. Note: One year after your protocol's approval date, a request for renewal OR a final project report is required.

Resources: https://www.ucmo.edu/offices/sponsored-programs-and-research-integrity/forms-and-resources/index.php.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the IRB committee at researchreview@ucmo.edu.

Sincerely,

Institutional Review Board
University of Central Missouri

Appendix B

Gatekeeper Permission Letter for Faculty, Alumni, and Student Participation

Dr. Matt Thomas

University of Central Missouri

Lovinger 3155

Warrensburg, MO 64093

Dear Dr. Thomas,

I would like to request your permission to invite applicable faculty, alumni, and current undergraduate students of the Middle School Program of the College of Education at the University of Central Missouri to participate in a research study entitled *The Examination of a Middle School Teacher Preparatory Program Through the Lens of Invitational Leadership*. I am examining the teaching and training in the middle school teacher preparatory program at the University of Central Missouri. Interviews will be coded to identifying invitational leadership principles integrated in the middle school program's curriculum and field experiences, as well as invitational leadership methods used by the faculty in the program. The information gathered should be beneficial to all of the university's education programs and further attempt to provide the necessary research for programs to use information as deemed helpful. This study is part of my dissertation research for a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Missouri-Columbia.

For this mixed methods study, the faculty in the middle school program will be asked to complete an interview and program alumni currently working as middle school teachers will be asked to participate in a focus group. Currently enrolled students in the program will be asked to complete an anonymous survey. No personal or identifying information will be collected from these educators or students. In addition, course syllabi will be used for document analysis. I am seeking your permission as the chairperson of the School of Teaching and Learning to contact the faculty, alumni, and current students in the middle school program for their participation in this study. A copy of the interview and focus group protocols and informed consent forms are attached for your review.

Participation in the study is completely voluntary. The participants may withdraw from participation at any time they wish without penalty, including in the middle of or after completion of the interview. Participants' answers will remain confidential, anonymous, and separate from any identifying information. The researcher will not list any names of participants in her dissertation or any future publications of this study.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns about participation either by phone at (816) 550-7358 or by electronic mail at chrichardson@ucmo.edu. In addition, you are also welcome to contact the dissertation advisor for this research study, Dr. Barbara Martin, who can be reached at 660-543-8823 or by email at bmartin@ucmo.edu.

If you choose to allow me to contact faculty, alumni, and current students regarding participation in this study, please complete the attached permission form. A copy of this letter and your written consent should be retained by you for future reference.

 Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Christina Price-Richardson

Doctoral Candidate

Gatekeeper Written Consent Form for Faculty, Alumni, and Student Participation

I, _____, grant permission for faculty, alumni, and students within our Middle School Teacher Preparatory Program to be contacted to participate in the study, *The examination of a Middle School Teacher Preparatory Program through the Lens of Invitational Leadership* conducted by Christina Price-Richardson, doctoral candidate at the University of Missouri.

By signing this permission form, I understand that the following safeguards are in place to protect faculty choosing to participate:

· All participation is voluntary, and may be withdrawn at any point before culmination of the study.

· All responses will be used for dissertation research and for potential future journal publications.

· All identities will be kept confidential in all phases of the research.

· An interview will occur with each faculty member in the Middle School Program, either in-person or via video conference, lasting approximately 30 minutes in length. Interviews will be recorded, transcribed, and coded to determine common themes in their perception and practices while teaching and advising students in the middle school program.

· An in-person focus group will occur with five to seven alumni from the University of Central Missouri Middle School Program who are currently employed as middle school teachers in local school districts. This will last approximately one hour in length. Conversations will be recorded, transcribed, and coded to determine common themes in the perceptions of their teacher training and how it has impacted their current teaching practices.

· A document analysis will occur of the course syllabi for the required courses within the middle school program. Findings will be coded to identify standards embedded in the program's core curriculum.

· An anonymous, electronic survey will be sent to the undergraduate students currently enrolled in middle school program at the University of Central Missouri. Data will be coded to identify perceptions of the teaching methods being taught and role modeled in the program.

· The information gathered should be beneficial to all of the university's education programs and further attempt to provide the necessary research for programs to use information as deemed helpful.

·   There is no cost to the university, school, department, or program to be a part of this study and anyone may discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

Please keep the consent letter and a copy of the signed consent form for your records. If you choose to grant permission for faculty, alumni, and students in your middle school program to participate in this study, please complete this *Administrative Permission for Program Participation Form* and return it to Christina Price- Richardson as soon as possible.

If you have any questions about the research, please contact Christina Price-Richardson via email at chrichardson@ucmo.edu or the faculty advisor Dr. Barbara Martin at bmartin@ucm.edu.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research and/or concerns about the study, or if you feel under any pressure to enroll or to continue to participate in this study, you may contact the University of Missouri Campus Institutional Review Board (which is a group of people who review the research studies to protect participants' rights) at (573) 882-9585 or umcresearchcirb@missouri.edu.

I have read the material above, and any questions that I have posed have been answered to my satisfaction. I grant permission for faculty and students in my program to be contacted and invited to participate in this study.

Signed: _____   Date:_____

Title/Position: _____

Please return to: Christina Price-Richardson

University of Central Missouri, Lovinger 2100

Cell Phone: 816-550-7358   Email: chrichardson@ucmo.edu

Appendix C

Informed Consent from Interview Participant

I, _____, agree to participate in the study *The Examination of a Middle School Teacher Preparatory Program Through the Lens of Invitational Leadership* conducted by Christina Price-Richardson, doctoral candidate at the University of Missouri-Columbia. I understand the following:

· My participation is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any point before culmination of the study.

· My responses will be used for dissertation research and potential future journal publications.

· My identity will be kept confidential in all phases of the research.

· This interview will occur either in-person or via video conference, lasting approximately 30 minutes in length.

Please keep the provided copy of the consent form for your records. If you choose to participate in this study, please **sign this consent form** prior to beginning the interview.

I have read the material above, and any questions that I have posed have been answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Signed: _____   Date: _____

Title/Position: _____

E-mail: _____

Please return to: Christina Price-Richardson
Cell Phone: 816-550-7358   Email: chrichardson@ucmo.edu

Appendix D

Interview Protocol for Middle School Program Faculty

Christina Price-Richardson

Faculty Interview Protocol

Introduction:

Thank you for taking the time to discuss your teaching practices with me. My name is Christi Richardson. The purpose of this discussion is to get your view on the leadership principles being taught by the faculty in the Middle School Teacher Education Program.

I have specific questions to help guide the conversation, but feel free to expand on your answers and to bring up additional ideas as you see relevant. I am trying to gather information about your teaching in the middle school program, so there are no right or wrong answers.

Our session will last about 30 minutes. In my written notes, the evaluator will maintain your confidentiality during future reporting. No names will be included in any reports.

Information	
1. Tell me your name, your role at the university and how long you have been working in middle school program at UCM. Probe: How many years, if any, did you spend in middle school education before joining higher education?	Learn about participants
2. What are the main things you want students that graduate from the middle school program to take to their own classrooms?	Q1 & Q2

3. In the middle school program, do you believe students are taught leadership skills for use in their future classrooms? Probes: Are these leadership skills specific to middle school teachers or general leadership for their everyday lives? How are these skills addressed (i.e. curriculum, role modeling)?	Q1
4. In the middle school program, do you believe students are taught to be inclusive of all people? Probe: How is inclusivity addressed and/or practiced in the program?	Q1 & Q2
5. Are students taught methods for creating a positive learning environment in their future middle school classrooms? Probes: Can you give an example or elaborate of one of the methods taught to students? How are these methods taught?	Q1 & Q2
6. How does the faculty treat students with intentional care, respect, trust, and optimism? Probe: Can you give an example(s) of how this is accomplished or elaborate?	Q1 & Q2
7. How does the faculty treat each other with intentional care, respect, trust, and optimism? Probe: Can you give an example(s) or elaborate?	Q1 & Q2

8. How do the students in the program treat each other with intentional care, respect, trust, and optimism? Probe: Can you give an example(s) or elaborate?	Q1 & Q2
9. Describe the late or missing assignment policy. Probe: How do students feel about this?	Q1 & Q2
10. How is student attendance handled? Probes: Is this effective? How do students feel about this?	Q1 & Q2
11. Do you consider the middle school program a safe space for students? Probes: What makes it a safe space? Do the students feel it is safe?	Q1 & Q2
12. Is there anything else about the middle school program that would be beneficial for me to include in my study?	

Thank you for your time and participation.

Appendix E

Informed Consent from Focus Group Participant

I, _____, agree to participate in the study *The Examination of a Middle School Teacher Preparatory Program Through the Lens of Invitational Leadership* conducted by Christina Price-Richardson, doctoral candidate at the University of Missouri-Columbia. I understand the following:

· My participation is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any point before culmination of the study.

· My responses will be used for dissertation research and potential future journal publications.

· My identity will be kept confidential in all phases of the research.

· This focus group will in-person, lasting approximately 45 minutes in length.

Please keep the provided copy of the consent form for your records. If you choose to participate in this study, please **sign this consent form** prior to participating in the focus group.

I have read the material above, and any questions that I have posed have been answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Position (grade level/content, building, and district):

_____

E-mail: _____

Please return to: Christina Price-Richardson
Cell Phone: 816-550-7358   Email: chrichardson@ucmo.edu

Appendix F

Focus Group Protocol for Middle School Program Alumni

Christina Price-Richardson

Alumni Interview Protocol

Introduction:

Thank you for taking the time to discuss your undergraduate experiences with me. My name is Christi Richardson. The purpose of this discussion is to get your view on the leadership principles being taught by the faculty in the Middle School Teacher Education Program.

We will have questions to help start the conversation, but do not feel that you have to address the specific question or go in order. You may elaborate on anything as much as you are comfortable. This is meant to be a conversation among the group members so please interact with each other and feel free to bring up different points of view. I am trying to gather information about your current classroom practices, so there are no right or wrong answers.

Our session will last about one hour. In my written notes, the evaluator will maintain your confidentiality during future reporting. No names will be included in any reports.

Information	
1. Tell me your name, what and where you currently teach, how many years you have been in this role and when you graduated from the middle school program at UCM. Probes: • Is anyone teaching in a content or grade level you did not earn your initial certification in upon graduation from the middle school program? • Are you certified in this area? • How did you receive this additional certification?	Learn about participants

2. What are some of the main things you feel you gained from the middle school program that you have incorporated into your classroom?	Q1 & Q2
3. What leadership skills did you learn that benefit you in the position you currently have as an educator? Probes: • Are these leadership skills specific to you as a middle school teacher or just general leadership for your everyday lives? • How did you learn these skills in the middle school program (i.e. curriculum, role modeling)?	Q1
4. In the middle school program, do you believe you were taught to be inclusive of all people? Probe: How was inclusivity addressed and/or practiced in the program?	Q1 & Q2
5. How were you taught to create a positive learning environment in your middle school classrooms? Probe: Have you incorporated any of this in your practice?	Q1 & Q2
6. How did the faculty treat students with intentional care, respect, trust, and optimism? Probe: How has this impacted you as an educator?	Q1 & Q2
7. How did you witness the faculty treating each other with intentional care, respect, trust, and optimism? Probe: How has this impacted you as a faculty member?	Q1 & Q2

8. Did the students in the program treat each other with intentional care, respect, trust, and optimism? Probe: How has this impacted you as a classroom teacher?	Q1 & Q2
9. Describe the late or missing assignment policy used in the middle school program and how you felt about it at the time? Probe: How is this reflected in your current policies?	Q1 & Q2
10. How do you handle student tardies? Probe: Is this a policy you learned about in the middle school program?	Q1 & Q2
11. How do you consider the middle school program a safe space for students? Probes: • What made it feel this way to you? • What aspects of this do you use in your classroom?	Q1 & Q2
12. Is there anything else about your training in the middle school program that would be beneficial for me to include in my study?	

Thank you for your time and participation

Appendix G

Permission to Adapt and Use the Inviting School Survey-Revised (ISS-R)

GOOGLE APPS @
UCM

Christina Price-Richardson <chrichardson@ucmo.edu>

permission for ISS-R adaptation and use

Ken Smith <Ken.Smith@acu.edu.au>   Mon, Apr 5, 2021 at 8:01 PM
To: Christi Richardson <chrichardson@ucmo.edu>

Yes that will be fine to use the ISS-R.

Best wishes on your dissertation.

~~~~~~
Ken Smith, PhD

Associate Professor | Faculty of Education and Arts | Education Victoria
Australian Catholic University www.acu.edu.au

Level 1, Office 43, 250 Victoria Parade, East Melbourne,

Victoria, Australia, 3002
T: +61 3 9953 3257

E: ken.smith@acu.edu.au

W: https://webapps.acu.edu.au/staffdirectory/index.php?ken-smith

Appendix H

Informed Consent from Survey Participant

You are being asked to participate in a survey entitled *Inviting School Survey-Revised* (ISS-R) which is being conducted by Christina Price-Richardson, Doctoral Candidate at the University of Missouri. This survey is anonymous. No one, including the researcher, will be able to associate your responses with your identity. The survey should take 10-15 minutes to complete. Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to take the survey, to stop responding at any time, or to skip any questions that you do not want to answer. Submission of the survey will be interpreted as your informed consent to participate.

If you have any questions about the research, please contact Christina Price-Richardson via email at chrichardson@ucmo.edu or the faculty advisor Dr. Barbara Martin at bmartin@ucm.edu. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact the MU Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (573) 882-3181.

Appendix I:
The Inviting School Survey - Revised (ISS-R)

1) Strongly disagree; (2) Disagree;
(3) Neither agree nor disagree;
(4) Agree; (5) Strongly agree.

PEOPLE ITEMS

3. The faculty in the middle school program involves all students in class activities and discussions.
6. Faculty in the middle school program show respect for all students.
9. Faculty members are easy to talk with.
12. The faculty takes time to talk with students about students' out-of-class activities.
15. Faculty members are generally prepared for class.
18. Faculty members have a sense of humor.
21. People (faculty and students) in the middle school program are polite to one another.
24. The faculty works to encourage students' self-confidence.
27. The middle school program faculty treats all students as pre-professional educators.
30. Students are supportive of each other in the middle school program.
33. People (faculty and students) in the middle school program want to be here.
36. People (faculty and students) in the middle school program try to stop negativity when they see/hear it happening.
39. Faculty members appear to enjoy life.
42. Professional pride is evident among all students in the middle school program.
45. Faculty members share personal, out-of-class experiences with students.
48. Faculty members are flexible and supportive of those who need extra help.

PROGRAM ITEMS

2. Requirements for completing a degree in the middle school program are easily accessed and clear for all students.
10. The middle school program is a safe space for all students.
17. The middle school program involves diverse field experiences.
23. Good health practices, both physical and mental, are encouraged and supported in the middle school program.
31. The middle school program teaches students how to be inclusive of diversity in a middle school classroom.
38. The middle school program encourages membership in diverse university organizations.
46. Faculty members in the middle school program are a good resource for advice, both personal and academic.

PROCESS ITEMS

1. Students in the middle school program work cooperatively with one another.
7. Grades are assigned by means of fair and comprehensive assessment of work and effort.

14. Email communication to faculty members in this program is answered promptly and politely.
22. Everyone arrives on time for classes.
29. Students feel welcome when they enter the classroom, middle school suite, or faculty office.
35. Faculty in the middle school program are accessible outside of class.
43. Faculty attend class regularly.
50. Classes get started quickly and end on time.

POLICY ITEMS
5. Faculty members are willing to help students who have special problems.
11. Students have the opportunity to talk to one another during class activities.
19. The middle school program supports and encourages freedom of expression by everyone.
26. Assignment due dates and missing assignment policies are reasonable for all students.
34. A high percentage of students graduate in this program.
41. Class attendance is encouraged while occasional absences are treated with grace.
47. The grading practices of faculty in this program are fair to all students.

PLACE ITEMS
4. Classroom furniture in Lovinger is pleasant and comfortable for everyone.
8. The air smells fresh in the hallways and classrooms in Lovinger.
13. The school grounds around Lovinger are clean and well-maintained for safety.
16. The restrooms in Lovinger are clean and properly maintained.
20. The middle school office suite is attractive.
25. Bulletin boards in the middle school suite are up-to-date and relevant.
28. Classrooms in Lovinger have enough space to move around safely.
32. Hallways in Lovinger are clear and well lit.
37. Classrooms in Lovinger offer flexible space for working in groups.
40. Elevators in Lovinger are in good repair.
44. There are convenient places in Lovinger to plug-in and/or charge electronic devices.
49. All students feel safe in Lovinger.

Appendix J

Document Review Form

Name of Document _____

Document # _____

Date Procured _____

Document Received From _____

Course Number of Document _____

Course Title of Document _____

Notes:

VITA

Christina Price-Richardson is from Blue Springs, Missouri. She is the daughter of Richard and Pamela Price. After graduating from Blue Springs High School, she earned an associate's degree from Metropolitan Community Colleges in Lees Summit, Missouri followed by a bachelor's degree in elementary education from Missouri State University. In 2000, she earned a master's degree in curriculum and instruction from the University of Central Missouri. In 2021, Christi earned a doctorate in educational leadership and policy analysis from the University of Missouri- Columbia.

Christi started her teaching career in the Lees Summit School District teaching students with behavior disorder in a self-contained classroom at Pleasant Lea Junior High. The next year she spent at Lees Summit North High School, only to realize she missed middle schoolers so she accepted a job teaching eighth grade science at Grain Valley Middle School for the fall of 2000. Soon into the start of the school year, Christi found out she was expecting her first child. Garrett was born in April of 2001, which marked the beginning of a career change to stay-at-home-mom for eight years while she raised Garrett and his sister, Sophie, born in 2003.

In 2009, when Sophie started kindergarten, Christi returned to work as an eighth grade science teacher at Osage Trail Middle School in the Fort Osage School District. Later, she added the extra duty position of District Science Content Facilitator. In 2015, Christi transitioned from being a middle school teacher to training future middle school teachers at the University of Central Missouri where she is currently an instructor in the College of Education.

Christina currently resides in Lees Summit, Missouri with her husband, Robert, their two children, Garrett and Sophie, and their two dogs, Mable, a Pomeranian, and London, a Pembroke Welsh Corgi.