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Leading early childhood education in Iowa schools

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Leading Early Childhood Education in Iowa Schools

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Alaina T. Daters

University of Northern Iowa

December 2022

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Abstract

Over the last 15 years, Iowa's Statewide Voluntary Preschool Programs (SWVPP) have undergone significant growth. By the end of the 2021-2022 school year, 323 out of 327 (99%) of Iowa public school districts offered preschool (Iowa Department of Education, 2022c). As a result, well over 450 Iowa administrators are potentially responsible for leading their district's preschool program.

The purpose of this mixed methods research study was to gain an understanding of the experiences, knowledge, and pedagogical needs of licensed Iowa administrators that are responsible for their district's SWVPP. Data was collected through a survey and analyzed using descriptive statistical analysis and the constant comparative method. Analysis revealed that participants most valued an understanding of management, structures and working with people's feelings. Additionally, the pedagogical knowledge areas of teaching and learning were also found to be important. Data indicated there is a need for continued learning in pedagogical knowledge and practices for administrators of SWVPP.

This Study by: Alaina T. Daters

Entitled: Leading Early Childhood Education in Iowa Schools

has been approved as meeting the dissertation requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Education

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my two sons, Addox and Axton. You give me purpose and my love for you is infinite.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Denny and Marcia Decker. Thank you for always loving me, believing in me and pushing me to be the best version of myself throughout my life. Although my father is no longer with us, I know he would be proud beyond measure. Mom, you've been my biggest cheerleader throughout this process and words cannot express my gratitude for your unwavering faith, love and support.

Acknowledgements

I am so very thankful to everyone that has supported me throughout this process. A special thank you to my Dissertation Chair, Dr. Beth Van Meeteren. You believed in me in times I didn't believe in myself, and I truly believe you are the reason this dissertation came to fruition. You are also an inspiring advocate for Early Childhood Education, and I can only hope to someday make the impact you have made throughout your career.

Additionally, I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Stephanie Schmitz and Dr. Matt Townsley. Your enthusiasm, encouragement and support during this process was immensely appreciated. Your expertise in your fields of study and your knowledge of survey research was essential to the completion of this dissertation.

Finally, I would like to thank all the administrators that I have worked with over the last few years. You inspire me with your vulnerability, dedication, passion and knowledge. School leaders make a difference in the lives of teachers, students, and parents every day. You all have made a difference to me.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Imagine being a tenth-grade science teacher in your local high school working with 15- and 16-year-olds. You love being in secondary education and have a desire to make a greater impact on more students and families, so you decide to go back to school to become an administrator. Over the 3 years of your graduate program, you viewed leadership styles, best practices in management, how to evaluate teachers and staff in a school, and general and special education law through your lens of secondary education experiences. After applying for several jobs, you've just accepted a job in rural Iowa as the new PK-8th grade principal serving children as young as 3 years old. Learning and teaching in preschool can't be that different from learning and teaching in high school. Right?

Iowa Administrators and Early Childhood

This fictional scenario is one with real possibility in Iowa. Prior to 2004, aspiring administrators could apply to programs to prepare them for either an Iowa K-6 licensure that allowed them to be a principal for children ages 5 to 11, or a program to prepare them for an Iowa 7-12 licensure to be a principal for students ages 12 to 17. In 2004, the state of Iowa's Board of Education Examiners (BOEE) replaced those two options with just one, a PK-12 administrator license. Administrators can now oversee 14 grades with PK-12 licensure serving children as young as 3 or 4 and as old as 17 or 18. This change in licensure has created the potential for administrators to lead buildings and programs that are very different from their prior teaching experiences.

Three years after this change in administrator licensure (2007), the Iowa legislature wrote Iowa Code Chapter 256c that established Iowa's Statewide Voluntary

Preschool Program (SWVPP). This program was created to provide free preschool for 4-year-old children in Iowa “to provide an opportunity for all young children in the state to enter school ready to learn” (Statewide Preschool Program for Four-Year-Old Children, 2021). The result of these two legislative changes in Iowa education created scenarios in which Iowa administrators with no early childhood experience were now potentially in charge of early childhood programming.

Changing the Landscape of Iowa’s Early Childhood Education

An increase in funding of Iowa’s early childhood programming began in 2007 with the establishment of Iowa’s SWVPP (Iowa Department of Education, 2020). During the 2006 fiscal year, 224 Iowa school districts were supporting 11,203 preschool students (Iowa Department of Education, 2011). Since the establishment of Iowa’s SWVPP, the number of Iowa public school districts providing preschool has increased by nearly 100. The number of preschool children being served has also increased by nearly 20,000 (Iowa Department of Education, 2020). This increase in service for nearly 20,000 students in early childhood programming impacts 99% of Iowa’s public school districts. As a result, many Iowa administrators are now leading early childhood programming with little experience in child development and early childhood education.

Most educational leadership preparation programs draw from well-established research in the categories of transformational leadership, servant leadership, situational leadership, instructional leadership, change agency, teamwork and continuous improvement (Marzano & Waters, 2005). And although there is a need for early childhood leaders, “to have backgrounds, or experiences, in early childhood education prior to leading it” (Kingrey, 2014, p. 179), there may be a small focus, or no focus at all,

in child development and early education programming as part of their leadership preparation program.

Kagan and Bowman (1997) identified five areas of leadership that are essential for administrators who lead early childhood programming to understand. These five areas include: pedagogical, administrative, advocacy, community and conceptual leadership. Of the five areas, pedagogical leadership is of utmost importance as it relates to an early childhood leader's background knowledge and understanding of child development (Kingrey, 2014).

Research Questions

Rodd (2013) states “the complexity of the early childhood context makes it difficult to deconstruct, analyse and define leadership” (p. 27) within the early grades and may demand more attention in administrator preparation programs. The purpose of this study is to examine the knowledge and experience licensed administrators overseeing a SWVPP may or may not have, thus shedding light on learning opportunities that could be provided to Iowa's leaders to better equip them with knowledge and skills to be highly effective early childhood leaders in Iowa. The study was formed around three questions:

1. What kinds of backgrounds, educational preparations, and experiences do current Iowa administrators have who also oversee Iowa's Statewide Voluntary Preschool Programs (SWVPP)?
2. What are some examples of leadership roles and responsibilities of current Iowa Administrators who oversee SWVPP?

3. Is there a need to support Iowa's SWVPP leaders with early childhood pedagogical knowledge and if so, what knowledge would best support them in their role as leaders?

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Leadership in education is complex and difficult to define. Over the last 40 years, the descriptors used to define persons who guide the learning in PK-12 schools have shifted from 'educational administration' to 'educational management,' and more recently to 'educational leadership' (Gunter, 2004). Administration, management, and leadership each implies a different perception of roles of those overseeing PK-12 education. The term "administration" infers being above the action in the classroom and running the processes of the schools. The term "management" can be defined as dealing with or controlling people or things (McKean, 2005). The term "leadership" is an act that comes from the root word "lead" meaning to guide initiative and provide an example to follow (McKean, 2005) thus making "educational leadership" more palatable and relational. Bush (2020) states there is not a widely accepted definition of educational leadership but believes considering both management and leadership skills equally is a step toward better understanding. Doing so would support leaders in operating schools effectively while also achieving goals within the school district's strategic plan. Tacking on an early childhood program within the district's strategic plan might sound doable but may be conceptually interesting and pragmatically challenging as early childhood is more complex and requires additional considerations (Kagan & Bowman, 1997).

The purpose of this study focuses on administrative support for early childhood education in Iowa. The three guiding questions are:

1. What kinds of backgrounds, educational preparations, and experiences do current Iowa administrators have who also oversee Iowa's Statewide Voluntary Preschool Programs (SWVPP)?

2. What are some examples of leadership roles and responsibilities of current Iowa Administrators who oversee SWVPP?
3. Is there a need to support Iowa's SWVPP leaders with early childhood pedagogical knowledge and if so, what knowledge would best support them in their role as leaders?

To examine the complexity of early childhood leadership in Iowa, a review of literature was conducted to understand the background or history of early education in Iowa, and the licensure and leadership standards for Iowa's school administrators. A review of models of educational leadership will frame an approach to leadership that includes early childhood. Finally, a review of early childhood pedagogy was conducted to determine how it may differ from elementary pedagogy.

This review of the literature begins with a review of the educational preparation and licensure of Iowa's early childhood educators and the administrators who supervise them. Second, it reviews educational leadership models and theories within the Four-Frame Model (Bolman & Deal, 2013) and the Five Faces of Leadership Model (Kagan & Bowman, 1997) from the unique aspect of leading in early childhood programs. Fourth, the connection between leadership in Iowa's school and early childhood education will be explored. Finally, it will provide an understanding of early childhood pedagogy and developmentally appropriate practices that will be further explored in this study.

Iowa's Systems of Licensure for Early Educators and Administrators

To more fully understand the complexity of early childhood education in Iowa, it is helpful to examine Iowa's licensure for administrators and early childhood educators and how that licensure frames administration and teacher preparation programs.

Iowa's Licensure and Leadership Standards for Administrators

In Iowa, building principals, curriculum directors and program leaders of Iowa public schools are required to hold an administrator license. Like Iowa's teachers, Iowa's administrators are licensed through the Board of Educational Examiners (BOEE). To be issued an administrator license, a person must adhere to the following requirements:

- Hold or be eligible for an Iowa teaching license
- Verify three years of teaching experience
- Completion of the requirements for an administrative endorsement
- Completion of a master's degree

Coursework for the Principalship program at the University of Northern Iowa (UNI, 2022) includes the following courses:

- EDLEAD 6206 Orientation to Educational Leadership Standards
- EDLEAD 6247 School Management for Student Learning
- MEASRES 6205 Educational Research
- EDLEAD 6282 Leading School Growth and Improvement
- EDLEAD 6291 Internship
- EDLEAD 6245 Leadership for Effective Schools
- EDLEAD 6289 Seminar: School Leadership
- SPED 6260 Special Education Law and Policy
- EDLEAD 6249 Leading Learning, Teaching, and Curriculum
- EDLEAD 6284 Evaluator Approval for Improved Student Learning
- EDLEAD 6291 Internship

- EDLEAD 6225 Activities Administration OR EDLEAD 6235 Community Connections
- EDLEAD 6232 School Governance, Law and Intersystems Relations
- EDLEAD 6292 Capstone in Education Leadership
- EDLEAD 6248 Leading Instruction in Schools

The list of the courses draws attention to the focuses of the program and its preparation of Iowa's leaders. There are a couple courses on law (school and special education), a few that appear to be focused on instructional leadership and others that encompass management, internship experience, and evaluator approval.

Once licensed, Iowa administrators are able to provide leadership in roles that include a PK-12 principal, a PK-12 Special Education Supervisor, and a PK-12 Special Education Evaluator. Beyond initial and professional administrator licensure, similar to teachers in education, administrators are required to provide evidence of continued education. Continuing education requirements consist of four renewal credits over a 5-year term and must include an evaluator course. Administrators are also required to be evaluated annually by a supervisor using Iowa's Standards for School Leaders (Table 1), similar to Iowa's teaching standards.

Table 1*Iowa Standards for School Leaders*

Standard 1. Mission, Vision and Core Values

Educational leaders develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high-quality education and academic success and well-being of each student.

Standard 2. Ethics and Professional Norms

Educational leaders act ethically and according to professional norms to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Standard 3. Equity and Cultural Responsiveness

Educational leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Standard 4. Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

Educational leaders develop and support intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Standard 5. Community of Care and Support for Students

Educational leaders cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community that promotes the academic success and well-being of each student.

Standard 6. Professional Capacity of School Personnel

Educational leaders develop the professional capacity and practice of school personnel to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Standard 7. Professional Community for Teachers and Staff

Educational leaders foster a professional community of teachers and other professional staff to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Standard 8. Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community

Educational leaders engage families and the community in meaningful, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial ways to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Standard 9. Operations and Management

Educational leaders manage school operations and resources to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Standard 10. School Improvement

Educational leaders act as agents of continuous improvement to promote each student's academic success and well-being. (School Administrators of Iowa)

School Administrators of Iowa (2022)

The responsibilities of Iowa's licensed administrators span 14 years, or from preschool through grade 12. Five of those 12 years, preschool through third grade, are considered early childhood as defined in both educational and medical research (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Yoshikawa et al., 2020) indicating the importance of understanding child development in educational programming and medical care. Despite this, many people, including Iowa administrators and educators, interpret early childhood to include only kindergarten, preschool, and younger children.

Iowa's Licensure for Educators in Preschool Through Third Grade

The confusion of which grades are considered early childhood is exacerbated by Iowa's educator licensure that in turn, impacts teacher preparation programs. The PK-3 Inclusive Settings Endorsement requires the successful completion of courses determined by the Board of Educational Examiners (BOEE) that prepares educators to teach children from birth to age 8 in inclusive settings. These teachers are prepared well in child development and are able to teach in classrooms that may have some children with special needs. The K-6 Elementary Classroom Teacher Endorsement requires the successful completion of courses determined by the BOEE that prepares educators to teach from kindergarten through Grade 6 and have much less of a focus on child development.

The coursework at teacher preparation programs reflect the requirements of these two types of license. At UNI, Elementary Education majors and Early Childhood majors take the very same courses with only a few differences as seen in Table 2.

Table 2*Differences Between Elementary and Early Childhood Preparation in Iowa*

| Early Childhood Majors PK-3 Inclusive Settings Endorsement | Elementary Majors K-6 Elementary Classroom Teacher Endorsement |
|---|--|
| Guidance and Instruction in ECE | Classroom management |
| Early Childhood Curriculum Development and Organization | Elementary Curriculum |
| Language Development and Emergent Literacy | Intermediate Grades Content Literacy |
| Experience in Special Education | Visual and Performing Arts Integration |
| Assessment of Young Children with Exceptionalities | |
| Child, Family, School, and Community | |
| Administration and Advocacy of Early Childhood | |

The course Guidance and Instruction in ECE focuses on strategies and programming that helps PK-3 children develop the ability to manage their own behaviors in a way that aligns with child development. Classroom Management does the same with

less attention given to child development. Early Childhood Curriculum Development and Organization prepares PK-3 educators to design integrative instruction that aligns with child development. Elementary Curriculum prepares K-3 teachers with a broader view of curriculum with less integration and with less attention to child development. Language Development and Emergent Literacy helps PK-3 educators understand how literacy learning unfolds aligned to research in child development. K-3 teachers with an elementary education major will not have this preparation unless they include literacy education as a minor.

Iowa law does not require kindergarten, but it is mandatory that public school districts offer kindergarten programs at a minimum of a half-day basis. The state of Iowa's Condition of Education 2021 Annual Report (Iowa Department of Education, 2021a) stated that out of 327 public school districts, 319 or 97%, offered kindergarten all day every day receiving per-child funding.

Iowa Funding of Early Childhood Education

Funding for preschool is more complex. In the state of Iowa, there are many programs and funding sources that provide quality services for the 0-5 age group. These programs include Early Access, Early Childhood Special Education, Head Start, Shared Visions, and the SWVPP. For the purposes of this literature review, Early Childhood Special Education and primarily SWVPP are offered in conjunction with Iowa's public school districts, and will be discussed.

Early Childhood Special Education

Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) services are provided by, or in partnership with, Iowa's preschool programs and school districts. Children within the

ages of 3-5 that are eligible for special education and are protected under the federal law Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; U.S. Department of Education, 2022) receive what is referred to as Part B services (special education services for ages 3 to 21) from highly qualified educators. All school districts are required to develop a service delivery plan that outlines how those special education services will be provided.

As reported in the 2021 Condition of Education Annual Report (Iowa Department of Education, 2022a), during the 2020-2021 school year, 1,164 learners were provided classroom special education services (excluding support services such as speech therapy, occupational therapy and physical therapy) in Iowa's preschool programs. Although preschool programming in Iowa has increased tremendously since 2007 (Iowa Department of Education, 2022b) "there has not yet been a proportionate expansion of providing ECSE services in regular early childhood programs" (para. 3).

Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program

Although Early Childhood Special Education in Iowa dates back to 1975 (Grimes & Stumme, 2016), Iowa's formal preschool general education programming (aside from Head Start) began decades later.

The Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program (SWVPP) for Four-Year-Old Children was established May 10, 2007, with the signing of House File 877. The SWVPP legislation provides an opportunity for all four-year-old children in Iowa to enter school ready to learn by expanding access to research based preschool curricula. The allocation of funds for the SWVPP is to improve access to high quality preschool instruction through predictable, equitable and sustainable

funding to increase the number of children participating in quality programs.

(Iowa Department of Education, 2011, p. 21)

Since its origination in 2007, the number of children being served within SWVPP has increased from 5,126 in 2007-2008 to 25,330 in 2019-2020 (Iowa Department of Education, 2020). So, over the course of 14 years, the number of children receiving free preschool programming in Iowa (not including children from other funding sources) has increased by more than 20,000. During the 2020-2021 school year, SWVPP was offered to families in 99% of school districts in the state of Iowa (Iowa Department of Education, 2021a).

In order to provide guidance for Iowa's school districts wanting to provide SWVPP, Iowa Code chapter 256c of Iowa Acts (2007) and 281--Iowa Administrative Code 16 were provided to those who receive funding. The codes outline a range of requirements such as teacher qualifications, program standards, learning standards, assessment requirements, leadership qualifications and so much more.

Leaders in school districts around the state have, at some point, applied for the grant funds and then subsequent years funding is based on an annual preschool programming count that occurs at the beginning of October each year. SWVPP leaders are also required to provide an annual report regarding program requirements.

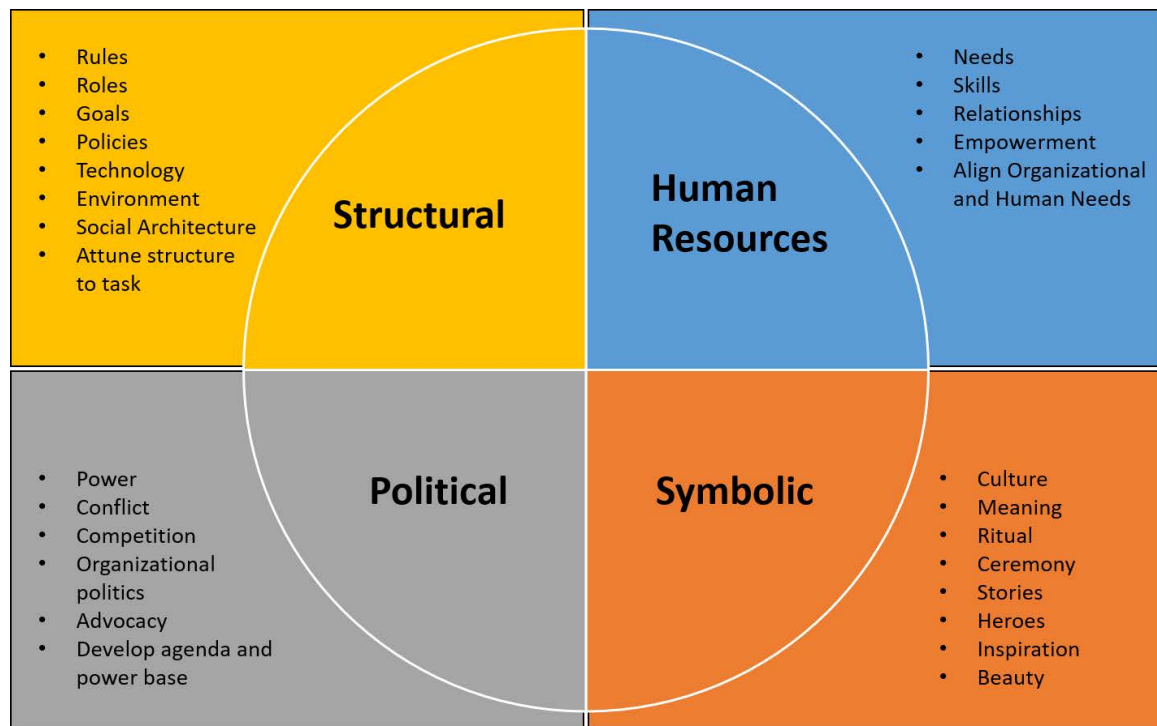
Models for Educational Leadership

Educational leaders across the world have a variety of roles and responsibilities. The roles they play can range from managing student behavior to evaluating school staff to providing guidance and support for student achievement. Researchers and theorists have developed models and styles of leadership to categorize or explain these roles and

responsibilities. Two leadership models that can be used to categorize leadership styles and practices include Bolman and Deal's (2013) Four-Frame Model and Kagan and Bowman's (1997) Five Faces of Early Childhood Leadership. These two models, and the leadership styles related to each model, can provide a deeper understanding of educational leadership.

Four-Frame Model

The Four-Frame Model (Figure 1) is a business leadership model that was created by Bolman and Deal (2013) to help leaders support, understand, and navigate complex organizations. The model is "rooted in both managerial wisdom and social science knowledge" (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 21) to help leaders navigate their responsibilities and guide their decision making in order to accomplish their goals. It advocates examining leadership from the perspective of four frames: the structural frame, the human resource frame, the political frame, and the symbolic frame. In the following section of this literature, the Four Frames Model will be used to organize research on educational leadership through the lens of early childhood education.

Figure 1*Four Frames Model*

McDaris (2021)

Structural Frame. The structural frame of an organization is its “rules, roles, goals, policies, technology, and environment” (Bolman & Deal, 2014, p. 19). It is often broad and subtle as it examines the social architecture of work. Within the structural frame, formal arrangements exist by putting people in the right roles and relationships thus resulting in positive change (Bolman & Deal, 2013). According to Bolman and Deal (2013), six core assumptions make up the structural frame:

1. Organizations exist to achieve established goals and objectives.
2. Organizations increase efficiency and enhance performance through specialization and appropriate division of labor.

3. Suitable forms of coordination and control ensure that diverse efforts of individuals and units mesh.
4. Organizations work best when rationality prevails over personal agendas and extraneous pressures.
5. Effective structures fit an organization's current circumstances (including its goals, technology, workforce, and environment).
6. Troubles arise and performance suffers from structural deficits, remedied through problem solving and restructuring (p. 45).

Using the structural frame, leaders can establish a blueprint for collaboration among internal and external stakeholders (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Bureaucratic and managerial leadership, by their position or title, already possess authority to make structural decisions within this frame (Bush, 2020).

Bureaucratic and Managerial Leadership. Bush (2020) defines bureaucracy as a formal organization that seeks maximum efficiency through formal approaches with features such as:

- A hierarchical authority structure (chains of command).
- Dedicated goals.
- Division of labor based on staff expertise.
- Rules and regulations guide decision making.
- Impersonal relationships to minimize personal relationship decision making.
- Recruitment and career progress determined on merit (p. 39).

Management is an essential component of successful leadership; however, it should always compliment other leadership approaches, such as bureaucratic leadership, rather than act as a stand alone approach (Bush, 2020). Managerial leadership includes supervision of people, coordination of efforts and people, providing essential resources and maintaining some level of control (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Managerial leadership is most often focused on working within existing structures rather than developing a vision for the future (Bush, 2020).

Instructional Leadership. A focus on teaching and learning and improved student achievement are roles of an instructional leader. In order for leaders to be effective instructional leaders, they must have some level of content and pedagogical knowledge (Brazer & Bauer, 2013) they can use to provide guidance and support to teachers in regards to teaching and learning. Shaked (2019) describes instructional leadership as “the school leaders’ deep and direct involvement in promoting best instructional practices” (p.81).

When considering a possible grade span of preschool through 12th grade in addition to the multiple subjects that are covered in schools, instructional leadership definitely has its challenges. Brazer and Bauer (2013) suggest that during leadership preparation programs and ongoing professional development, leaders should expand beyond their prior experiences and dive deeper into content and pedagogy across multiple grade levels and subject areas.

Structural Frame in the Context of School. Marzano and Waters (2005) identified 21 categories of behavior they call responsibilities of school leaders. One of

those responsibilities is order. They believe order in any environment is created by structure and that the responsibility of order in school is:

- Establishing routines for the smooth running of the school that staff understand and follow.
- Providing and reinforcing clear structures, rules, and procedures for staff.
- Providing and reinforcing clear structures, rules, and procedures for students (p. 57).

Bolman and Deal (2013) agree, stating that the right structures in schools can prevent talented individuals and staff from becoming confused, ineffective, apathetic, or hostile. However, Wimpelberg's 1987 research (as cited in Bolman & Deal, 2017) "found that principals of ineffective schools relied almost entirely on the structural frame, whereas principals in effective schools used multiple frames" (p. 311).

Human Resources Frame. The human resources frame encompasses the needs, skills, and relationships of the human element of an organization. People's skills, attitudes, energy and commitment are impactful on organizations (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Four core assumptions make up the human resources frame:

1. Organizations exist to serve human needs rather than the converse.
2. People and organizations need each other. Organizations need ideas, energy, and talent; people need careers, salaries, and opportunities.
3. When the fit between individual and system is poor, one or both suffer. Individuals are exploited or exploit the organization-or both become victims.

4. A good fit benefits both. Individuals find meaningful and satisfying work, and organizations get the talent and energy they need to succeed (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 117).

Through the human resources frame, leaders have a few big key areas to consider: human needs, work and motivation, and human capacity (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

Humans have many needs ranging from obvious needs such as food, water, and sleep to more elusive needs such as connection, safety, and self-esteem (Kaufman, 2020).

Leaders that are perceptive and responsive to human needs can be recognized as working within the human resources frame.

Work and motivation can also be considered aspects of human needs. Many theorists have developed models of motivation at work (Alderfer, 1989; McClelland, 1961). One example is Maslow's Hierarchy of Need. Originally published in 1943, Maslow's theory of motivation is still "widely accepted and enormously influential in managerial practice" (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 122). Then there is the component of human capacity, knowledge and skills. There has been a shift over the past 50-70 years from jobs that were production-intensive to more information-intensive thus creating a skill gap within many organizations (Bolman & Deal, 2013). This gap in skill pushes employers to go beyond employee basic needs and urges organizations to invest in an individual's effort to grow their knowledge and skills.

The human resources frame has obvious associations with widely known leadership models such as servant leadership and transformational leadership. These two models of leadership work well within the human resources frame because they are focused on people as change agents.

Servant Leadership. Servant leadership is not a technique, strategy or process; rather, it is a conscious choice about how you choose to be and how you choose to lead (Autry, 2001). Autry (2001) offers five ways of being that he believes guide a leader towards success: (a) being authentic, (b) being vulnerable, (c) being accepting, (d) being present, and (e) being useful. Servant leaders understand that growth and progress occur when people feel comfortable taking risks, experimenting, collaborating, and communicating ideas and feelings (Robbins & Alvy, 2009). By being of service to others, leaders create cultures that employees thrive within, thus resulting in increased achievement toward organizational goals.

Transformational Leadership. Transformational leaders can be defined as individuals that lead with a sense of vision, inspiration, and careful execution of change. Transformational leaders inspire staff to new levels of energy, commitment, and moral purpose (Burns, 1978). Leithwood (1994, as cited in Bush, 2020) conceptualizes transformational leadership along eight dimensions:

- building school vision;
- establishing school goals;
- providing intellectual stimulation;
- modeling best practices and important organizational values;
- demonstrating high performance expectations;
- creating a productive school culture;
- developing structures to foster participation in school decisions (p. 101).

Transformational leaders “champion and inspire followers” (Burns, 2003, p. 26) to work together to achieve system, cultural and personal goals. The focus on the people

is the conceptual connection to the human resources frame; however, transformational leadership does have strong connections to both the political frame and the symbolic frame as well.

Human Resources Frame in the Context of School. As mentioned, Bolman and Deal (2013) identify three areas, human needs, work and motivation, and human capacity, that sum up the human resources frames. When considering these three ideas in the context of schools, school or building culture comes to mind.

School culture is another responsibility of leaders found in Marzano and Waters' (2005) meta-analysis that directly links the three key areas and schools. One of the jobs of a leader is to establish an atmosphere of trust by their daily actions (Marzano & Waters, 2005). These actions include taking care of staff needs, managing their work, providing motivation and recognition for that work, and supporting staff to excel at their highest capacity. Marzano and Waters (2005) go on to suggest that good school culture can be established when leaders position themselves at the center of their organization/school so they have direct connection and access to all staff rather than using a hierarchical system that would isolate them at the top.

Political Frame. The political frame, at its heart, is power and the perception of power in an organization. It is rooted in coalition and conflict resolution. Leaders must consider relationships, ethics, and organizational values (Bolman & Deal, 2013) when addressing problems of individuals or groups. The political frame can be summarized by five assumptions laid out by Bolman and Deal (2013):

1. Organizations are coalitions of different individuals and interest groups.

2. Coalition members have enduring differences in values, beliefs, information, interests, and perceptions of reality.
3. Most important decisions involve allocating scarce resources- deciding who gets what.
4. Scarce resources and enduring differences put conflict at the center of day-to-day dynamics and make power the most important asset.
5. Goals and decisions emerge from bargaining and negotiation among competing stakeholders jockeying for their own interests (pp. 188-189).

Political leadership has a primary focus on goals of sub-units, or groups of individuals, rather than the goals of the organization or school itself (Bush, 2020). Many leadership strategies can be viewed through the lens of the political frame; however, Bolman and Deal (2013) believe “constructive politicians know how to fashion an agenda, map the political terrain, create a network of support, and negotiate with both allies and adversaries” (p. 223). Leadership models that closely align with the political frame include both transformational and transactional leadership. Transactional leadership and transformational leadership have often been viewed as opposing leadership styles; however, when the two styles are combined, the role of the transactional leadership style is to maintain an organization through the use of contingent rewards (Leithwood, 1993). Bush (2020) states that “transactional leadership involves relationships based upon an exchange for a valued resource” (p. 99).

Transactional Leadership. Judge and Piccolo (2004) describe three dimensions to transactional leadership which include:

1. Contingent reward: the degree to which the leader sets up constructive exchanges with followers.
2. Management by exception-active: active leaders monitor follower behavior, anticipate problems and take corrective actions.
3. Management by exception-passive: passive leaders wait until the behavior has caused problems before taking action (p. 100).

One of the largest drawbacks to the transactional leadership model is that it lacks engagement with staff beyond the surface level reward. It fits best within the political frame as it relies heavily on the give and take of active leadership and passive leadership as well as the power to deliver rewards to maintain status quo.

Transformational Leadership. Transformational leadership, as it relates to the political frame, can be viewed as a leader's ability to encourage or require teachers to implement centrally determined policies or ideas (Bush, 2020). Within this frame, the notion of personal power comes into play as part of transformational leadership.

Political Frame in the Context of School. Although schools are not always thought of as a business, the political frame provides a perspective on schools that make it much easier to see the connection between businesses, organizations and schools. Table 3 draws attention to the correlations between the five assumptions of the political frame and those assumptions in the context of schools.

Table 3*Correlation chart*

| Assumptions | In a School Context |
|--|--|
| Organizations are coalitions of different individuals and interest groups. | Often referred to as stakeholders (community members, employees, government, parents, students) |
| Coalition members have enduring differences in values, beliefs, information, interests, and perceptions of reality. | Perspectives of stakeholders based on individual or group interests. |
| Most important decisions involve allocating scarce resources- deciding who gets what. | Resources: employee contracts (salary/benefits), curriculum, time allocation, support staff, etc. |
| Scarce resources and enduring differences put conflict at the center of day-to-day dynamics and make power the most important asset. | School and building leaders hold the positional power in day-to-day operations. |
| Goals and decisions emerge from bargaining and negotiation among competing stakeholders jockeying for their own interests. | School board members and district leaders generally determine goals and decisions while considering stakeholder interests. |

Bolman and Deal (2013) specifically address this frame in schools, again making the correlation between schools and business and organizations well founded.

Schools and colleges, for example, have lived through alternating eras of feast and famine related to peaks and valleys in economic and demographic trends. When money and students are plentiful (as they were in the 1960s and again in the 1990s), administrators spend time designing new buildings and initiating innovative programs. Work is fun when you're delivering good news and constituents applaud. Conversely, when resources dry up, you may have to shutter buildings, close programs, and lay off staff. Conflict mushrooms, and administrators often succumb to political forces they struggle to understand and control (p. 186).

Symbolic Frame. The symbolic frame represents the vision for the organization's future. A symbol is often thought of as an object that represents something; however, symbols can also be in the form of actions. "Symbols carry powerful intellectual and emotional messages; they speak to both the mind and the heart" (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 243). The symbolic frame is about how people make sense of the world based on their own personal beliefs.

According to Bolman and Deal (2013), the symbolic frame is an umbrella of ideas which distills ideas from diverse sources into five suppositions:

1. What is most important is not what happens but what it means.
2. Activity and meaning are loosely coupled; events and actions have multiple interpretations as people experience situations differently.

3. Facing uncertainty and ambiguity, people create symbols to resolve confusion, find direction, and anchor hope and faith.
4. Events and processes are often more important for what is expressed than what is produced. Their emblematic form weaves a tapestry of secular myths, heroes and heroines, rituals, ceremonies, and stories to help people find purpose and passion.
5. Culture forms the superglue that bonds an organization, unites people, and helps an enterprise to accomplish desired ends (p. 248).

There is a clear link between visionary leadership and the symbolic frame.

However, this frame also includes an element of emotional leadership which is focused highly on motivation and interpretation of events (Bush, 2020). It is also worth noting that the external physical environment of a workplace impacts organizational culture, therefore making the environment a symbol of which school leaders need to be aware.

Visionary Leadership. “Vision turns an organization’s core ideology, or sense of purpose into an image of the future” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 250). A school vision serves as a symbol for thinking, organizing, planning and delivering a plan for future progress, goals and expectations. Visionary leadership has been an essential component for effective leaders for more than 25 years (Bush, 2020). Visionary leaders are strategic in their ability to create mission statements, vision statements, clarify organizational values and enact those statements and values in practice. They inspire teachers and staff to join them in their pursuit of attaining outcomes aligned to their vision and mission (Abel et al., 2017). Visionary leaders use their vision as a catalyst for collaborative work and knowledge, thus moving systems or individuals forward in their practice.

In order to bring a vision into practice, leaders are often required to make daily decisions that support the work and progress toward the vision. These decisions can range from values, goals, and policies to budgets, pedagogy, recruitment, family engagement and even ethical issues (Rodd, 2013). “Leadership emanates out of vision that is grounded in philosophy, values and beliefs, which in turn guides policy, day-to-day operation, procedures and innovation” (Rodd, 2013, p. 20).

Symbolic Frame in the Context of School. One way schools function as an organization within the symbolic frame is through the development and use of district and/or individual building visions, missions, and sometimes mantras and strategic plans. These serve as symbols of what is most important to a school or district. According to Lane et al. (2005), a well-written strategic plan establishes:

- a district’s vision, mission, and beliefs
- a path to accomplish the district’s aspirations
- a path to working with the community to accomplish the goals, objectives, and activities within the strategic plan
- communication that allows for an understanding of how a school district works, how finances are spent, and identifies the school district’s needs, and a way to set specific data-driven priorities (p. 198).

An example of an urban Iowa school district’s strategic plan, vision and mission that is inclusive of early childhood is the College Community School District located in Cedar Rapids. Their district strategic plan (Figure 2), found on their district website, contains their vision, mission, and a ten year goal statement while also specifically addressing Iowa’s Early Learning Standards and preschool student achievement data.

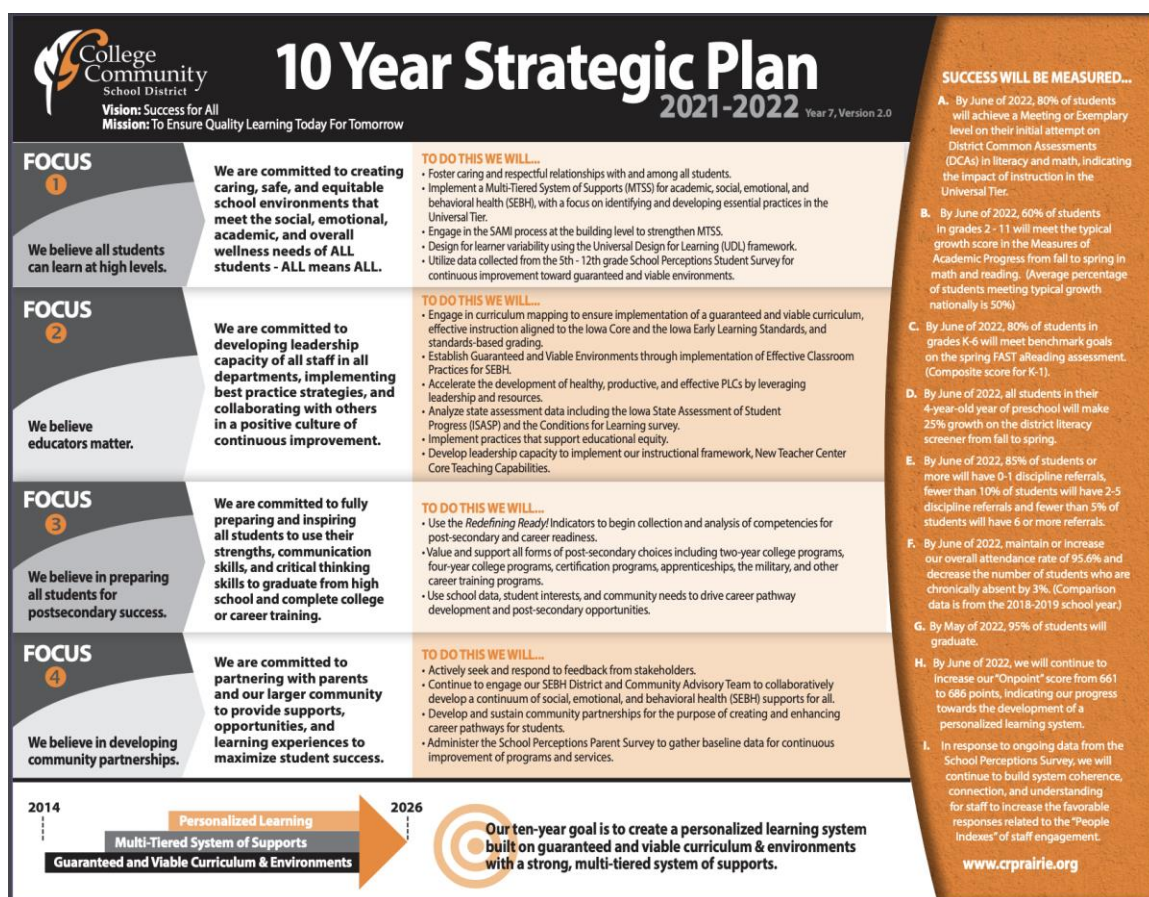
Vision: Success for All

Mission: To Ensure Quality Learning Today For Tomorrow

Ten-year goal: Our ten-year goal is to create a personalized learning system built on guaranteed and viable curriculum & environments with a strong, multi-tiered system of supports (College Community School District, 2022).

Figure 2

College Community Schools Strategic Plan



College Community School District (2022)

The Five Faces of Early Childhood Leadership Model

Leadership in early childhood can have a variety of meanings to many individuals. This is due to the fact that the people that make up the early childhood leaders range from individual care takers and learners themselves, to directors, principals, and managers (Rodd, 2013). However, for the purposes of this literature review, the term “early childhood leaders(hip)” will most often be referencing individuals with an administrator license that fall into the categories of principal and director.

So, what does it take to be a good leader in early childhood? Leaders with personal qualities such as honesty, trust, collaboration, inclusion and those with a vision that is driven by purpose and grounded in developmental science and early childhood pedagogy (Pacchiano et al., 2018; Rodd, 2013) are important strengths to possess as an early childhood leader. Visionary leadership in early childhood encompasses a core understanding of the why behind early education and the impact of budgets and policy. It also consists of the big-picture view, love for learning and necessary foundational skills to support learners in kindergarten and beyond (Pacchiano et al., 2018).

Kagan and Bowman (1997) address five areas of early childhood leadership: pedagogical, administrative, advocacy, community and conceptual leadership, that are “widely endorsed by the vast majority of early childhood educators” (Rodd, 2013, p. 23). These five areas are referred to as the Five Faces of Leadership and are used to engage leaders in systematic and collaborative discussion to support understanding of a commonly accepted definition of early childhood leadership (Kagan & Bowman, 1997).

Frameworks that develop pathways for aligning beliefs and professional identity are important in building professional capacity and must be maintained (Stamopoulos

(2012). In many ways, Kagan and Bowman (1997) use their Five Faces of Leadership as a framework to analyze the multi-faceted nature of early childhood leadership (Rodd, 2013).

Pedagogical Face of Leadership. Katz (1997) discusses pedagogical leadership within three aspects based on her knowledge and experience: (a) ideology, (b) research interpreters, and (c) pedagogical agenda.

The Aspect of Ideology. Ideology is generally described as a set of strong beliefs that are rarely backed by evidence. Katz (1997) believes that the lack of evidence in early childhood education is due to the ethical nature of working with young children. She states, “As long as we have any reason to believe that something is good for children, it is unethical to withhold it from them just for the sake of the advancement of science or to test theories and methods” (p. 17). She goes on to discuss ways to overcome the restraints that ideology can create by arguing that “leaders are likely to be effective when they make explicit their ideological assumptions, strive for openness to counter-evidence, and explicate their views with appropriate qualifiers as to the sources of their own convictions” (p. 18).

The Aspect of Research Interpretation. According to Katz (1997), two subcultures exist in the world of early childhood; the practitioners that are with learners day in and day out, and social scientists or researchers that are generally the ones engaging in research and producing new knowledge, generally housed in higher educational settings. She believes it is the responsibility of an early childhood leader to listen, acknowledge, and masterfully interpret both sides of the expertise to guide decision making related to early learning.

The Aspect of the Pedagogical Agenda. When leaders take their skills as a research interpreter and apply them to practice and decision making with practitioners, they are revealing a pedagogical agenda. A leader's first step in establishing a pedagogical agenda is developing visions, rules, guidelines and practices that support practitioners in their day-to-day work. Their second step is taking new research or theory to practitioners and inspire experimentation and change (Katz, 1997).

Hujala et al., (2016) suggested a similar approach to pedagogical leadership consisting of three elements: developing educational practices, taking care of human relations, and administrative management from the perspective of educational goals. These elements, although stated differently, have a similar disposition to Katz's (1997) aspects of pedagogical leadership. Both believe that the work of an early childhood leader encompasses knowledge and understanding of research, evidence-based practices, stakeholder beliefs, and weaving those things together in decision making situations. Stamopoulos (2012) also stated the importance of pedagogical leadership.

The early childhood profession's focus must be on pedagogical leadership that connects to practice, builds professional capacity and capability, and recognises the importance of relationship building and quality infrastructure (p. 47).

Administrative Face of Leadership. Culkin (1997) uses terms like manager, managing and managerial as descriptors of administrative leadership as well as organizational culture. Culkin (1997) listed seven competencies that are essential to administrative leadership success. These competencies and descriptions are as follows:

1. Develop and maintain an effective organization - seeing organizations as a system of components such as environment, people, structure, processes, culture and outcomes.
2. Plan and implement administrative systems that effectively carry out the program's mission, goals, and objectives - organization of tasks, teams, decision making processes, facilities for all program components.
3. Effectively administer a program of personnel management and staff development - hiring and firing of personnel while maintaining the confidence and support of parents, children, staff and boards.
4. Foster good community relations and influence the child care policy that affects the program - gaining knowledge of both internal and external community health services, social services, vendors of needed service, legislative processes and media resources.
5. Maintain and develop the facility - establish and maintain procedures to monitor compliance with codes, such as fire, zoning, safety of equipment, and security.
6. Have the legal knowledge necessary for effective management - general knowledge of regulations and policies related to child care custody issues, confidentiality laws, liability issues, health rules, and basic contracts.
7. Have financial management skills - mobilizing needed resources, maintaining accurate records and directing others in financial planning and reporting (pp. 25-30).

It could be argued that Culkin (1997) and Bush (2020) have different views on management as Culkin includes vision, mission, and people work in her competencies, whereas Bush states that managerial leadership “does not include the concept of vision” (p. 50). However, Rodd (2013) argues that “it is not clear what differentiates leadership from management and leaders from managers in the early childhood context. In general, leaders lead people in ways that empower and develop others. Managers manage functions, processes and people” (p. 19). These arguments are also likely part of why Kagan and Bowman (1997) believe that early childhood leadership as a subfield is pragmatically challenging.

Leaders in school districts around the state of Iowa have, at some point, applied for grant funds to initially begin their SWVPP. Subsequent years’ funding is provided based on the annual preschool programming count (number of enrolled learners) that occurs at the beginning of October each year. SWVPP leaders are also required to provide an annual report regarding program requirements. These tasks alone connect leadership in SWVPP to the concept of administrative leadership and managerial leadership previously discussed.

Advocacy Face of Leadership. Supporting children and families is the foundation of advocacy leadership. Although all leaders have to advocate for their beliefs and practices, for early childhood leaders, advocacy is essential to the growth and progress of their field. Blank (1997) examines specific leadership characteristics that support early childhood leaders in their role as an advocate. These characteristics are:

- Having a vision, planning for the long term, and moving beyond the press of everyday responsibilities.

- Reaching out and working with people and organizations beyond familiar colleagues.
- Scanning the environment to seize strategic opportunities to move an issue forward.
- Making strategic use of data and expert support.
- Developing new approaches to reach the public and policymakers.
- Making tough decisions and risking being popular.
- Hanging tough, being relentless, and continually developing new approaches to highlight the issues.
- Know how and when to compromise.
- Inspiring and supporting new leaders and collaborating with colleagues (pp. 39-45).

Many of these characteristics have a familiar resemblance to many characteristics of both servant leadership and transformational leadership which both fall under the human resources frame. There is a clear focus on being visionary and getting outside of what is comfortable in order to do what is best for children, families, and staff.

Community Face of Leadership. Building relationships on trust and understanding with community stakeholders is another face of early childhood leadership. Being a community leader means being visible in the community, telling your story of early childhood education and making meaning for stakeholders so they are willing to collaborate with you in support of your goals (Crompton, 1997). Creating partnership with powerful stakeholders is not always easy as a leader; however,

Crompton (1997) presents a few key personal characteristics and professional skills that can guide leaders through their community leadership.

Personal attributes such as character, passion, and optimism are foundational for the success of a community leader (Crompton, 1997). The skills that serve a community leader well include knowledge and experience in early education, a strong track record, commitment and vision, risk taking, and sharing credit with stakeholders when possible (Crompton, 1997).

Another way to look at community leadership is through the lens of the relationship that leaders and staff have with children and families. By engaging with families in a variety of ways, collaborative partnerships are formed, thus creating a community of people working together to support individuals as well as program goals. In connection with the political frame, Bush (2020) suggests that an external stakeholder's input can have significant influence on an internal stakeholder's decision making. Management in the political frame deals with the community or external stakeholders in a way that takes time, commitment, and strategy to accomplish a leader's goals (Crompton, 1997).

Conceptual Face of Leadership. A concept is generally described as an idea or thought that can sometimes vary in meaning between individuals. Although conceptual leadership is not a term that frequently appears in the literature or everyday vocabulary, it is used here to describe leadership that goes beyond thinking about individual programs but rather having a sense of the field as a whole (Kagan & Neuman, 1997).

Visionary leadership and conceptual leadership share many of the same elements. Visionary and conceptual leaders both focus on big picture thinking, inclusive and long

term planning, and pushing beyond current reality to possibilities of the future (Kagan & Neuman, 1997). Visionary leadership and conceptual leadership can be viewed through the lens of the symbolic frame. However, Kagan and Neuman (1997) identify one important difference: that conceptual leadership transcends a single program or organization. They (Kagan & Neuman, 1997) continue with their description of conceptual leadership to build a better understanding.

Conceptual leadership focuses less within organizations than it does between and across them. Inherent in this construct of conceptual leadership is a decided de-emphasis on any single program, funding stream or service. Similarly, conceptual leadership is less concerned with the development of any single curriculum, policy or strategy. Rather, it is concerned with the cumulative efforts of such discrete efforts, with how they interact and fit together (p.61).

So how does a leader make steps or movements in their field as a conceptual leader? Kagan and Neuman (1997) believe that attitudinal, behavioral, and structural steps can be taken to promote conceptual leadership. Early childhood leaders must think about early education as a social imperative, then work to share and train stakeholders to share their beliefs and passion. Finally, leaders must create structures and forums in which individuals can come together, both literally and metaphorically, to work on change related to their beliefs and ideas (Kagan & Neuman, 1997).

Connecting Leadership in Iowa's Schools and Early Childhood Education

Educational leadership and early childhood leadership, especially in Iowa, share many common attributes. Leaders in Iowa have the same licensure requirements, follow

the same standards for professional growth, work in public school districts and provide guidance and support for the academic success and well-being of learners. But as explored, early childhood leaders have additional requirements set out by Iowa Code and program standards. So what exactly do Iowa Early Childhood leaders need to know to be effective?

Kingrey (2014) found, from an early childhood teacher's perspective, there is a gap in understanding of early childhood best practices and developmentally appropriate practices for leaders without early childhood experience. Based on his findings, he believes leaders should have experience in early childhood and have advanced understanding of developmentally appropriate practices and child development prior to becoming a principal to an early childhood classroom (Kingrey, 2014).

However, as we know, based on licensure in the state of Iowa, that is not always possible for leaders, especially in Iowa's rural districts where leaders serve larger spans of grades. So then the question becomes, how do we support, teach, and guide administrators that do not have this knowledge, background and experience? What particular pedagogy is needed for leaders to be successful early childhood administrators?

Research-Based Early Childhood Pedagogy

We can begin our understanding of early childhood pedagogy by first exploring and defining teaching and learning. Traditionally, the term teaching could be described as something teachers do while learning could be described as what learners do; however simply associating teaching with teachers and learning with learners is an oversimplification of both terms.

Teaching can be defined in many ways due to the broadness of the term. Teaching can be described as imparting knowledge from teacher to student, it can be instruction including moves and practices of teachers, it can be the explanation of content, knowledge or skills, and it can be the use of applying curriculum in a classroom. Although all of those explanations can be true in isolation or in any combination together, it is important to understand that in teaching, active participation of the learner is a key factor (Mascolo, 2009). Therefore, if teaching can be the instruction or moves and practices of teachers, then learning can be defined as the result of that teaching.

Young (2015) identifies aspects of learning as knowledge building and skill acquisition which can occur through both education and experiences. Knowledge building is broader in a sense because the term knowledge includes acquisition of skills but can also encompass facts, information and even an understanding of how to use facts, information and skills, whereas the term skills is generally used more to define a narrow ability of area of expertise. In short, teaching and learning are reciprocal of one another.

Additionally, in the context of schools, teaching and learning is often associated with professional learning communities, curriculum, and assessment. In professional learning communities, teaching and learning is often viewed through the four PLC questions popularized by the DuFours (DuFour & DuFour, 2013). The four questions are:

1. What do we want all students to know and be able to do?
2. How will we know if they learn it?
3. How will we respond when some students do not learn?
4. How will we extend the learning for students who are already proficient?

In the state of Iowa, the Iowa Early Learning Standards inform what we want preschoolers to learn. The pedagogy used to facilitate learning is informed by assessments.

Unpacking what is meant by teaching and learning is a first step in understanding early childhood pedagogy. To gain a deeper understanding, it is helpful to unpack what is meant by early childhood and pedagogy as well. Early childhood is defined as a developmental period in life ranging from birth to age 8 (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009) and pedagogy is defined as “the method and practice of teaching” (McKean, 2005, p.). By understanding teaching and learning, as well as its direct correlation to pedagogy, we can begin to answer the earlier question of, what particular pedagogy is needed for leaders to be successful early childhood administrators?

Loughran (1999) states that “central to the idea of pedagogy is the normativity of distinguishing between what is appropriate and what is less appropriate for children and what are appropriate ways of teaching and giving assistance to children and young people” (p.14). Based on this understanding, it makes sense to take a deeper look at developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) considering the direct correlation between DAP and early childhood pedagogy. NAEYC (2020) defines DAP as:

methods that promote each child’s optimal development and learning through a strengths-based, play-based approach to joyful, engaged learning. Educators implement developmentally appropriate practice by recognizing the multiple assets all young children bring to the early learning program as unique individuals and as members of families and communities. Building on each child’s strengths—and taking care to not

harm any aspect of each child’s physical, cognitive, social, or emotional well-being—educators design and implement learning environments to help all children achieve their full potential across all domains of development and across all content areas. Developmentally appropriate practice recognizes and supports each individual as a valued member of the learning community. As a result, to be developmentally appropriate, practices must also be culturally, linguistically, and ability appropriate for each child (para. 1).

Constructed from this definition and the definition of pedagogy, this study will consider three teaching methods that bridge both pedagogy and developmentally appropriate practice when considering potential needs of administrators supporting programs and/or teachers in Iowa’s preschools. The three methods are: (a) play based learning, (b) engaged learning, and (c) designing and implementing learning environments.

Play Based Learning. Play is a commonly known instructional strategy in the world of early childhood education. Seen mostly in classrooms from birth through age 5, it is likely that an administrator with upper grade teaching experience may have never experienced a classroom in which play is a primary teaching method. “Play is central to development, because play is the laboratory where individuals exercise and refine their abilities to comprehend and manage the world” (Henricks, 2020, p.126).

Understanding the importance of play, as well as the benefits for young children, will help administrators guide, support, and evaluate preschool programs and teachers under their leadership. “Play is how children learn to socialize, to think, to solve

problems, to mature and most importantly, to have fun” (Anderson-McNamee & Bailey, 2010, p.3). For classrooms supporting learners ages 3-5, facilitation of play supports development of learners in social emotional development, scientific thinking, spatial reasoning, language, and executive function (Hassinger-Das et al., 2017).

Although administrators may not necessarily need to understand the different levels of play and the specifics on the benefits of each kind of play, understanding why play is important and using that knowledge to evaluate teacher interactions, as well as purchase appropriate instructional materials and curriculum, is important. With the understanding of play as good instruction, administrators will also better understand a teacher’s need for a flexible classroom schedule, materials that learners can explore and manipulate, and the benefits of observing a teacher interacting with children during play, all of which may look and sound a little different than the needs of teachers in upper grade classrooms.

Engaged Learning. Understanding the importance of play is a great first step in understanding what engaged learning looks and sounds like during the early childhood years. Engaged learning can look different in preschool than it does in upper grades. Engaged learning in preschool is defined as the time children are actively involved with materials, with other children, or experiences (DeKruif & McWilliam, 1999; McWilliam & Bailey, 1992;). Research has shown that a child’s engagement in preschool is a strong predictor of success in learning, development, and overall well-being in the later years (Belsky et al., 2007; Chien et al., 2010; Fuhs et al., 2013; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Ladd & Dinella, 2009). According to McWilliam and Casey (2008), engagement in a preschool classroom is “the amount of time a child spends interacting with the environment in a

developmentally and contextually appropriate manner, at different levels of competence” (p.17). Using this definition, it is reasonable to assume that one of the highest forms of engagement in preschool classrooms would occur during play. However, this does not mean that children can only be engaged during play. Learning for young children can also take place during times of the day like small groups, large group circles and meal times; however, engagement needs to remain a focus in order to ensure learning.

McWilliam and Casey (2008) organize and explain engagement using categories and levels within categories. The four categories are nonengagement, unsophisticated engagement, differentiated engagement, and sophisticated engagement. Table 4 can be used to understand these categories of engagement and can be used to identify how engagement may look at any time of the day, including play and more structured times such as large and small groups.

Table 4*Categories and Characteristics of Engagement*

| Category of Engagement | Characteristics of Engagement |
|------------------------|---|
| Sophisticated | Pretending, problem solving, talking about past and future, making, creating, persisting, etc |
| Differentiated | Playing with peers and toys, following classroom routines, engaging in language exchanges that are non-repetitive |
| Unsophisticated | Looking at an object or person for three seconds, repetitive behaviors such as rolling a car back and forth or maintaining a loop of feedback with an object or toy |
| Nonengagement | Unoccupied behavior, staring blanking, crying or whining, aggression, rule breaking, doing opposite of what an adult wants him or her to do |

McWilliam and Casey (2008)

The Learning Environment. The third and final instructional piece to understand early childhood pedagogy is the importance of the learning environment. Although the learning environment is important in all classrooms at any grade level, the environment of a preschool classroom is, in itself, an important instructional tool and strategy. A classroom environment can tell a story of what is and what is not important learning that occurs there. Consider the impact of a preschool classroom that is full of

desks or even large tables compared to a classroom where there are clearly defined spaces on the floor and small tables surrounded by small furniture and toys.

The physical environment of a preschool classroom should be created to “foster children’s initiative, active exploration of materials and sustained engagement with other children, adults, and activities” (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p.153). It is also important that the environment is organized and predictable so children feel comfortable and safe. A well designed classroom allows adults in the room to not only supervise play and learning but it also provides teachers with opportunities to see when and where they can engage and scaffold learning. It “has the power to improve children’s level of engagement; enhance their learning; decrease negative behaviors; and become the “home” for your caring, collaborative classroom community” (Fowler, 2022, para. 20).

Summary

Educational leadership and early childhood education in the state of Iowa come with their own set of codes, rules and recommendations. Early childhood teachers are trained in the teaching practices that are unique to early childhood education. Administrators are trained in leadership styles and management best practices. However, for administrators that oversee and/or support Iowa’s SWVPP, it is essential administrators know and understand early childhood education and how their leadership can support high quality early education. Due largely to Iowa’s licensure policies and educational leadership preparation programs, there is a population of leaders in Iowa schools that may not have the background or pedagogical knowledge unique to early childhood education. There is a clear need to provide leaders with some basic pedagogical knowledge, but the questions of when, where and how still exist.

This study will help to provide insight in regard to the background and experiences of leaders of Iowa's preschool programs. It will explore how current administrators use general leadership knowledge and best practices to make decisions regarding their preschool programs and classrooms. Finally, it will dig into the needs of current administrators in the area of early childhood pedagogy. Although the answers to these questions will not be able to answer the immensity of questions regarding early childhood leadership in Iowa, it will serve as a piece of evidence that could have a worthwhile impact on supporting Iowa's early childhood leaders.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the experiences, knowledge, and pedagogical needs of licensed Iowa administrators that provide leadership to programs and teachers in Iowa's Statewide Voluntary Preschool Programs (SWVPP).

Research Questions

1. What kinds of backgrounds, educational preparations, and experiences do current Iowa administrators have who also oversee Iowa's Statewide Voluntary Preschool Programs (SWVPP)?
2. What are some examples of leadership roles and responsibilities of current Iowa Administrators who oversee SWVPP?
3. Is there a need to support Iowa's SWVPP leaders with early childhood pedagogical knowledge, and if so, what knowledge would best support them in their role as leaders?

Research Methods

This research study was conducted and analyzed through a mixed methods approach. Qualitative data was the dominant paradigm used in this study and grounded theory methodology was used for analysis to create theories related to the knowledge, background, experiences, and pedagogical needs of early childhood leaders in Iowa. Grounded theory is "a theory that emerges from, or is "grounded" in, the data-hence, grounded theory" (Merriam, 2009, p.29). The quantitative data was included in this study and analyzed through a descriptive statistical analysis approach allowing the researcher to

summarize the data set, conveying information about the background and experiences of the research participants (Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

The data collection tool used to collect both the qualitative and quantitative data was a survey. The survey was divided into three clear sections. The first section collected primarily quantitative data where sections two and three primarily collected qualitative data through narrative, open-ended response questions that could have been experienced in a participant interview. The researcher chose to use a survey rather than interviews for three main reasons.

The first reason was the number of participants. The researcher anticipated being able to gather information from more participants through a survey than would have been possible with interviews. The survey was extended to the majority of leaders in Iowa that oversee a SWVPP. Through the use of the survey, information was able to be gathered from rural and urban leaders all over the state.

The second reason was time. Through the use of the survey the researcher was able to get participant responses in a shorter amount of time. Time was also considered in relation to when the study was being conducted. The survey went out to participants just a week or more before many Iowa schools began preservice days. The researcher anticipated participants would more likely respond on their own time rather than a set time or day that would be required for interviews.

The third reason was efficiency. Within the survey, some quantitative data was also collected related to years of service, years of leadership, and years of experience directly related to early childhood leadership. The researcher believed it would be more

efficient to capture both the quantitative data and qualitative data concurrently. It was also more efficient to survey, rather than interview, a large number of participants.

Participants

The target audience for this research study included principals, directors, and other administrators that hold an Iowa administrator license and have leadership responsibilities in a SWVPP. Leadership responsibilities were defined as: hiring of preschool teachers or paraeducators, evaluation of preschool teacher(s), evaluation of preschool support staff (paraeducators), program funding, program desk audit, curriculum decision making, assessment decision making, and collaboration or support with community partner programs. Participants were asked to identify any and all of their responsibilities from this list.

To create a list of potential participants, the researcher merged the information from the “*Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program School Districts and Buildings 2021-2022*” (Iowa Department of Education, 2022d) and the “*2021-2022 Iowa Public School Building Directory*” (Iowa Department of Education, 2021b). In instances where names and contact information for potential participants were still missing, the researcher filtered through district websites to identify the names and email addresses of program leaders (principals, directors, etc). Additionally, information found on district websites enabled the researcher to add principals, assistant principals, and a few directors to the participant list. Once all the information was complete, the researcher eliminated community partner sites and leaders that did not hold an administrator license and eliminated duplicate leaders that were listed as leaders to multiple sites or buildings. In some instances where districts had hired new administrators and updated information was

on their website, contact information for a building was changed to reflect the most up to date information. The final participant email list consisted of 485 possible participants.

Survey

The research survey used (Appendix A) was created by the researcher in Qualtrics through the University of Northern Iowa (UNI). The survey was developed in three sections, each section correlating with one of the three research questions.

Question 1. What kinds of backgrounds, educational preparations, and experiences do current Iowa administrators have who also oversee Iowa's Statewide Voluntary Preschool Programs (SWVPP)?

To determine answers to this question, seven multiple choice or one-word answer questions were generated to gather data on demographics, such as years of experience, their own prior classroom teaching, licenses held, and number of teachers and preschool children under their responsibilities. Three short open-ended questions inviting a short narrative response were generated to nudge them to elaborate on the types of teaching experiences they had prior to becoming an administrator, the types of administrative roles they served, and any other information related to background, experience, or education related to SWVPP.

Question 2. What are some examples of leadership roles and responsibilities of current Iowa Administrators who oversee SWVPP?

Section two of the survey contained two multiple choice questions, three questions asking for a 3-5 sentence response, and seven short answer, open-ended narrative response questions. The questions were crafted to gain an understanding of the decision making factors, styles and processes of early childhood leaders. Questions 1-13

were focused on leadership styles and practices developed around the four frames model discussed in the literature review whereas, the second set of questions, questions 14-24, were more specific to early childhood leadership roles and responsibilities.

Question 3. Is there a need to support Iowa's SWVPP leaders with early childhood pedagogical knowledge and if so, what knowledge would best support them in their role as leaders?

The final section in the survey had a sole purpose of understanding pedagogical knowledge and needs of early childhood leaders. Five sets of questions were generated with each set relating to a discussion piece in the literature review: (a) Developmentally appropriate practice, curriculum and assessment, (b) play, (c) engaged learning, (d) environment, and (e) general conclusion (Table 5).

Table 5*Questions Related to Pedagogy*

| | |
|--|--|
| Developmentally Appropriate Practice Curriculum & Assessment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Describe your current understanding of the term “developmentally appropriate practice” ● List the curriculum/assessment used in your preschool program. ● Describe any pedagogical methods you feel are important for early childhood leaders to know. |
| Play | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How important is play? ● What is the role of the teacher in play? ● What should be understood about play for early childhood leaders? |
| Engaged Learning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Describe what you believe engaged preschoolers look and sound like ● Do you believe engagement is essential to learning during all activities |
| Environment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How important is the environment? ● What should preschool classrooms look like? |
| General Conclusion | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Importance of professional learning for EC leaders. ● Who is responsible for giving professional learning to Iowa’s leaders? |

Three of these questions were Likert Scale questions. Ten questions required longer explanations. Questions in this section aspired to gain an understanding of the leader’s pedagogical knowledge in the past and present, as well as their thoughts and ideas on future learning related to early childhood pedagogy.

The data for this mixed methods study was conducted concurrently, meaning both the quantitative and qualitative data was collected at the same time, in this instance, through the use of a survey. The survey was emailed to all 485 potential participants, through the Qualtrics system with the electronic informed consent letter (Appendix B).

Follow up emails, used as reminders, were sent out one week after the initial invitation and then again after another week. One final reminder was emailed two nights before the survey was set to close. The survey was expected to close 3 weeks after the initial invitation; however, participants that had started the survey but had not finished were allowed one week from their start date to complete the survey, thus resulting in a final closure of the survey 4 additional days past the expected closure date.

Data Analysis

This mixed methods research design used two analysis methodologies to examine and find meaning within the data. Initially, data was divided into three sections, aligned with the three survey sections, for analysis. The first section, primarily quantitative data, was analyzed through a descriptive statistical approach. The data was compiled, grouped and organized based on participant responses, and was later triangulated with the qualitative data from sections two and three in order to increase the validity of the grounded theory that emerged.

The constant comparative data analysis method was used to examine the results of the data from sections two and three, as well as two questions in section one of the survey. The three coding procedures which occurred during analysis included open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Open coding and axial coding were used to analyze two questions within section one that were partially open-ended; however, responses did not yield enough data to be significant from the two coding processes.

The second section of the survey consisting of 11 questions, and the third section of the survey consisting of 13 questions, were separated for open coding and axial coding

analysis. During open coding analysis, the researcher examined responses for each individual question, looking for words, phrases, or ideas that could be labeled and named and potentially be organized into categories or groups for further analysis (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). During axial coding, the researcher began to create clusters, still within each section of data, and look for relationships between and across participant responses. This stage of coding also involved organization and more defined clarity of clusters beginning to emerge within the data.

The third coding procedure used was selective coding. Selective coding began with the convergence of the qualitative data from both sections two and three of the survey. First, theories from open and axial coding were verified followed by the researcher again looking for words or phrases that were repeated frequently in participant responses.

The final component of analysis occurred through again rechecking the theories previously found in the data. This triangulation was necessary to ensure that theoretical saturation (Johnson & Christensen, 2008) had occurred during the overall data analysis process.

Chapter Four: Results

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the experiences, knowledge, and pedagogical needs of licensed Iowa administrators that provide leadership to programs and teachers in Iowa's Statewide Voluntary Preschool Programs (SWVPP). The study was guided by the following questions:

1. What kinds of backgrounds, educational preparations, and experiences do current Iowa administrators have who also oversee Iowa's Statewide Voluntary Preschool Programs (SWVPP)?
2. What are some examples of leadership roles and responsibilities of current Iowa Administrators who oversee SWVPP?
3. Is there a need to support Iowa's SWVPP leaders with early childhood pedagogical knowledge and if so, what knowledge would best support them in their role as leaders?

The data for this research study was collected through the use of an online survey in Qualtrics through the University of Northern Iowa (UNI). Of the 485 surveys initially emailed to potential participants, four emails were found as duplicates dropping potential participants to 481. Additionally, 39 emails bounced back, thus resulting in a final potential participant count of 442.

One week after the initial correspondence with participants, eight surveys had been completed. Three reminder emails were sent to participants over the course of the following 2 weeks which resulted in five additional participants each time. The final total of survey responses collected was 23. Of the 23 total responses, following the first three

questions, the total responses dropped to 19 for the remainder of section one of the survey. Following the first section of the survey, an additional 8 participants discontinued, thus resulting in 11 participant responses for sections two and three of the survey.

The survey collected both qualitative and quantitative data and was organized into three sections: (a) Demographics, Background, and Experience; (b) Leadership Styles and Practices; and (c) Pedagogical Knowledge. The results will first be discussed by each section, then collectively as a whole.

Demographics, Backgrounds and Experience

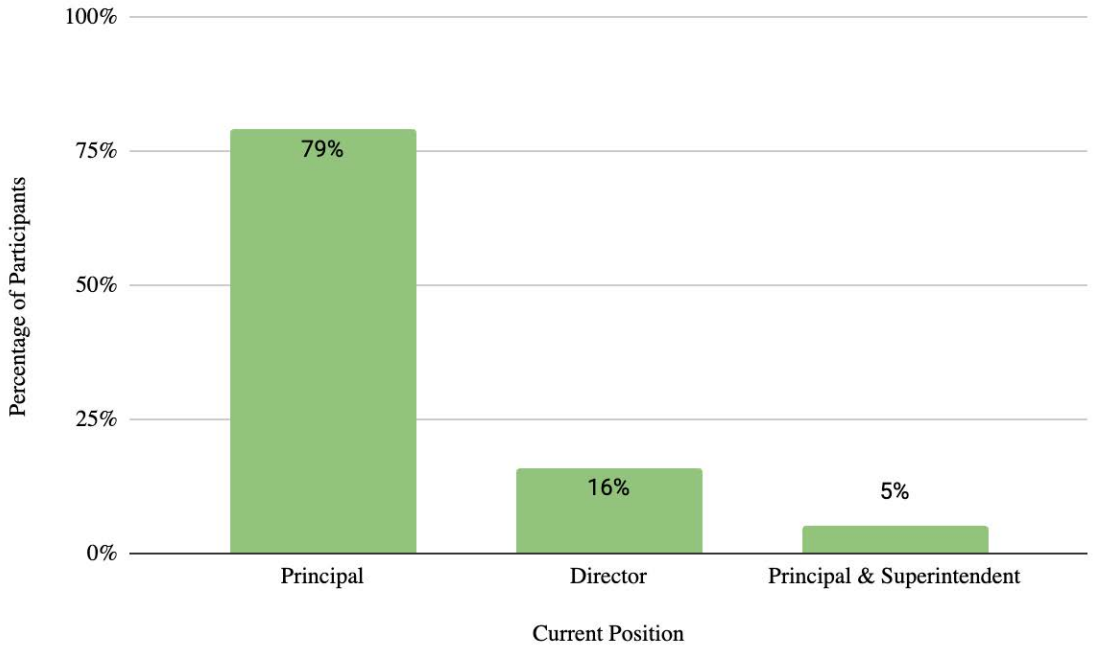
Question 1. What kinds of backgrounds, educational preparations, and experiences do current Iowa administrators have who also oversee Iowa's Statewide Voluntary Preschool Programs (SWVPP)? To answer the first research question, quantitative data was collected and analyzed using a descriptive statistical approach.

Administrators' Titles

Of the participants that completed section one of the survey, 79% identified as a principal, 16% identified as a director and 5% indicated a combined position of superintendent and principal (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

Participant Titles

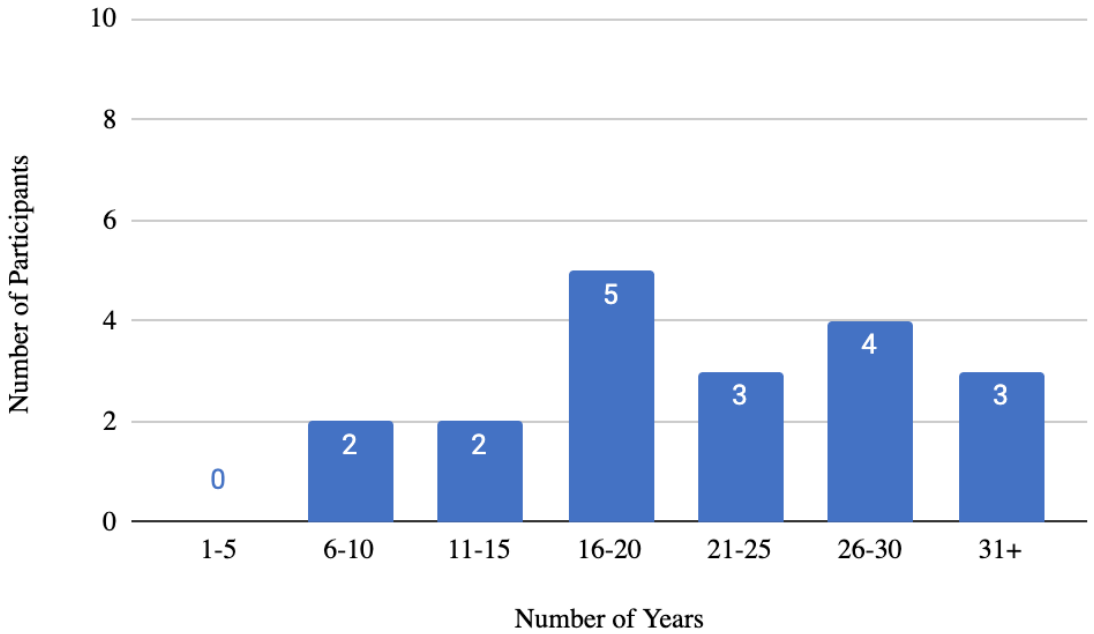


Administrators' Years of Experience in Education

In order to obtain a clear picture of participants' teaching background and experience in education, participants were asked to share their years in education. The data showed there was a mean of 19-22 years in education, a median of 21-25 years in education and a mode of 16-20 years in education (Figure 4).

Figure 4

Years in Education



Administrators' Licensures

Additionally, information was gathered regarding participants' licensure. Of the 19 participants, nine licensure areas were represented with several participants holding multiple license areas. Table 6 shows the number of participants that hold the different areas of licensure.

Table 6*Teaching Licensure*

| Areas of Licensure | Number of Participants |
|--|------------------------|
| Early Access Birth Through Grade 3 | 4 |
| Preschool through Grade 3 | 10 |
| Early Childhood Special Education | 3 |
| Kindergarten through Grade 6 | 17 |
| Grade 7 Through Grade 12 | 2 |
| Special Education | 5 |
| Elementary Physical Education | 1 |
| Foreign Language | 1 |
| English as a Second Language | 1 |
| Mathematics Kindergarten Through Grade 8 | 1 |

The combinations of license areas varied. The data showed that 8 out of 10 participants that hold a PK-3 license also hold an elementary K-6 license. The other 2

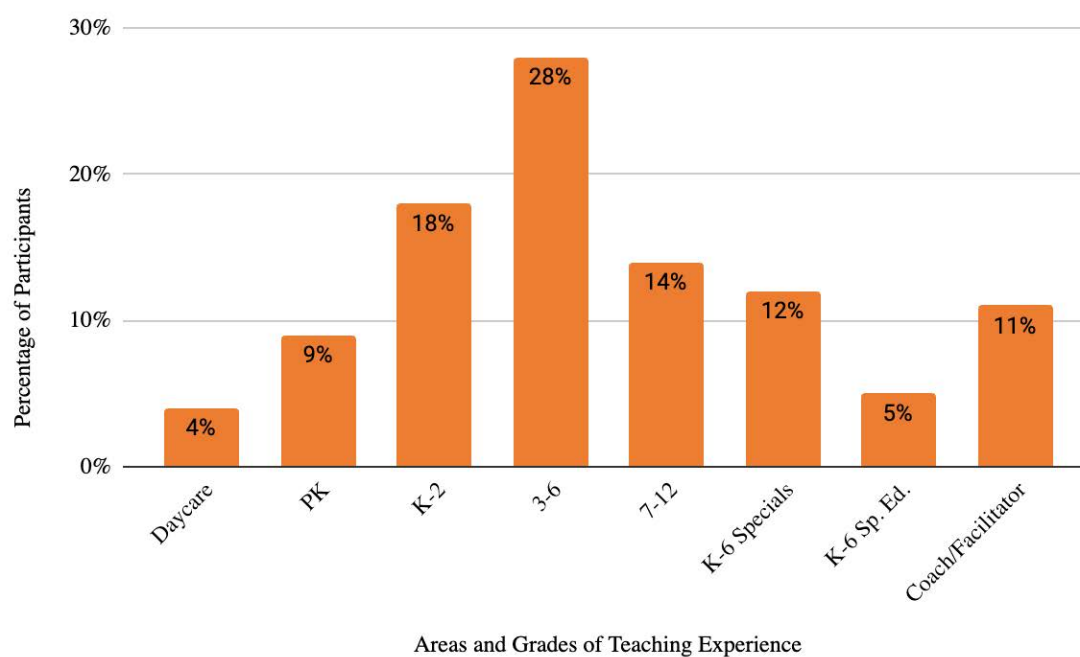
participants with a PK-3 license also hold licenses in Early Access (Birth-3yrs) and Early Childhood Special Education.

Administrators' Personal Experiences in Teaching

Figure 5 illustrates the grade-level teaching experience reported by administrators.

Figure 5

Teaching Experience



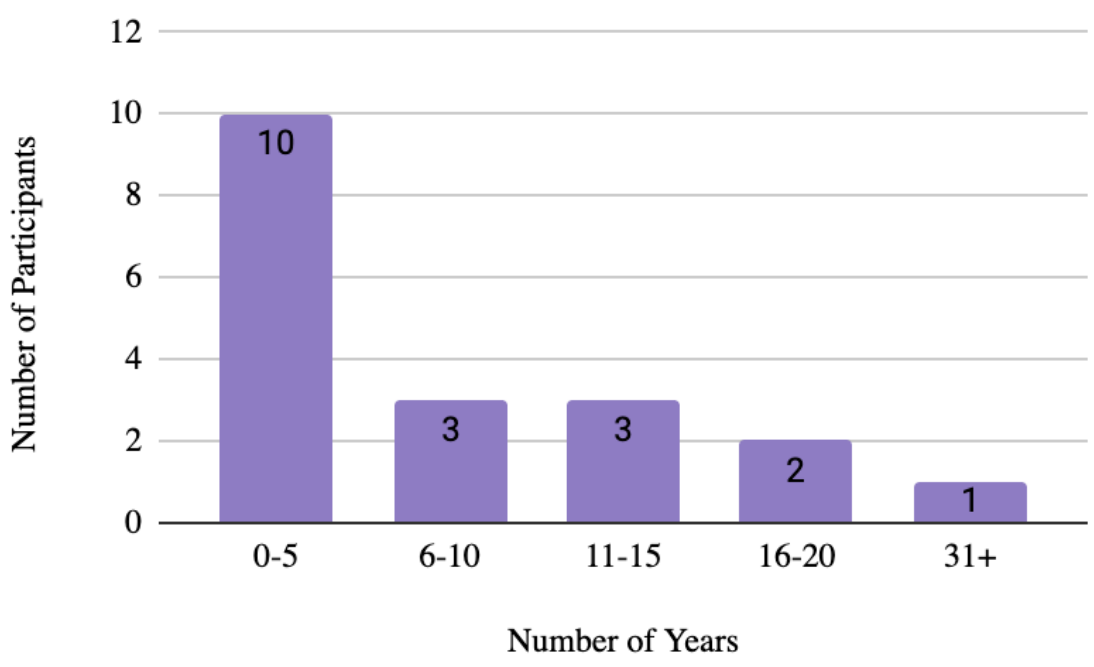
Results indicated 27% of administrators overseeing Iowa's SWVPP had experience teaching in preschool through second grade classrooms, which is by definition early childhood, although only 9% of these administrators had experience teaching preschool.

Years of Experience as an Administrator

In addition to years and experiences in education as a whole, participants were asked to provide the number of years they have been an administrator in Iowa. Ten of the participants were relatively new in their positions as administrators, indicating five or less years of experience with one indicating over 30 years of experience (Figure 6).

Figure 6

Years in Administration



Years of Experience with SWVPP

Narrowing the scope of leadership experience, participants were asked to identify how many years they had been serving as a leader of a SWVPP. The data showed only six administrators have more than 10 years overseeing SWVPP in their role (Table 7).

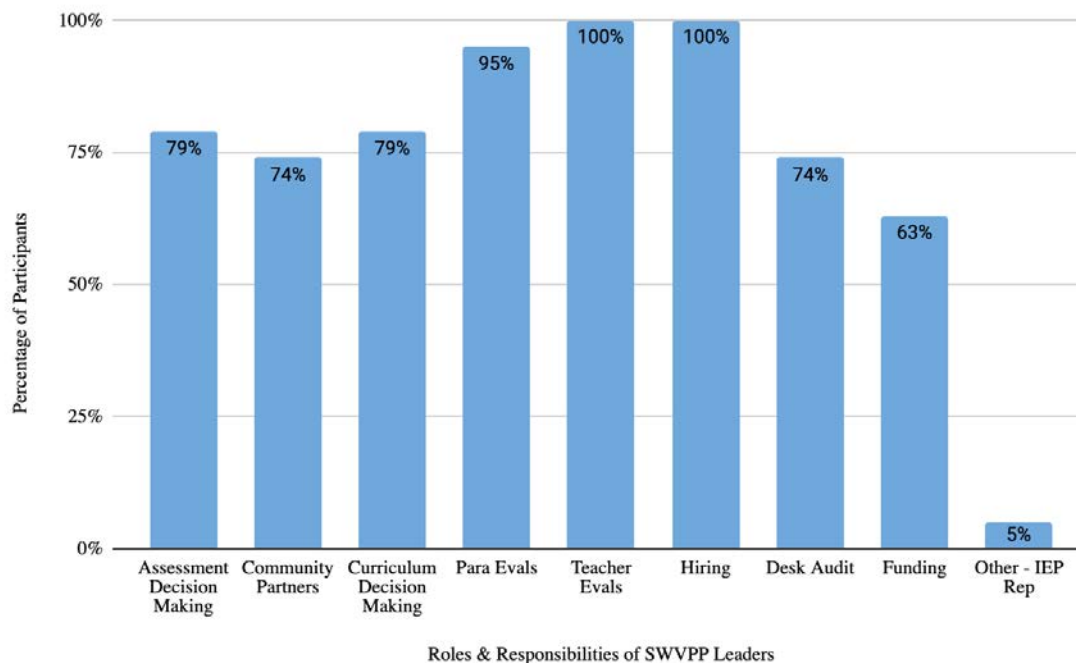
Table 7

Leadership in SWVPP

| Number of Years | Number of Participants |
|-----------------|------------------------|
| 0-1 | 4 |
| 2-5 | 1 |
| 6-10 | 8 |
| 11+ | 6 |

Administrators' Obligations and Responsibilities

In order to understand participant's obligations in their roles, they were asked to identify responsibilities they held as an administrator. One hundred percent identified the hiring and evaluation of teachers as a responsibility, with 95% also responsible for evaluating para educators. Two responsibilities closely related to early childhood pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment were responsibilities of 79% participants, with community partner relationships close behind at 74%. Finally, IQPPS desk audits were a responsibility for 74% and funding a concern of 63% (Figure 7).

Figure 7*Leadership Roles and Responsibilities in SWVPP*

This data conveyed that nearly 80% of participants had responsibilities related to early childhood pedagogy.

SWVPP Teachers and Students

The number of preschool teachers that districts were supporting in SWVPP widely varied (Table 8). Four districts supported only one teacher. However, one district oversaw 31 preschool teachers.

Table 8*Teachers in Participants' SWVPP*

| Number of Teachers | Number of Districts |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| 1 | 4 |
| 2 | 5 |
| 3 | 3 |
| 4 | 2 |
| 6 | 1 |
| 10 | 2 |
| 17 | 1 |
| 31 | 1 |

The number of preschool teachers in SWVPP predicted the number of children in SWVPP (see Table 9). Eight districts served up to 40 children. On the other end of the continuum, one district served 1,100 children in SWVPP.

Table 9*Students Served in Participants' SWVPP*

| Number of Students | Number of Districts |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| 10-40 | 8 |
| 60-80 | 7 |
| 300-400 | 2 |
| 500 | 1 |
| 1110 | 1 |

This information establishes the range of teachers and students served in programs across Iowa. This data also draws attention to the fact that leaders serving both small and large amounts of students participated in the study indicating that conclusions from this study represent school districts of many sizes.

Leadership Roles and Practices in SWVPP***Question 2. What are some examples of leadership roles and responsibilities of current Iowa Administrators who oversee SWVPP?***

To answer this question, data collected in the second section of the survey was analyzed using the constant comparative methodology (Merriam, 2009). Open coding was the first analysis process used to begin to break down and understand responses to questions about leadership roles and responsibilities. The researcher began open coding by identifying key terms and phrases that came from all responses to each individual question. Once the open codes for each question were collected, they were compiled, creating a final list of 203 open codes within section two of the survey.

The next step was to work through the open codes looking for repeated words and phrases. This analysis resulted in 29 codes with a frequency count of three or more. During this narrowing process, words and phrases that had the same meaning as other words and phrases were merged. An example of this are the words collaborate, collaboration and collaborative. Collaboration and collaborative were changed to collaborate in order for codes to be more concise.

During the axial coding process, the 29 repeated codes were clustered and organized based on similarities identifying three clusters: (a) managerial leadership responsibilities; (b) instructional leadership responsibilities; and (c) supports to assist leaders in carrying out instructional responsibilities. The majority of the responsibilities were related to managerial leadership or instructional leadership, both of which are leadership styles under the structural frame of the Four Frames Model (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

Managerial Responsibilities

Bush (2020) wrote that managerial leadership is “focused on managing existing activities successfully rather than visioning a better future for the school” (p. 50). Following Bush’s definition of managerial leadership, responsibilities such as budget/funding, data review protocol, annual oversight checklists, staffing, and handbooks were coded as managerial.

Staffing was a concern. Some expressed difficulty in keeping staff and staying on top of a high turn-over rate. “I have had a lot of turnover for the preschool position. It is very difficult to hire preschool teachers for my school.” Another expressed concern about the teachers’ understanding of inclusion. “Sometimes there are hard feelings when

students require 1:1 assistance. If a child needs a para in one room, the staff in the other room sometimes feels like it isn't fair because they do not have the same amount of help in their room. We spend a lot of time each semester reviewing the difference between a preschool para and a special education para.”

Participants referenced annual, universal desk audits, an annual report submitted to the Iowa Department of Education to provide evidence of compliance with state and federal legal requirements. The audit includes evidence of policies addressing curriculum development, implementation, and evaluation; specifically, policies in place on how to select instructional materials (Iowa Department of Education, 2022a) One stated the audit “tends to be very vague or general and often takes several attempts to satisfy what the state is looking for, but that is because it is difficult to understand from the outset what evidence they are looking for.”

Other participants mentioned the 28E agreement. Because Iowa doesn't fully fund preschool, preschools enter into 28E agreements written into Code of Iowa Chapter 28E. This code provides the ability for governmental and private entities to enter into contracts with each other to provide joint services and facilities and agencies that are mutually advantageous. In agreements between existing preschools and public school districts, the duties and responsibilities in regard to funding, operation, and management of the SWVPP are detailed in a lengthy scope of services the school district and the preschool will each take on.

Instructional Leadership Responsibilities

The instructional leadership responsibilities cluster included codes such as vision/mission, collaboration, professional learning, and special education. When

participants were asked to identify ways in which they include their district's vision, mission, and strategic plan into their early childhood leadership decision making, a participant with early childhood licensure and elementary school experience referenced their mission when she wrote,

“Our mission is every child, every day. This includes providing for our SWVPP children as well by making sure the necessary systems are in place as well as support for the teachers. We also engage in PD designed by our AEA as a team to increase our knowledge and instructional practice.”

Another participant with early childhood licensure and experience responded, “Our preschool leadership team plays a major role in incorporating the vision, mission, and strategic plan into PLC meetings, professional learning, and lesson planning.”

Both of these examples not only address their district's mission, which was included in the question, they also include other terms and phrases that are related to instructional leadership such as professional learning.

Support in Providing Instructional Leadership

The last cluster of codes, support for leaders, indicated that networking and working with AEA were the main ways in which leaders received support related to their instructional leadership responsibilities. When participants were asked how they access learning opportunities for themselves and their teachers, 6 of the 11 responses identified AEA as a support. One participant, with licensure in early childhood and teaching experience in elementary, responded,

“Our area education agency shares current research through monthly newsletters and round table meetings. Professional development opportunities are available through our AEA. We close on a day each January so all staff can train together.”

This data concludes that leaders of SWVPP have a range of leadership responsibilities and rely on the AEA and their peers (where applicable) to support them. One participant with both licensure and experience in elementary school expressed the importance of AEA support, “AEA Early Childhood Supports provide learning opportunities, research and information on best practices- however that is being stretched thin now and we have less access to that. We need this support - we can’t be experts on everything.”

Pedagogical Knowledge

Question 3. Is there a need to support Iowa’s SWVPP leaders with early childhood pedagogical knowledge and if so, what knowledge would best support them in their role as leaders?

Data was collected and analyzed within section three of the survey similar to the manner data was collected and analyzed in section two of the survey. Most questions in this section were open-ended, narrative response questions with several Likert scale questions. Analysis of the data began with open coding, again looking at responses to each individual question separately, resulting in a total of 265 open codes. Codes were then sorted and organized resulting in 21 codes with a frequency count of three or more.

During the axial coding process of the data from section three, the open codes were organized and clustered resulting in two main clusters; (a) instructional practices and (b) curriculum and assessment.

Instructional Practices

The instructional practices cluster contained open codes such as model, engage, centers, play, and facilitation. When participants were asked to describe what they believe a teacher's role is during play in a preschool classroom, four participant responses used the word "facilitate" or create conditions that make play more likely. Facilitation is contingent on the likes and needs of each individual child. The need to differentiate was illustrated in a participant's response who held both licensure and experience in elementary school with the phrase, "depending on the student, to facilitate, prompt, and/or observe." Another participant, also with elementary licensure and experience, agreed saying, "observe and facilitate those who are not engaging."

Instructional practices can be enhanced or limited by the classroom physical and intellectual environments. In regard to the physical arrangement of the classroom, comments leaned toward safety as well as inviting and accessible to young children. The classroom should be arranged for the teacher to "see the whole room at a time" with stations or centers. "Thought should be put into the movement patterns of the room. The placement of various centers should not interfere with each other allowing ease of moving from one area to another." Materials "should be accessible for children's use by putting materials at "eye-level so they can be independent." The survey asked participants to describe what a preschool classroom should look and sound like throughout their day. Responses to this question addressed both engagement and play and described centers and teacher practices such as modeling. A participant with early childhood licensure and experience responded, "Engaged preschoolers ask questions, show excitement and add their experiences and ideas to the study (theme), and interact

with other students and the adults.” Other participants with elementary preparation and experience recognized the value of active, open-ended experiences even though they may not have fully understood its importance. One supported a dramatic play center as it allowed for creativity, imagination, cooperation, and collaboration with classmates. The participant also saw value in sensory tables as it allowed for a “sciency” approach to learning and supporting children “investigating their surroundings and asking questions, making hypotheses, and trying them out.” Another wrote, “They may be playing by self or with others, they may be quiet or talkative. They might be leading, following, or even teaching each other.”

Participants were also asked to describe how important they believed play to be in preschool and also what they believed leaders need to understand about the role of play in the preschool classroom. All participants agreed that play is an essential instructional practice. However, their responses regarding what leaders need to know about play varied. One participant, with early childhood licensure and elementary experience wrote “play is developmentally appropriate and one of the main ways of learning for PK students. Play facilitates learning and helps build the needed social skills beyond academics.” A participant with both licensure and experience in early childhood indicated that leaders need to know that play “is planned and purposeful.” Yet another with early childhood licensure and elementary experience wrote that leaders of early childhood need “to listen to the educators and support them” as it pertains to play in the preschool classroom.

Curriculum and Assessment

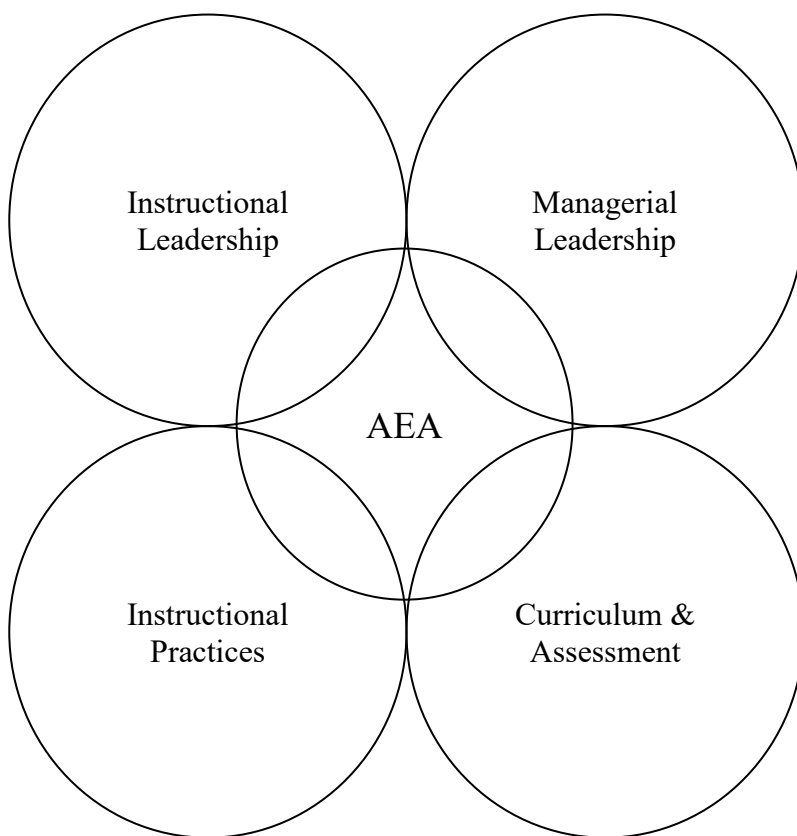
The curriculum and assessment cluster included codes like GOLD®, Creative Curriculum®, early literacy and early math. One question asked participants to list the curricula and assessments used in their preschool program and describe their purpose and how they are used by teachers. Literacy curricula was mentioned by 44% participants, social emotional learning by 33%, and math by 22%. References to pre-packaged curriculum included Jolly Phonics and Heggerty (literacy) Second Step® (social-emotional), Everyday Mathematics and LT2 (mathematics). Creative Curriculum® is a comprehensive curriculum marketed by Teaching Strategies® and was referenced by 56% of participants.

GOLD®, also marketed by Teaching Strategies®, is the state of Iowa's mandatory assessment system for SWVPP and is a comprehensive assessment. It was referenced by 67% of the participants. Assessment using GOLD® can be time consuming for teachers and administrators took note of this. One participant emphasized difficulty with the assessment by stating, "GOLD is a beast!" Another participant with elementary licensure and experience reported efforts to support teachers in implementation by stating,

"The GOLD assessment seems to be a monstrous task each year. We have created protocols where we have trained all teachers and paras as well as having them complete the inter-rater reliability training. We have also set an expectation of inputting at least 15 items per week for each teacher and para so it is not so overwhelming at checkpoint time."

When asked what learning they would like to be provided to support their early childhood teachers this same participant responded, “Deep dive into the curriculum (Creative Curriculum) and assessment (GOLD assessment).” Another expressed a need to help teachers with GOLD® assessments “because we have had a lot of turnover for the preschool position.”

In addition to the data regarding leaders’ pedagogical knowledge and beliefs, participants were specifically asked to address any support and learning they would want to be provided in early childhood pedagogy. The only participant with both early childhood licensure and experience responded, “Educating elementary principals as to what a quality preschool environment consists of” (instructional leadership) while three other responses were for math, literacy and social emotional learning (curriculum and assessment). Additionally, two responses also included a desire to receive learning and support around assessment and state reporting (managerial leadership). Figure 8 provides a visual representation of not only the roles and responsibilities of leaders that emerged from the data but also the desired support.

Figure 8*Clusters of Qualitative Data***Theoretical Saturation**

After open and axial coding was complete, the researcher moved to selective coding, the third analysis process commonly used in the constant comparative data analysis method (Merriam, 2009). Selective coding began with the convergence of the qualitative data from both sections two and three of the survey. During this process, the researcher again looked for words or phrases that were repeated frequently in participant responses resulting in 9 codes with a frequency count of 10 or more and 18 codes with a frequency count between 5 and 9. These 27 codes were then reorganized and sorted into four clusters that emerged during axial coding: (a) Instructional Leadership; (b)

Instructional Practices; (c) Curriculum and Assessment; and (d) Managerial Leadership.

The fifth cluster was formed around the AEA as it surfaced 20 times throughout the data, with the highest frequency count of any single code.

Finally, data from all three sections was examined and reviewed and the clusters that emerged during the first three rounds of analysis were checked and confirmed. This final check served the purpose of ensuring that theoretical saturation and trustworthiness had occurred.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusions

This study was guided by the following questions:

1. What kinds of backgrounds, educational preparations, and experiences do current Iowa administrators have who also oversee Iowa's Statewide Voluntary Preschool Programs (SWVPP)?
2. What are some examples of leadership roles and responsibilities of current Iowa Administrators who oversee SWVPP?
3. Is there a need to support Iowa's SWVPP leaders with early childhood pedagogical knowledge and if so, what knowledge would best support them in their role as leaders?

Discussion

In May of 2007, the Iowa legislature wrote Iowa Code Chapter 256c that established Iowa's Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program (SWVPP). This program had an immediate impact on many school districts in Iowa. Over the course of the last 15 years, Statewide Voluntary Preschool Programs in Iowa have grown tremendously, being offered in 323 or 99% of Iowa's school districts during the 2021-2022 school year (Statewide Preschool Program for Four-Year-Old Children, 2021). This large increase in early childhood programming has resulted in the need for well over 450 Iowa Administrators to have some sort of leadership involvement in their district's preschool program. The purpose of this research study was to gain a better understanding of the background and experiences of those administrators while also examining their use of leadership styles and practices as well as their understanding and need for support in early childhood pedagogy.

A mixed methods research design was used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data to support the generation of theories from the data. Through descriptive statistical analysis and constant comparative data analysis, categories and themes emerged from the data that resulted in a deeper understanding of Iowa's Early Childhood leaders.

Summary of Findings

In order to draw conclusions about the backgrounds and experiences of Iowa's leaders that participated in this study, participant responses regarding their licensure and teaching experience were combined. These two sets of data conclude that 38% of administrators in this study have a license to teach elementary K-6 education; however, 28% have experience in grades 3-6 while only 18% have experience in grades K-2.

Another way to view this data is nine participants had elementary and/or secondary licensure and elementary experience, five participants had early childhood licensure and early childhood experience and four participants had early childhood licensure and elementary experience. This data provided evidence that participants were representative of leaders with varying levels of experience and formal education in early childhood. This data, alongside the other quantitative data was able to sufficiently answer the first research question of the study.

The second research question, regarding leadership roles and responsibilities led to one portion of the grounded theory that emerged from the data. When participants were asked to list their roles and responsibilities, as it related to SWVPP, 80% of participants indicated they had responsibilities related to early childhood pedagogy.

Leadership Through the Structural Frame. In the words of one study participant, “SWVPP is a BEAST!! We can't possibly, as an elementary administrator, manage it all. It is very overwhelming.” This one quote exemplifies the overall feeling of the data that was collected and analyzed for this study in relation to early childhood leadership.

Kagan and Bowman (1997) argue that early childhood practitioners and early childhood social scientists do not always understand one another. They believe it is the role of the early childhood leader to be “both knowledgeable and effective at helping teachers understand and put into action the principles and practices derived from the knowledge base” (p. 18) provided by the social scientists.

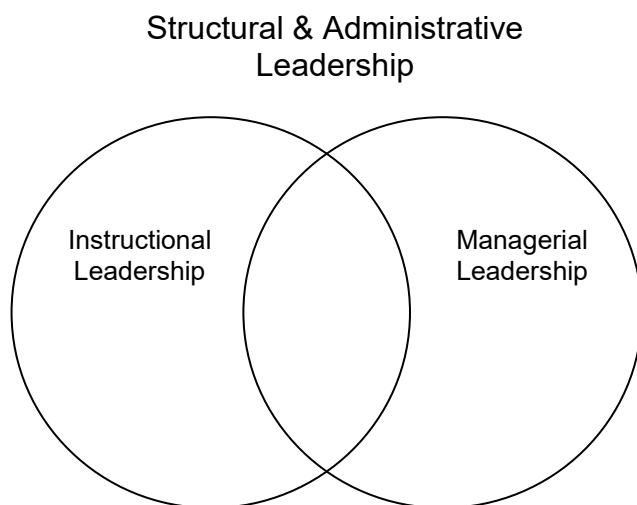
This study found that early childhood leaders in Iowa use many leadership styles; however, the data indicated that instructional leadership and managerial leadership were the two most common styles of leadership used by study participants providing an answer to the second research question. As discussed, the instructional leadership responsibilities found in the data were related to vision/mission, collaboration, professional learning and special education. The managerial responsibilities found in the data included responsibilities related to program management, budget/funding, staffing, and handbooks.

Both of these leadership styles connect to the structural frame of Bolman and Deal's (2013) Four Frame Model and the administrative leadership face of Kagan and Bowman's (1997) Five Faces of Leadership Model. Through the analysis of the study data, alongside a review of the literature associated with these leadership practices, a theory emerges. Leadership roles and responsibilities related to these practices exist both

alone and in combination with one another and fall under the domains of structural and administrative leadership (Figure 9).

Figure 9

Leadership Roles and Responsibilities Theory



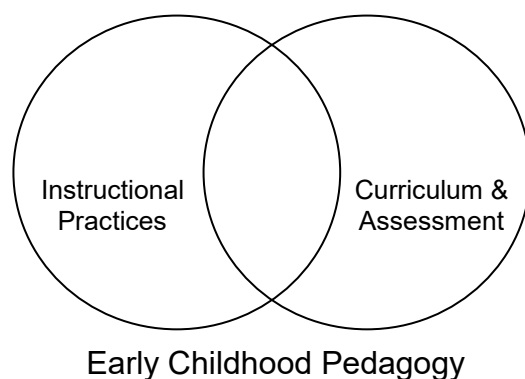
Early Childhood Pedagogy. In addition to the structural and administrative leadership practices found in the data, a portion of the data collected was in regards to early childhood pedagogy knowledge and needs of Iowa's SWVPP leaders. Instructional practices, as well as curriculum and assessment, were themes discovered in the data related to pedagogy. The instructional practices theme contained open codes such as model, engage, centers, play, and facilitation. The curriculum and assessment theme included codes like GOLD®, Creative Curriculum®, early literacy, and early math.

When considering (a) the themes of instructional practices; (b) curriculum and assessment in combination with literature around pedagogical leadership (Kagan & Bowman, 1997); and (c) developmentally appropriate practices, a new theory emerges

answering the first part of the third research question. It is the combination of instructional practices and curriculum and assessment that make up early childhood pedagogy for Iowa's leaders (Figure 10).

Figure 10

Early Childhood Pedagogy Theory

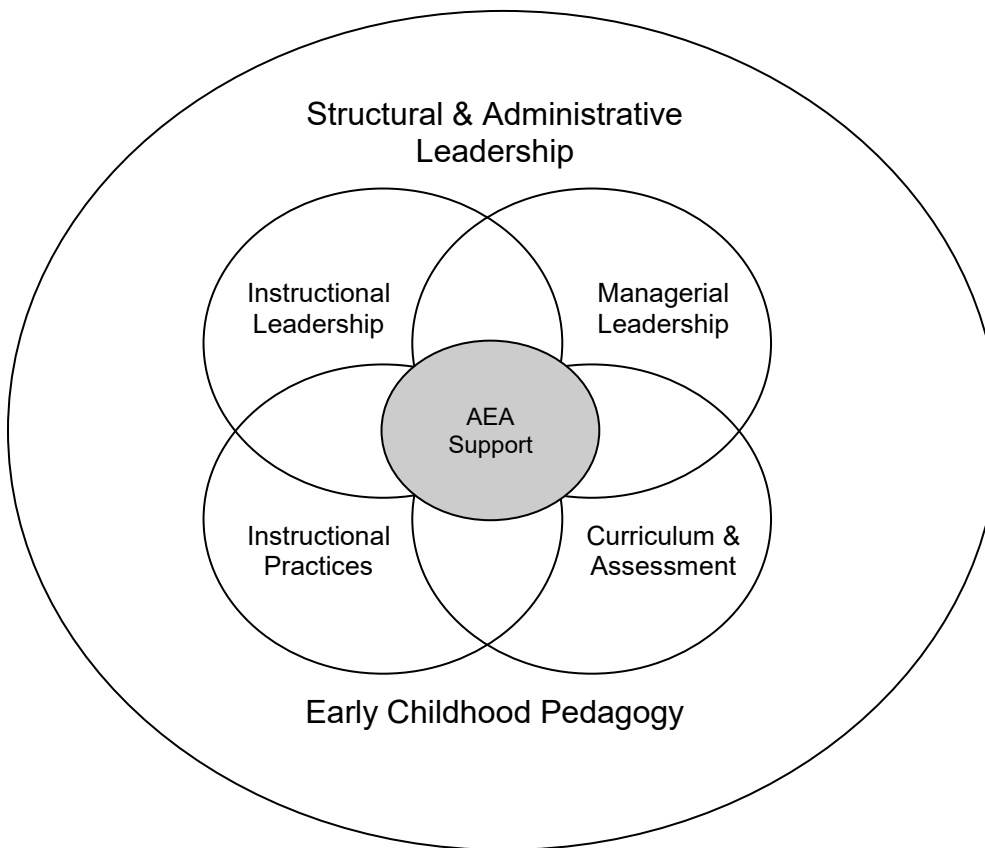


Katz (1997) states, “The pedagogical function of early childhood programs addresses the role and responsibilities of caregivers and teachers with respect to what they intend children to learn and when and how knowledge and skills are best learned” (p.17). It is through knowledge and understanding of early childhood pedagogy that leaders of Iowa’s SWVPP will be able to provide a higher quality of instructional leadership support.

The second part of research question three aimed to understand what current Iowa SWVPP leaders need for support or learning in order to be effective early childhood leaders. The data overwhelmingly answered this question finding that leaders desire more support and learning around instructional practices, and curriculum and assessment. The

data also found that leaders believe that local AEAs should be responsible for providing this learning and support to them.

Grounded Theory. This small-scale representation of the backgrounds, experiences, practices and needs of Iowa's SWVPP leaders allowed me to connect the literature to the combination of the themes and categories that emerged from the quantitative and qualitative data. The data suggests a direction to a new grounded theory. This theory suggests that Iowa's attention to the combination of instructional leadership, managerial leadership, knowledge of instructional practices, and knowledge of curriculum and assessment that administrators may more successfully lead Iowa's SWVPP. The AEAs are in a unique position to design the roadmap for this kind of support (Figure 11).

Figure 11*Grounded Theory Visual Representation***Early Childhood Leadership in Iowa's SWVPP**

Iowa's current implementation of SWVPP is complex. A question that could potentially be explored in future research is how and where can leaders receive learning around leadership practices and early childhood pedagogy that would support them in their successful leadership of an Iowa SWVPP. One participant wrote, "We just can't possibly do it all - this type of program is HUGE!!!" So, how can this administrator and administrators with similar feelings be better supported? In the words of Maya Angelou

(2018) “Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.”

Limitation

There was one important limitation of this research study that is important to discuss; the return rate of the survey. With a return rate of only 5%, the data was not able to represent a complete understanding of Iowa’s current SWVPP leaders. The data for this research was collected during a pandemic. Educators are overwhelmed with addressing the needs of both teachers and students. This may have been a contributing factor of the low return rate for the survey. Another factor for the low response rate may have been the time of the year that the survey was sent. The survey was sent to leaders prior to the start of a school year to avoid interruption in the work of a school year. Sending out the survey at a different time of year may have resulted in a higher response rate. Another factor may have been the length of the survey. There were eight participants who responded to questions in section one, then chose to discontinue rather than responding to questions in sections two and three which asked for more narrative, short answer responses. Restructuring the survey to include more Likert scale questions with an optional comment box may have resulted in a higher return rate, however that would have caused a reduction of the thick descriptions that provided insight to the lives of the participants behind the numerical data.

Implications for Practices

There are multiple implications that can be taken from this research study; however, the biggest implication is the need to help and support Iowa’s current leaders of

SWVPP in the areas of curriculum, assessment, state reporting, and best practices including areas of play, environments, and engagement.

Providing current leaders and future leaders with a foundation of early childhood pedagogy will not only support the work of the leaders but it will also impact the learners in Iowa's SWVPP. If the purpose of SWVPP is to provide young learners with the opportunity to enter elementary school ready to learn (Statewide Preschool Program for Four-Year-Old Children, 2021) then providing learning and support for program leaders is essential to enhance the impact on Iowa's young learners.

The study found that participants believe that the AEAs in Iowa should be responsible for providing learning and support to leaders; however, this study could also potentially have some implications for administrator preparation programs. Universities and colleges that offer an administration degree program could better prepare their students, Iowa's future leaders, with basic knowledge and understanding of the differences they may face if leading a SWVPP. Basic learning around developmentally appropriate practices including quality curriculum and assessment could potentially set future leaders up for a higher level of success.

Conclusion

With the writing of Iowa Code Chapter 256c that established Iowa's Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program (SWVPP), the state of Iowa has experienced a tremendous growth of this program requiring school administrators to take on the responsibility of leading the development and learning of our youngest learners. This mixed methods research study sought to contribute to the knowledge base and understanding of early childhood leadership in the state of Iowa. The data and theory developed from the study

indicate that there may be a need for the administrative leaders of Iowa's Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program to develop an understanding of not only leadership practices, but also early childhood pedagogy.

Examining leadership practices, including pedagogical leadership in Iowa's preschools contributes to the growing body of studies related to the uniqueness of early childhood and also supports the deconstruction and analysis of quality early childhood leadership. The results of this study are limited by the amount of data collected during the pandemic, but may serve as a starting place for a larger study to be conducted in the state of Iowa examining the needs of Iowa's early childhood leaders. Doing so will assist current Iowa administrators that do not have background or experience in early childhood education to expand their knowledge and understanding of how to be an effective pedagogical leader for their SWVPP. It may also contribute to the body of research used by educational institutes that issue degrees that lead to administrator licensure in the state of Iowa. Finally, it could also be used by educational organizations such as Iowa's AEAs to consider the direction and development of the services they provide to leaders in their areas, and the state of Iowa to reduce the amount of complexity in its SWVPP.

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Appendix A: Research Survey

Title: Leading Early Childhood Education in Iowa Schools

Consent Question

I have read and understand the purpose of this study. I understand my participation is voluntary and that I am free to discontinue participation at any time, without giving reason.

Yes, I voluntarily agree to take part in this study

No, I wish to not participate

Participation Criteria

1. Are you a current Iowa Administrator that oversees one of Iowa's Statewide Voluntary Preschool Programs (SWVPP)? (if no, please stop here and thank you for your time)
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
2. Do you hold an initial or professional administrators license through the Board of Educational Examiners (BOEE)? (if no, please stop here and thank you for your time)
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

Section 1

Demographics, Background and Experience

3. What is your title in your current position?
 - a. Principal

- b. Assistant Principal
 - c. Director
 - d. Supervisor
 - e. Other (fill in)
4. How many total years have you been in the field of education (in any capacity)?
- a. 1-5
 - b. 6-10
 - c. 10-15
 - d. 16-20
 - e. 21-25
 - f. 26-30
 - g. 31+
5. Check all areas that you are currently or have ever been licensed to teach in Iowa.
- a. Early Access (Birth-3 yrs)
 - b. Early Childhood (PK-3)
 - c. Early Childhood Special Education
 - d. Elementary (K-6)
 - e. Secondary (7-12)
 - f. Special Education
 - g. Counselor
 - h. Specials (art, music, PE, foreign language, technology, etc)
 - i. Other (please list)

6. Describe your teaching experience (grades and years taught) prior to becoming an administrator.
7. How many years have you been an administrator in Iowa?
 - a. 0-5
 - b. 6-10
 - c. 10-15
 - d. 16-20
 - e. 21-25
 - f. 26-30
 - g. 31+
8. Describe any administration experience prior to overseeing a SWVPP (if applicable).
9. How many years have you been an administrator for any Iowa SWVPP?
 - a. 0-1
 - b. 2-5
 - c. 6-10
 - d. 11+
10. What are your specific responsibilities as a leader of your SWVPP (check all that apply)
 - a. Hiring of preschool teachers or paraeducators
 - b. Evaluation of preschool teacher(s)
 - c. Evaluation of preschool support staff (paraeducators)
 - d. Program funding

- e. Program desk audit
- f. Curriculum decision making
- g. Assessment decision making
- h. Collaboration or support with community partner programs
- i. Other (please explain)

11. How many teachers are part of your SWVPP?

12. Approximately how many students are served in your SWVPP?

13. Please describe any other information related to your background, experience and/or education that is relevant to your role as a SWVPP Iowa Administrator.

Section 2

Leadership Styles and Practices

14. In 3-5 sentences, describe a situation, related to SWVPP, in which you created structures, rules, and procedures for staff and students. Please include any factors that impacted your decision making.

15. In 3-5 sentences, describe a situation, related to SWVPP, in which you created a positive work environment that is safe and motivating for staff. Please include any factors that impacted your decision making.

16. Describe your roles and responsibilities, related to SWVPP, that involve outside stakeholders.

17. In 3-5 sentences, describe how you incorporate your school's vision, mission and strategic plan into your SWVPP and any factors that contribute to your decision making.

Early Childhood Leader Roles and Responsibilities

18. What accreditation program standards do you follow in your preschool?
 - a. IQPPS (Iowa Quality Preschool Program Standards)
 - b. NAEYC
 - c. Other (please identify)
19. How do your program standards factor into your program decision making?
20. Describe the most challenging components of your leadership in your SWVPP.
21. Describe ways or situations higher administration in your district are involved in your preschool classrooms or programs.
22. How do you access learning opportunities, current research and information on best practices related to early childhood education?
23. What community organizations, partners, groups or committees do you have to support your decision making related to your preschool program/classroom(s)?
24. Please describe any other information related to your decision making processes that are relevant to your role as a SWVPP Iowa Administrator.

Section 3

Pedagogical Knowledge

Developmentally Appropriate Practice, Curriculum and Assessment

25. Describe your current understanding of the term “developmentally appropriate practice”?
26. Please list the curriculum(s) and assessment(s) used in your preschool program and describe their purpose and how they are used by teachers.
27. From your perspective, how important is play in the preschool classroom?

- a. Likert scale 1- least important to 4 being most important
28. Describe what you feel the role of a teacher is during play.
 29. What do you feel is most important for early childhood leaders to understand about the role of play in the preschool classroom?
 30. Describe what you believe engaged preschoolers look and sound like throughout their school day.
 31. Do you believe engagement is essential to learning during all activities?
 - a. Likert scale 1- no, not at all to 5 always
 32. From your perspective, how important is the environment in a preschool classroom?
 - a. Likert scale 1- not important to 4 very important
 33. What is most important to you when thinking about what a preschool classroom should look like (room arrangement, materials, etc.)?
 34. Describe any pedagogical methods (teaching and instructional practices) that you feel are important for early childhood leaders to know and understand?
 35. If you were able to be provided with any learning to support your early childhood leadership, what would that learning be about?
 36. Whose role do you believe it is, to provide knowledge and understanding of early childhood best practices, to Iowa's administrators? Please explain.
 37. Is there anything else you would like to contribute to this research from your experience as an early childhood leader in Iowa?

Appendix B: Informed Consent



Department of Educational
Psychology, Foundations &
Leadership Studies

August 12, 2022

Dear Research Participants,

You are being invited to take part in a survey research study regarding Early Childhood Leadership in Iowa. This study is being conducted by persons affiliated with the University of Northern Iowa as part of a dissertation research project.

The purpose of this study is to gain understanding of the experiences, knowledge, decision making processes and pedagogical needs of licensed Iowa administrators that provide leadership to programs and teachers in Iowa's Statewide Voluntary Preschool Programs (SWVPP). The survey consists of 25 narrative, open response questions and 12 multiple choice, yes/no, likert scale, or checkbox questions and will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. You will take the survey online, using the provided link, at a time that is convenient for you. The survey will close on September 2, 2022.

Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the Qualtrics technology being used. Specifically, no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data transmitted electronically. Once the research study is complete, your name and email address will be separated from your survey responses. Your name and contact information will be destroyed by June 1, 2022. Grouped results will be shared in a published dissertation, articles and presentations.

Participation in this study is voluntary therefore you may refuse to participate and you may discontinue participation at any time. The study risks are minimal, although you may feel some discomfort answering questions about your personal experiences or knowledge regarding early childhood education.

Should you have any questions regarding this research study, please contact UNI Graduate Student, Alaina Daters, adaters@uni.edu or 319.899.7617. You may also contact Beth VanMeeteren, Faculty Advisor, beth.vanmeeteren@uni.edu or 319.272.2101. Questions regarding participant rights can be directed to IRB Administrator Lisa Ahern, lisa.ahern@uni.edu or 319.273.6148

If you are interested in completing the survey, click the link to the survey in the email. If not, you may simply delete the email with the survey link or open it and respond "No" to the first question, then close your browser. Thank you for your time!