

**Turnaround Leadership Development Project:
Preliminary Findings from a Statewide Project**

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Findings from a Statewide Project

Introduction

In 2010, the Arizona Department of Education designated 252 schools across the state at Tier III, persistently underperforming schools. Arizona schools serve culturally diverse students with the majority being Hispanic or Latino. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2009) report, the percentage of Arizona population with Hispanic or Latino origin is 30.8%. Indian and Alaska Native persons count 4.9% of Arizona population, significantly more than the national parameter of 1.0%. The percentage of White not Hispanic population in Arizona is 57.3%, lower than that national data of 65.1%. The percentages of other ethnicities in the Arizona population are 4.4% Black, 2.6% Asian persons, 0.2% Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, and 1.8% reporting two or more races (U. S. Census Bureau, 2009). Many Arizona schools also serve high percentages of children living in poverty. Nonetheless, Arizona state policy mandates that between one-third and one-half of principals' evaluations are based on student academic growth including student outcomes on state tests (ARS §15-203(A)(38)). Furthermore, support for principal performance pay is growing among many legislators tied to these same results.

This policy environment is particularly challenging for principals of Arizona Tier III schools that have been in school improvement for a series of years given current curriculum and accountability politics. This paper reports empirical findings from a mixed-methods study of a statewide turnaround leadership intervention designed to develop Tier III Arizona principals' and teachers' knowledge and skills aimed at

curriculum change and improvements in student outcomes. The project was funded by the Arizona Board of Regents to develop a statewide intervention for persistently underperforming Arizona schools.

This paper is organized into five main sections. The first two sections provide an overview and description of the Turnaround Leadership Development model. Next, the project evaluation is presented. The fourth section describes results of the project that indicate a large effect of the leadership development model on participating principals' and teachers' effectiveness (knowledge and skills). The paper concludes with implications for research, leadership preparation, and practice.

Background

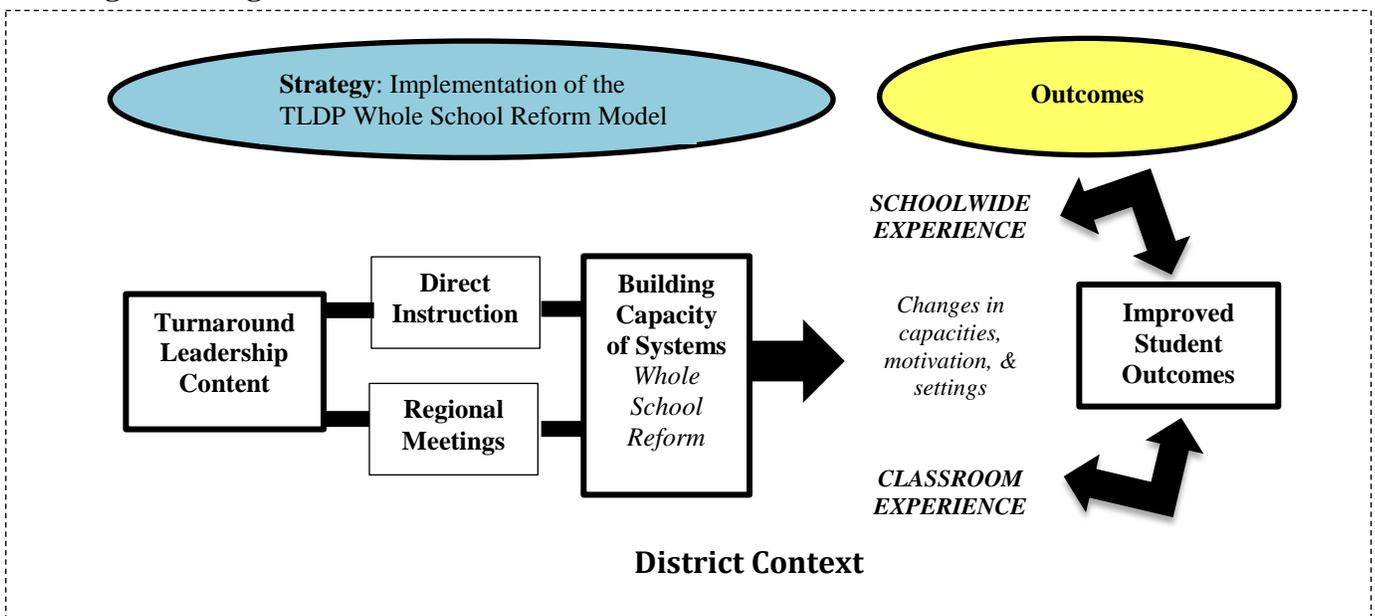
In 2011-12 Arizona turnaround schools received \$ 10,114,156 for school improvement grants (Arizona Department of Education, 2011). At the same time, none of the Arizona turnaround providers show results from studies with at least moderate evidence to support causal conclusions (Brinson, Kowal & Hassel, 2008). Given the lack of Turnaround innovations with at least moderate evidence of success, the number of low-performing schools, and the high costs of school improvement grants, there was a definite need for a validated turnaround school innovation. Moreover, turnaround with its related staff turnover causes intense disruption for students, producing little to no gain in student achievement (Brinson et al., 2008). Leadership succession literature (e.g. Leithwood & Mascall, 2008) also validates that high principal and teacher turnover impedes school and district productivity. In Arizona for 2010 and 2011, 31 schools were reconstituted and new principals and teachers were hired.

This Turnaround Leadership Development model prepared school leaders to engage in effective strategies for using data to improve teaching and learning in all curriculum subjects. The project results indicate that the TLDP fills these needs with a cost-effective turnaround innovation that increases principal and teacher effectiveness, and improves student outcomes and productivity. Results of the project suggest that it is portable and ready to scale regionally and nationally.

Description of the Project

TLDP (Figure 1) illustrates the ways that school principals and teachers in high-needs (Arizona Tier III) schools who learn about whole school turnaround leadership content (Leithwood et al., 2010; Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008; Ylimaki & Jacobson, 2011) through a combination of delivery components build systems-wide capacity to diffuse the TLDP training throughout their classrooms and schools, in turn, improving student outcomes for all student groups, including Special Education and LEP students.

Figure 1: Logic Model for TLDP



Specifically, TLDP is a research-based whole school reform innovation aimed at accelerated development of turnaround leadership teams to improve teaching, learning and outcomes. TLDP serves leadership teams in persistently low-performing (Tier III) schools that are in school improvement but not yet designated for reconstitution (turnaround) under federal NCLB guidelines. Overall, the project training develops leadership teams skilled in turnaround leadership practices. Four features distinguish the design of TLDP:

1. Research-based turnaround leadership content
2. An intensive professional development program delivered through direction instruction/ institutes with online support and regional meetings (professional network) whereby educators learn to lead instructional improvements for children
3. Explicit attention to classroom, school, and district context and needs
4. A research and evaluation system maintained by external evaluators to continuously monitor results, ensure accountability, and provide information for making implementation decisions

Specific delivery system components are described below:

[TLDP Institutes \(Direct Instruction\)](#) – Four Institutes were provided for participants spaced throughout the project timeframe (18 months). In addition, an online platform provided support and resources to participants. Overall, the training developed leadership teams skilled in turnaround leadership practices.

[Trained Regional Facilitators](#) – Facilitators conducted 3 regional professional development meetings focused on turnaround leadership practices in order to extend and apply the content received in the institutes.

Leadership content is aligned with each Turnaround Stage. For the leadership curriculum content of TLDP, we use findings from Leithwood et al.'s (2010), Robinson et al.'s (2008), Leithwood, Harris & Strauss' (2010), and Ylimaki and Jacobson's (2011) studies of leadership specific to turnaround settings and stages. Turnaround Leadership content, then, features four Turnaround Leadership practices:

- 1) Setting directions (shared vision, short term goals, high expectations, communication)
- 2) Developing people (support, intellection stimulation, preferred practices and values)
- 3) Redesigning the organization (collaborative cultures, supportive structures, family relationships, connections to wider environment)
- 4) Improving the instructional program (provide staff, monitor instruction/learning, minimize distractions, support for classroom work)

Trained turnaround leadership facilitators deliver content specific to the three turnaround stages (Leithwood et al., 2010):

- 1) Stopping the decline and creating conditions for early improvement
- 2) Ensuring survival and realizing early performance improvements
- 3) Achieving satisfactory performance and aspiring to much more

Professional development delivery structures for TLDP are grounded in effective professional development research (Cohen, Hill & Kennedy, 2002; Wenglinsky, 2000; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman & Yoon, 2001). Garet et al.'s (2001) study, funded by the Eisenhower Professional Development Program and endorsed by the What Works Clearinghouse, was the first large-scale empirical comparison of effects of different

characteristics of professional development on teachers’ learning. Results of the study indicate that there are more positive outcomes from professional development activities when all of the structural features and the core features are included:

Table 1: Alignment of Professional Development Features with TLDP

<i>Structural and Core Features</i>	<i>TLDP</i>
Form	institutes, regional meetings
Duration	regular contact; collective participation—school-based teams
Content focus	leadership; active learning opportunities – application, reflection, demonstration follow-up
Coherence	aligned with ISLLC

In sum, the TLDP model provides research-based turnaround leadership content through a delivery system aligned with professional development best practice. In the next section, we describe how we evaluated the TLDP model using both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Evaluation Methods

TLDP has utilized rigorous research as a basis for design and evaluation (Leithwood et al., 2010; Robinson et al., 2008; Ylimaki & Jacobson, 2011). The study followed guidelines for mixed methods design. Research questions were:

- 1) Can the turnaround curriculum and delivery impact teachers’ and principals’ leadership knowledge and skills within the project period as a result of the leadership development program?
- 2) How, if at all, do the leadership knowledge modules influence turnaround practices?
- 3) To what extent has the project impacted student outcomes?

Sampling

Drawing from the statewide sample of Tier III schools (252), 45 schools were selected for participation in the project. The selection largely depended upon superintendent support and participant willingness to commit to all aspects of the project for the 18 month period. Schools are located throughout the state of Arizona with 61% located in rural areas, 26% urban centers, and 13% suburban areas. Representing the 45 schools were 80 participants; their racial/ethnic/gender demographics, as well as years of experience are illustrated in Table 2 3.

Table 2: Demographics of Participants

Characteristic	Staffs (n=35)	Principals (n=45?)
Gender		
% Female	74	62
% Male	26	38
Race/Ethnicity		
% Anglo	60	60
% Latino/a/Hispanic	14	27
% Native American	3	11
% Other	23	2

It is important to note that most principal participants had a tenure of 3 years or less, and many were in their first year of service.

Data Sources and Collection

Data sources included quantitative surveys as well as qualitative interviews. All project participants completed the Leithwood et al. (2010) *Leadership for Learning* survey as a pre-assessment prior to the beginning of the first training and a post-assessment at the end of the project (89% return rate). Using this 104-item survey, the researchers examined principals' and teachers' leadership knowledge and practices. All scales of the Leithwood survey achieved acceptable levels of reliability (Alpha

coefficients between .72 and .96). Leithwood et al. (2010) demonstrated with strong evidence the indirect effects between these leadership practices (setting direction, developing people, redesigning the organization, and improving the instructional program) and student outcomes.

The qualitative phase of the study featured 30-45 minute semi-structured interviews with participants that had completed all aspects of the training, including (a) attendance at all institutes and follow-ups, (b) completion of the survey, and (c) attendance at regional meetings. Interview questions were developed from the survey findings, featuring capacity building, collaboration, community involvement, accountability, and values and priorities. Semi-structured interviews were conducted during subsequent instructional leadership institutes in order to determine what changes in capacity-building occurred during the intervention period following the first institute. Interview participants included 16 principals and 13 teachers (See Table 3).

Table 3: Interview Participant Characteristics (N=29)

Characteristic	Staffs (n=13)	Principals (n=16)
<i>Gender</i>		
% Female	23	25
% Male	77	75
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>		
% Anglo	84	56
% Latino/a/Hispanic	8	25
% Native American	0	19
% Other	8	0

After each of three institutes, external evaluators (Cloud Team) also asked participants qualitative information about how to improve logistics, training delivery, and communication of the project as a whole.

Data Analysis

Survey respondents yielded an 89% return rate. Surveys from 18 respondents were eliminated due to large amounts of missing data. Open-ended questions revealed survey data were incomplete due to the respondent's lack of knowledge about the school year as they were new in the position reducing the total survey sample to 62 participants (35 principals, 27 staff). Mode imputation was used to replace missing data for the remaining participants, which, at most, included 1 or 2 questions per survey.

Survey results were analyzed descriptively and using chi-squared tests to compare means between the principals' self-reported responses and two teachers' familiar with his/her practice. Reliability was .97 for the principal surveys and .95 for the staff surveys. Independent samples t-tests were used to compare means between the principals' self-reported responses and staff familiar with his/her practice. Because Likert-scale responses consist of only five categories (low to high) and technically have a range of answers that assumes a discrete distribution rather than a normal distribution, we also performed chi-squared tests to determine the significance of association in order to be more statistically valid. A reliability analysis was performed for each survey. The alpha coefficients are .95 (staff survey) and .97 (principal survey), thus indicating very strong internal consistency.

Since the qualitative portion involves contextually sensitive data concerning individual perceptions about the work of each teacher and principal, we employ an interpretative lens to allow for an in-depth inquiry into the turnaround leadership "phenomenon in real-life context" (Merriam, 2001, p. 191). Our purpose, in this approach, is to uncover causation through "insight, discovery and interpretation"

(Merriam, 1988, p.10). Interview data were analyzed inductively in light of Leithwood's turnaround leadership practices (Leithwood, Harris & Strauss, 2010) and leadership in the socio-cultural dimension (Ylimaki, Bennett, Fan & Villaseñor, 2012). Inductive analysis was used to allow particular themes to emerge based on lived experiences. To ensure reliability, codes and themes used in this study required consensus with two additional coders.

Results

Quantitative Results

Low capacities. At the beginning of the project, teachers and principals scored as 'low capacity' for turnaround readiness on 74% of all items. Shared low capacity mean scores (14%) consisted of a '1' or '2' on a 5-point scale. Mean differences between staff and principal groups on low capacity items were not statistically significant. Low capacity means indicated challenges in shared vision and with some assessment literacy practices. For example, respondents had difficulties in defining success ($M=2.2$, $SD=1.06$) and consistent implementation of common formative assessments across all grade levels ($M=2.7$, $SD=1.21$). Students were impeded in their academic progress by lack of economic advantage or lack of safety in the surrounding neighborhood. Families were not viewed as supportive of their children's education. Schools also did not take steps to provide inclusive and student relevant curriculum that engaged parental or student input nor considered outside involvement useful in developing common formative assessments (see Table 4). Students were also minimally involved in contributing to the direction of the school ($M=2.7$, $SD=.98$). Isolation of the school from the community was further evident in the lack of interactions and building positive external relationships with respect

to supporting curriculum, collaborating with community organizations (e.g., civic associations, businesses, non-profits, etc.) and communicating key information about student progress.(see Table 5). Schools did not engage their communities.

Table 4: Extent of Inclusive and Student Relevant Curriculum (N=62)

Survey Item	M ^f	SD
Student relevant curriculum	2.9	1.05
Change in student relevant curriculum over last 5 years	2.9	1.02
Students inform curriculum	2.7	1.04
Parent involvement in curriculum planning	2.6	1.05
Common formative assessments developed with multiple stakeholders	1.5	.78

^fNote. Mean score of respondent on Likert-scale item (1=Low, 5 = High)

Table 5: Community Relationship Building (N=62)

Survey Item	M ^f	SD
Curriculum supported by community partnerships	2.5	1.05
Principal contributions to curriculum supported by community partnerships	2.7	1.13
Collaboration with community organizations	2.6	1.02
Vision communicated to members of the external community	2.6	1.10
Assessment data shared with the community	2.5	1.07
Principal contributions to sharing assessment data with the community	2.8	1.29

^fNote. Mean score of respondent on Likert-scale item (1=Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree)

Medium capacities and discrepancies. Survey respondents scored 66% of the Likert-scale items (responses coded ‘1’ through ‘5’) as a ‘3’ indicating medium capacity.

Limited capacities were also exemplified in the mean differences between staffs and

principals that were statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level. On average, staff reported more collaboration time for curriculum ($M=3.9, SE=.54$) than principals ($M=3.3, SE=.54$), $t(60) = 2.18, p < .05$ although it represented a weak effect ($r = .27$). Principals believed they contributed more to practices of distributed leadership ($M=4.2, SE=.54$), on average, than staff acknowledged ($M=3.6, SE=.54$), $t(60) = 2.6, p < .05$. Principals also indicated they were more influential on decision making about the collaborative process ($M=4.1, SE=.54$) than staff suggested ($M=3.5, SE=.54$), $t(60) = 2.6, p < .05$.¹ Chi-squared tests indicated significant association between respondent group and the extent the principal contributed to the extent of distributed leadership $\chi^2(3) = 10.53, p < .05$. Significant association also existed between respondent group and the extent the principal contributed to the decision making about the collaborative process $\chi^2(3) = 14.50, p < .01$.

High Capacities. Shared high capacity items (13%) were scored as a '4' or '5' by staff and principal respondents. Mean differences between these groups on high capacity items were also not statistically significant. Despite limitations in community relationships, respondents believed the principal was accountable for involving parents and the community in the school ($M=4.0, SD=.95$) and that the school also respected students' cultural backgrounds ($M=4.0, SD=.96$). Respondents also recognized strong principal awareness in other key areas of accountability pressures (see Table 6). The school was considered a safe environment ($M=4.1, SD=.70$) and that the principal made significant contributions to this effort ($M=4.3, SD=.75$). Respondents indicated the use of curriculum maps ($M=4.0, SD=1.09$) and that the principal made positive efforts to communicate school results to the teaching staff ($M=4.0, SD=.83$).

¹ Both principal contributions to distributed leadership and decision-making about the collaborative processes represented a medium-sized effect ($r = .31$).

Table 6: Principal Awareness of Accountability Pressures (N=62)

Survey Item	M ¹	SD
Principal feels accountable to stakeholders	4.1	.94
Principal feels accountable in implementing policy	4.2	.97
Principal feels accountable to district for monitoring of student outcomes	4.4	.90
Principal feels accountable to district administration for student achievement	4.5	.84
Principal feels accountable for ensuring AZ learning standards are met	4.5	.74
Principal feels accountable for ethically-responsible behavior for student needs	4.6	.69

¹Note. Mean score of respondent on Likert-scale item (1=Low, 5 = High)

Several capacity-building assessment literacy practices were evident and were complemented by important contributions of the principal (see Table 7). Mandated benchmarks were a priority as well as sharing of assessment data with all staff. Principals were also perceived as contributing to these tasks. Similarly, respondents reported strong principal contributions to teaching collaboration for student achievement ($M=4.1$, $SD=.78$) and decision-making about the direction of the school ($M=4.0$, $SD=.91$). They acknowledged principal contributions to high self-expectations ($M=4.1$, $SD=.90$). Principals believed themselves as instrumental to promote democratic principles in the work of their schools ($M=4.2$, $SD=.66$). Principal respondents gave themselves high-capacity scores on twelve additional items (7%). First, principals considered themselves as instrumental in cultivating a supportive professional atmosphere (see Table 7). They gave themselves rather high scores concerning their capacity-building efforts to help people feel honored and thrive (Mitchell & Sackney, 2009). They fostered respect, self-reflection, modeled professional attributes, and expected the same for others. Second, principals noted confidence in enabling staff commitment to positive change (see Table 8). As stewards of the vision, principals believed they fostered a climate of ongoing

renewal and improvement (Mitchell & Sackney, 2009). Additionally, respondents indicated few tensions they experience related to their work in schools (see Table 9).²

Table 7: Successful Assessment Literacy Practices (N=62)

Survey Item	M ¹	SD
Mandated benchmark assessments	4.1	1.28
Principal contributes to mandated benchmark assessments	4.1	1.03
Assessment data shared with all school staff	4.2	.92
Principal contributes to sharing of assessment data with all school staff	4.4	.81
Principal contributes to school-wide goals based on assessment data	4.0	.99

¹Note. Mean score of respondent on Likert-scale item (1=Not at All, 5 = High)

Table 8: Principals' Self-Reported Influence on Cultivating Supportive Professional Atmosphere (N=62)

Survey Item	M ¹	SD
Respect all staff	4.6	.49
Respect all students	4.7	.44
Self-reflective	4.3	.66
Treat staffs as professionals	4.6	.55
Hold high expectations of others	4.4	.56
Act as role model and lead learner	4.5	.56

¹Note. Mean score of respondent on Likert-scale item (1=Never, 5 = Often)

Table 9: Principals' Self-Reported Influence on Enabling Staff Commitment to Positive Change (N=62)

Survey Item	M ¹	SD
Hopeful about improvement	4.8	.43
Gives sense of purpose to school	4.3	.62
Initiates new projects	4.1	.87
Plan strategically for the future	4.0	.77
Offer innovative ways of doing things	4.0	.62
Self-belief in ability to make a difference	4.7	.47

¹Note. Mean score of respondent on Likert-scale item (1=Never, 5 = Often)

² In this case, mean scores in '1' or '2' categories indicate low feelings of tension about these items.

They felt rather insulated from pressures that caused them to neglect the interests of students in order to comply with district requirements, choose between competing values, or to avoid participation outside the school (e.g., committees, professional development) because of constraints at school (see Table 10).

Table 10: Extent of Shared Inherent Tensions (N=62)

Survey Item	M ¹	SD
Tensions between district requirements and what is best for students	2.8	1.09
Tensions choosing between competing values	2.5	1.00
Tensions present at school vs. participating outside school	2.7	1.31

¹Note. Mean score of respondent on Likert-scale item (1=Never, 5 = Always)

Therefore, while quantitative findings suggest principals possess high self-capacity for developing people, commitments, setting direction, and effectively improving some aspects of the instructional program within their schools, these views were not equally shared by staff. Most capacities for building curriculum change at the beginning of the intervention period ranged from low to medium and reveal certain discrepancies or weaknesses. Schools manifested a keen awareness of accountability pressures, and ability to comply with mandates that required use of some practices necessary for curriculum change (e.g., curriculum maps, benchmarks) although they had difficulties in defining success. Schools valued supportive, professional, collaborative, democratic environments although they neither lacked deep-rooted connections or consciousness with their communities nor seemed to value their contributions or support.

Qualitative Results

Qualitative findings extend description of key discrepancies noted in the quantitative section in ways that suggest limited participant understanding about turnaround leadership practices early in the project. Indeed, many participants suggested

that their schools were in transition and that they were at various stages of developing capacity for change with some improvement related to intervention efforts. While principals and teacher leaders reported that their schools were making positive changes regarding formative assessments, data use, and growth in redesigning their organizations. In this section, low capacity and developing processes will be discussed in terms of three emergent themes: 1) varied definitions of effective turnaround leadership; 2) the extent of implementation and development of organizational redesign around professional learning communities; 3) barriers to change.

Varied Definitions of Effective Turnaround Leadership

When asked to provide their definition of turnaround leadership, participants responded in two primary ways: leadership as formal administrative role and leadership as a capacity for curriculum change. While some emphasized that leadership is the sole role of administration, others talked about instructional leadership in terms of capacity or shared with others in collaborative teams. These definitions guided their leadership practices, particularly in terms of PLC implementation and community engagement.

Leader as principal's role. Participants who emphasized individualized instructional leadership focused on their administrative roles in leading the curriculum and instructional development at their schools. They tended to answer the question of defining turnaround leadership in I statements. For example, a charter school principal responded that, "I'm looking at the bigger picture. I'm looking at the curriculum. I'm looking at how everybody is approaching the kids and what they can do differently."

For others, the principal's role as a leader centers on his/her abilities to monitor instruction and staff/student interactions. More specifically, participants defined this role

in terms of direct supervision and management. For example, one principal noted that leadership meant “ensuring teachers are doing their best, that the students are actually learning from the method the teacher is using, and that students are not being abused in some way.” Similarly, a high school assistant principal emphasized that her role as a turnaround leader is to confront ineffective instructional practice. She indicated, “if they’re not using effective practices, we [administration] step in and make sure they do, in whatever way that happens.”

In some contrast to the individual, managerial, approach to leadership, others defined it in terms of collaborative practices and capacity building. For one elementary principal, the locus of control for leadership went beyond her role as the principal. She maintained that agency for leadership should also include “the facilitators and the paraprofessionals. It’s the anybody who touches the child in their educational career.” For her, the principal’s role was “to help build that [leadership capacity] within them.” Others similarly defined leadership as an interdependent team effort consistent with Leithwood et al.’s (2010) notion of redesigning the organization around collaboration. As one elementary principal stated, “It should be building the capacity of everybody. We are an interdependent team of leaders.”

While most of the definitions of collaboration leadership in terms of the school staff, only one principal extended the definition to the other stakeholders. She defined leadership as a collaborative practice:

where a group of people—teachers, support staff, administrators, and parents as— stakeholders come together to evaluate their mission and vision, and where they want to focus, and where they want to go with the school.

The varied and sometimes contrasting definitions of turnaround leadership appeared to have a direct impact on the level of a shared ethos for collaboration in each school. Participant understandings of the nature of leadership, characterized by one teacher leader, determines “how you define the school, and how you take that role of not necessarily the leader, but how you build that collaboration with everybody to focus what your true priorities are for the school.” The nature of leadership enabled extent of collaboration among staff “to really understand that we are here to serve a common mission,” which “has to be built around the values of the school, the community.” Turnaround leadership practices also had implications for capacity building and the functioning of professional learning communities, a model that many of the schools have adopted as a vehicle for organizational redesign. In the next section, varied levels of PLC implementation and development will be discussed.

Professional Learning Communities

Participants highlighted the use of professional learning communities (PLCs) to redesign their organizations and drive the use of formative assessments and other data (e.g. state test results) for instructional decisions. For principals of Tier III schools, data-based decision-making is essential to make adequate yearly progress on standardized tests. While the majority of participants identified some level of engagement in the development and implementation of PLCs, they were at varying levels of implementation.

Some participants noted that the development of PLCs were in their initial stages. For example, some participants have started to look at how they can implement PLCs into practice at their schools. As one principal noted, “We have looked at how we instruct

our students, how we build community within our school.” Similarly, another principal stated that she implemented PLCs at each of her campuses. However, principals in the beginning stages of PLC implementation defined the implementation of PLCs as “an ongoing process” and “slow going.” For others, the process, although slow is better than what previously existed. An elementary school principal discussed the chaos prior to initiating a professional learning community model at her school. In the past, “we were always flying by the seat of our pants and this year the school is focusing on building the culture.”

While some participants were in the beginning stages of implementing PLCs, some were unable to “fit it into” current practices. One principal stated, “I think it is something that has to start small and build before it goes system wide. We just don’t have the time to put one more thing on teachers plates” referring to collaboration around data in their professional learning communities. Likewise, a superintendent/principal identified a lack of time and other mandates as her rationale for not promoting PLCs at this time. According to her, the school is going to collaborate next summer “to work on curriculum mapping, pacing guides, and creating our own formative assessments.”

Other participants have had difficulty and unexpected outcomes in their transition toward interdependent professional learning communities. According to a middle school principal who has been promoting PLCs at her school for several years, “the biggest challenge has been from re-culturing the school from that old industrial model into a professional learning community.” Another principal found that collaboration in professional learning communities brought to light areas that were in need of focus that went undiscovered until teachers worked together. He stated that PLCs “forced us to look

a little bit deeper at our data. That was kind of alarming...We maybe had that before and really didn't focus on it.”

Other participants saw the implementation of PLCs as an experience that changed the way that they viewed leadership and the role of the entire school staff. For a high school assistant principal, PLCs are:

really looking at how you define the school, and how you take the role of not necessarily the leader, but how you build that collaboration with everybody to focus on what your true priorities are for the school.

While PLC implementation caused some participants to transform practices from independent decision-making to collaborative decision-making, one principal highlighted the difficulty in implementing the PLC model when school staff is not interested in collaboration. She, in turn, has taken a directive approach to force compliance with the professional learning community she has begun at her school. For her, non-compliant staff has no place in her school. She stated, “Those who don't, who push away from their own personal accountability and their choices, they are team members who are on their way out unless they change their philosophy.”

Despite the struggles implementing professional learning communities, some principals responded that the PLC model has made a positive impact on their school and staff practices. An elementary school principal reported that, “It's given them [teachers] more structure for knowing what to do with data and then having the trust with each other and with the administration that we are going to do what we need to do. For a middle school principal, transitioning from more traditional professional development to a PLC has improved instructional practices and focused staff. “Everybody is more on the same

page.” In other words, these schools are clearly beginning the process of developing a shared vision for change.

Yet, there were several examples where schools were unlikely to develop high capacity learning community schools because “the principal lacks trust in the staff,” “the principal wants to control the decision-making,” and “staff bullying others into decisions.” One principal exemplified a lack of trust in her school staff and the school’s students when she stated, “I can’t get away today because there’s going to be some sort of chaos, some blowup, and the only time they behave is when I’m there.” Here the principal is also struggling with moving from a conception of “principal as individual instructional leader” to “instructional leadership as a capacity for curriculum improvement”.

Another principal could not release authority over her staff. Instead, she dictated what the teachers would do and remained closed to the idea that others had something to contribute to the discussion. She recalled a PLC meeting where several teachers had opposing views. She recalled teachers “not really being upset when they left the meeting because they didn’t agree with me, and my decision is right”.

For another principal, the staff had dysfunction in collaborative work that seemed to be accepted and/or overlooked. “Each grade level has only three teachers per grade level. It’s not a big battle because two will tell the other one this is what we’re doing .” To her, this practice seemed normal and created efficiency while, in actuality, the situation is the antithesis of collaborative practices (Leithwood, et al., 2010).

While many of the schools are engaged in various levels of implementing PLCs at their school sites, a few of the schools have attempted to involve the external community

into their practices. Some have had little success engaging the community while some have made strides improve their relationships with outside stakeholders although sometimes at the expense of other priorities without more purposeful connection to the classroom.

Barriers to Change

Participants identified several barriers to building capacity that must be overcome in order to move their schools out of school improvement. These barriers include the need to change past perceptions and practices regarding teachers and the community, addressing socio-cultural, political, and historical contexts, district office practices, overdependency on formal authority, lack of trust, and staff turnover.

Changing past perceptions and practices. For one elementary turnaround principal, changing past perceptions about successful teaching provides him with his largest hurdle and is based on a prior evaluation system that discounted achievement data as a component of teacher evaluation. In other words, the principal previously used only anecdotal evidence to evaluate instruction, which always informed teachers they were doing a great job until the changed emphasis on integrating data. According to the principal, “They [teachers] were told they were doing well, but they were never using data and results to see where they really were.” As a result, he began restructuring the evaluation of teachers to emphasize “success” as defined in NCLB and Race to the Top. Similarly, an elementary principal noted that teaching practices were not aligned with effective instruction. This was the barrier that she wished to address. “The students’ knowledge is vastly superior and what we need to do is bring our teachers up to teaching at that level...Some are getting there based on their pure talents, not because we are

helping them get there.” And while these principals’ narratives clearly fall short of Leithwood et al.’s third stage of sustained turnaround, these schools are under tremendous pressure to get out of “school improvement status” and attain high performance labels.

Some participants identified the need to transform past beliefs about “successful” teaching practices, but others identified the deficit thinking of staff and the community as their largest barrier. For example, one principal stated “The preconceived notion has been talking about ‘those’ students, ‘those’ (i.e. Latino/a, Native American) kids; from the community, from the children, and unfortunately from some educators on staff as well.” An elementary teacher highlighted this type of deficit-thinking when confronting a peer about the belief that educating all students was an impossible task. When recounting the story, she recalled her statement to her peer: “All right, out of your class of 22, do you believe that every single one of your students can learn? All right. Your job is to teach them.” An elementary principal recalled a similar experience where she took a directive approach with a teacher. She noted that she told the teacher that she was responsible for teaching all students, “I mean, this is what you are going to do or you may not have a job.” She further commented that she had adapted her practice to confront these types of beliefs in a harsh manner because “you can’t deal with hugs or even carrots with people who are unwilling to change.” Here the principal asserts her authority as an instructional leader who can and will set high expectations. Yet in certain ways, this principal’s narrative also reflects neoconservative and culturally neutral discourses.

While some principals and teachers identified confronting deficit thinking as a major challenge, some principals explicitly identified their own deficit thinking as a barrier for change. The following quote exemplifies this deficit thinking:

It's very important for us to try and help those students coming from those homes so that they have a better chance at the future. I live where the educated people live. And I said that if you get a good education, you can live down there too.

[Principal in high Native population school]

In a sense, unknowingly, this principal has created a vision of her school and community that devalues the funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez) and lived-experiences of the very students that she wishes to educate. Her comment overlooks important historical and social conditions that create real barriers outlined by another principal in a similar context. For a high school principal, it was the historical context that provided the largest barrier for student success.

I think that the challenge that we have is the history of education on the reservation with the BIA schools and the parochial schools that were established on the reservation. As a result, there is a kind of resistance, or maybe an undercurrent of resistance to education.

An assistant principal similarly noted that the disconnect between the school and community culture creates the biggest barrier. "I think that our biggest challenge is dealing with a culture that is kind of removed...because their life on the reservation is quite different from the dominant culture."

Inconsistent district support and directives. Although some participants clearly recognized internal school barriers to capacity building, another recurrent theme centered

on the role that the district office plays in allowing change to occur. For some principals, it was the lack of district support for new knowledge implementation that created a barrier:

We don't get to continue those collaborative discussions that then get our superintendent, or our assistant superintendent, or our staff development person involved. Which really, in order to implement those things that we discussed here [institutes], we really need those people on board as well.

Others identified a lack of follow-through by district office personnel as a barrier to building capacity across the district. This was exemplified by two participant's responses. The first stated, "We have only two schools participating and we were supposed to have four. It's just the inconsistencies that we have as a district." Participation was not a clear priority of the district. Participants observed that districts were too disorganized, lacking in effective communication, or overwhelmed with too many competing demands to encourage participation and give adequate support. The second commented, "We started with the superintendent and other principals and now we are the only ones left. We feel like they are missing the boat." Lack of central office attention and follow-through made it difficult to carry on the dialogue at the district level about the value of the intervention participants received for free. Many did not believe their interest and enthusiasm for curriculum change was equally shared in the district.

Still others identified the overwhelming amount of mandates as a barrier to change. The pressure of implementing a plethora of initiatives has led to a lack of follow-through. Statements such as "We had a lot of directives that threw teachers off this year" or "We have so many district initiatives that we can't focus on one thing" characterize

participant perspectives that so many directives inhibit capacity to implement change with fidelity as there are so many competing priorities to address. Many participants acknowledged, however, that these criticisms were not universally shared by district officials. For example, one principal lamented, “We do so much professional development that we don’t stick to any one item, and I know that the superintendent would disagree with that.” Participants highlight the inability of participating schools to build capacity around specific initiatives. Here district leadership transience and inconsistent support prevented some schools from moving beyond low capacity and early turnaround stage work.

Over-dependency on formal authority, lack of trust, and teacher retention. While participants identified the district office as a barrier, several teachers noted that it was the school administrator (principal) who was the largest barrier to change reinforcing an overt over-dependency on those with formal authority:

If you don’t have the administrative power to make the change, it’s just the ideas are there, but your superintendent and your principal are essentially the only two who are going to make that change. I don’t think that I’ve seen any change that has been positive yet. [Teacher]

Teachers similarly reported a lack of trust in staff decision making as a barrier to capacity building, which becomes more problematic when formal authority is not driven by clear district priorities in these areas. Furthermore, staff turnover and difficulty attracting teachers were noted as barriers to many schools. One principal noted an 85% turnover in staff has led to numerous conflicting professional development activities. She stated that the turnover “means our professional development plan, which is a piece of

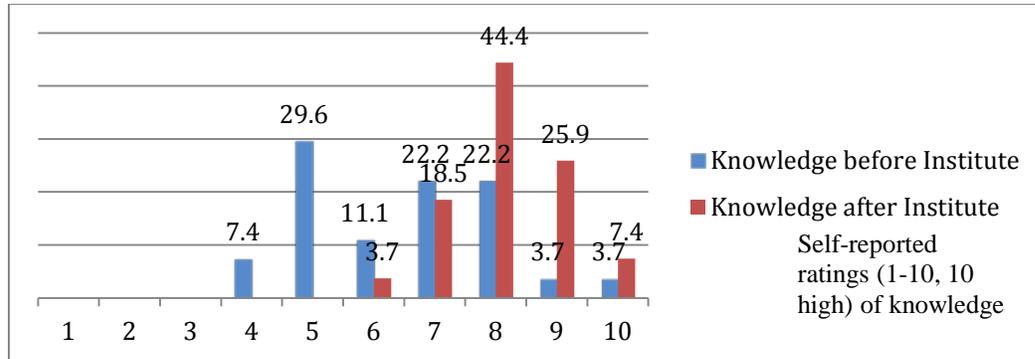
this; we are having to go back and professionally develop our folks.” Participants similarly complained about frequently having to start over in preparing new teachers to build up the same capacities for change that were lost with the departure of previous staff. Constant repetition of this process complicates uniform professional growth. Others in more rural areas emphasized that their school’s location and isolation prevents attracting and retaining quality staff. “It’s hard to attract teachers because we are in an isolated area and it’s kind of a cultural shock...some adjust and some don’t.” Many school leaders/participants were in rural areas, and geography became a major barrier to professional networking and capacity building. At the same time, this quote reveals some deficit thinking about the socio-cultural context of Arizona schools generally and rural schools in particular. It is seen to prevent attracting and retaining quality staff. “It’s hard to attract teachers because we are in an isolated area and it’s kind of a cultural shock...some adjust and some don’t.” Many school leaders/participants were in rural areas, and geography became a major barrier to professional networking. At the same time, this quote reveals some deficit thinking about the socio-cultural dimension of their work. Qualitative findings, thus, provide more in-depth description of participant understanding of turnaround leadership aimed at curriculum change as well as in areas needing development identified by quantitative findings.

External Evaluation Results

External evaluators (Cloud Team) were contracted to examine the fidelity of the project implementation and the effect of the training. Figure 2 (Shaw et al., 2012) illustrates that as a result of the TLDP training, participants increased their knowledge

and leadership skills to improve the instructional program through data measurement and assessment literacy (0.54 Effect Size).

Figure 2: Knowledge of measurement and data analysis



Principal and teacher leader participants increased their knowledge of turnaround leadership for organizational redesign, people development, and collaborative direction setting processes as a result of the training (a medium-sized effect, 0.31 Effect Size).

Effect sizes were computed and classified using the Cohen-convention for classifying effect sizes as small (small $\geq .10$; medium $\geq .30$; large $\geq .50$).

Table _ reports effect sizes for all areas examined by the evaluators.

Table 11: Descriptive statistics of pre/post data

	Percentages of Recorded Ratings										Mean	Std Dev	Effect Size
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10			
Knowledge before meeting: knowledge of measurement and data analysis to assess teacher improvement and student achievement (Total = 27)				7.41	29.63	11.11	22.22	22.22	3.70	3.70	6.48	1.58	0.54
Knowledge after meeting: knowledge of measurement and data analysis to assess teacher improvement and student achievement (Total = 27)						3.70	18.52	44.44	25.93	7.41	8.15	0.95	
Preparation before meeting: I am prepared for data-based strategic planning for school improvement. (Total = 27)			7.41	11.11	14.81	7.41	33.33	22.22		3.70	6.33	1.75	0.42

Preparation after meeting: I am prepared for data-based strategic planning for school improvement. (Total = 27)					11.1 1	3.7 0	22.2 2	33.3 3	14.8 1	14.8 1	7.81	1.47	
Knowledge before meeting: Knowledge to lead your faculty to higher student engagement (Total = 27)			7.41		11.1 1	25.9 3	18.5 2	25.9 3	3.7 0	7.4 1	6.85	1.59	0.35
Knowledge after meeting: Knowledge to lead your faculty to higher student engagement (Total = 27)			3.70			7.4 1	18.5 2	37.0 4	25.9 3	7.4 1	7.93	1.30	
Knowledge before meeting: Knowledge of additional assessment tools to monitor students' progress (Total = 27)			7.41	18.52	11.1 1	14.8 1	29.6 3	11.1 1	3.7 0	3.7 0	6.07	1.82	0.39
Knowledge after meeting: Knowledge of additional assessment tools to monitor students' progress (Total = 27)			3.70			22.2 2	25.9 3	22.2 2	22.2 2	3.7 0	7.44	1.37	
Knowledge before meeting: Knowledge of ways in which I can change my assessment strategies (Total = 25)			20.00		16.0 0	16.0 0	24.0 0	20.0 0	4.0 0		6.20	1.55	0.44
Knowledge after meeting: Knowledge of ways in which I can change my assessment strategies (Total = 25)					4.0 0	20.0 0	24.0 0	20.0 0	28.0 0	4.0 0	7.60	1.32	
Confidence before meeting: Confident in my ability to analyze AIMS scores to identify improvement areas (Total = 27)			3.70	3.70	22.2 2	3.7 0	18.5 2	22.2 2	14.8 1	11.1 1	7.11	1.95	0.39
Confidence after meeting: Confident in my ability to analyze AIMS scores to identify improvement areas (Total = 27)						7.4 1	11.1 1	25.9 3	37.0 4	18.5 2	8.48	1.16	
Knowledge before meeting: Knowledge of how to build value-added models for improvement (Total = 27)		7.41		14.81	25.9 3	22.2 2	18.5 2	11.1 1			5.56	1.60	0.34
Knowledge before meeting: Knowledge of how to build value-added models for improvement		3.70		3.70	11.1 1	22.2 2	22.2 2	25.9 3	11.1 1		6.74	1.63	
Confidence before meeting: Confident that what I know will help me improve teacher motivation and student achievement scores (Total = 27)			3.70	11.11	18.5 2	3.7 0	25.9 3	33.3 3		3.7 0	6.56	1.72	0.43
Confidence after meeting: Confident that what I know will help me improve teacher motivation and student achievement scores (Total = 27)					3.7 0	3.7 0	25.9 3	37.0 4	14.8 1	14.8 1	8.00	1.24	

Conclusions and Implications

This study yielded four primary findings: 1) schools were not at high-levels of turnaround leadership capacity; 2) those schools in the process of building capacity demonstrated a directive leadership approach; 3) school turnaround efforts focused on developing professional learning communities; and 4) schools face numerous barriers to change, including the local context and level of district support. Quantitative and qualitative findings indicated very little evidence of high capacity building. Quantitative findings indicated an increased focus on setting direction and visioning, however, teacher surveys and interviews do not support the notion of shared vision. Similarly, principal surveys and interviews revealed a higher level of collaborative work culture and collective learning than staff responses suggest. Furthermore, varied levels of trust hindered the ability of some schools to push capacity building forward in their schools.

Like previous research on leadership in challenging contexts (e.g., effective schools literature in the U.S., Alma Harris' research in the U.K., ISSPP, Jacobson, Johnson, Ylimaki, & Giles, 2005) the principals used a directive leadership approach in building capacity for turnaround. For instance, some school leaders placed numerous teachers on plans for improvement and exited several others. Additionally, participants indicated a need to focus on literacy in order to direct all efforts toward increasing rigor for the Common Core. Principals also reported not being able to let go of authority, which is not unusual for the early stages of turnaround (Leithwood et al., 2010). While a directive leadership approach has been effective for school turnaround processes, this approach reinforced a lack of trust among staff.

Participants relied on the use of professional learning communities in order to redesign their organizations. Interview data indicated that schools were at varying levels of implementation of PLCs. At the same time, principals and teachers reported that the PLC model had made a positive impact on their schools. Because some principals experienced difficulty in relinquishing authority to staff members, the establishment of PLCs floundered; interviews suggested that lack of trust and authenticity contributed to the lag in development.

Participants identified numerous barriers to change that must be overcome in order for turnaround to occur. These barriers included 1) changing past perceptions and practices, 2) inconsistent district support and directives, and 3) an over-dependency on formal authority. For example, teachers were not accustomed to using data for decision-making. Further, many participants identified the need to transform past beliefs about “successful” school practices. Curriculum maps, mandated benchmark assessments, and surface use of data in professional learning communities took precedence over priorities for democratic collaborative processes and authentic community engagement.

This study is limited by the number of teacher participants per school. Participants were selected as leadership teams by the principal or the superintendent. Nonetheless, the survey return rate and high reliability suggests evidence of generalizability. In addition, the external evaluators’ survey results indicate a medium to high effect size of the training on participants’ turnaround leadership knowledge and skills. Furthermore, the Arizona context is important because demographics foreshadow national trends. Also, schools across the U.S. face accountability demands in culturally diverse communities.

Therefore, our focus on Tier III schools to make improvement gains is relevant for research and practices.

These findings suggest several implications for the next steps. First, the turnaround process is complex and context specific. Second, district support is essential in order for school leaders to focus on the turnaround process. Third, with the advent of the Common Core Standards, future turnaround leadership development models need to include a specific literacy focus.

Future research will validate the turnaround leadership development model with a focus on literacy for Tier III schools that links turnaround leadership, literacy curriculum knowledge, and student achievement. Thus, the next generation of educational leaders must have the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and analytical tools to lead schools in the accountability culture.

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