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# School District Support Structures: A Mixed Methods Study of the Leadership Development of Pre-Service School Librarians

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*School librarians are frequently encouraged to be leaders. However, few studies examine how pre-service school librarians can be prepared to be leaders during their librarianship degree programs. Using a mixed-methods research design and Transformational Leadership theory as a theoretical framework, the researcher studied how school district support structures provided for pre-service school librarians enrolled in a distance learning program impacted their self-perceived leadership behaviors. Results indicate that support structures such as cohorts and mentors are effective ways for developing the transformational leadership skills of pre-service school librarians.*

## Introduction

The Project LEAD program at Florida State University was developed as a leadership curriculum for school librarians. Funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), Project LEAD uses National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) guidelines in addition to school librarianship preparation guidelines as a foundation for addressing critical shortages in highly qualified school librarians that serve as leaders, who engage in reflective practice, technology integration, and the creation of student-centered learning environments. Students participating in the Project LEAD program take a curriculum that includes courses emphasizing leadership in reading, technology, instruction, and information leadership. The foundational principals of the NBPTS guidelines enhance the Project LEAD curriculum because the NBPTS certification process is a leadership development activity that improves professional practice (Lustick & Sykes, 2006; Park, Oliver, Johnson, Graham, & Oppong, 2007). Although the NBPTS process develops leadership skills, it has been noted that the process is more effective if candidates have mentors to support them during the process (Everhart & Dresang, 2007).

During the past decade, library degree programs like Project LEAD have begun to address the leadership development of school librarians (Mardis & Everhart, 2014). In 2010, the ALA and AASL released preparation standards that emphasized the roles that school librarians should engage in. These roles included teaching, promoting reading and literacy, acting as information specialists, being program administrators, and serving as library advocates and school leaders. In 2014, the American Association of School Librarians adapted the mission statement, "The American Association of School Librarians empowers leaders to transform teaching and learning" (AASL, 2014). The emphasis on leadership as an integral component of effective school

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librarianship pedagogy signifies that leadership is an important aspect of preparing school librarians during degree programs.

While it has been established by the new AASL (2014) mission statement and school librarian guidelines for preparation (ALA & AASL, 2010) that leadership is important for school librarians, there is little information about how degree programs can prepare school librarians to be leaders. Understanding the best practices for helping pre-service school librarians to learn leadership skills can facilitate how school library educators and school administrators create leadership development opportunities for them. Studying the school district support structures offered to the first cohort of Project LEAD students affords a unique opportunity for exploring how support structures can be used to assist pre-service school librarians with becoming leaders.

## **Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of the school district support structures available for the Project LEAD students on their leadership development. The following research questions guided the investigation:

1. What leadership skills did the participants report learning during the degree program?
2. What was the relationship between the participants' perceptions of mentor support and the self-perceived leadership skills of the program participants?
3. What was the relationship between the participants' perceptions of school district support and the self-perceived leadership skills of the program participants?
4. What was the relationship between the participants' perceptions of their school climate and the self-perceived leadership skills of the program participants?

## ***Theoretical Framework***

Project LEAD incorporated transformational leadership concepts to reinforce the NBPTS guidelines throughout the curriculum. The participants were taught how to be change agents within their school districts. As such, transformational leadership serves as the theoretical basis for this study. Northouse (2004) credits Downton (1973) with coining the phrase "transformational leadership." However, Burns (1978) was the first to propose an articulated theory of transformational leadership and to thoroughly analyze the qualities of such leaders. According to Bass (1990), transformational leaders exhibit expertise such as leading by motivating followers and appealing to their inner values. Though the leader and the followers may begin with separate goals, ultimately their purposes become fused (Burns, 1995).

Scholars have accepted transformational leadership as a way to reconstruct organizations facing significant alterations in mission, structure, or accomplishment (Abu-Tineh, Khasawneh & A-Omari 2008; Brown & Posner, 2001; Fields & Herold, 1997; Hautala, 2005). As such, it has been touted as a means for providing leadership in schools, the setting that is relevant to this study. The use of transformational leadership skills enables principals, as the formal leaders of schools, to distribute leadership responsibilities. Hence, they are not required to shoulder the entire responsibility for the success or failure of reform efforts (Cohen, 2003). School stakeholders are encouraged by principals to become more involved and committed to reform efforts. Their commitment in turn can sustain reform efforts, regardless of who may be appointed to formal leadership roles (Sheppard, 1996).

## **Literature Review**

### ***Community Embedded Learning as a Leadership Development Tool***

There is research that indicates that current and potential leaders can be taught leadership skills. For example, Bennis and Nanus (2003) affirm that learning experiences actually provide inspiration for leaders. One way to provide relevant experiences to facilitate transformational leadership skill development is to offer individuals community embedded learning experiences. Champions of community embedded learning or service learning assert that individuals who take courses with community embedded learning activities can apply their experiences related to their professional communities and social communities to their learning communities (Haythornthwaite, Bruce, Andrews, Kazmer, Montague, & Preston, 2007). Social communities include family members, friends, social groups, and volunteer activity groups. Professional communities reflect the people that one must interact with when they work. Learning communities are the people that students interact with while they are engaged in classes or professional development. Most (2011) concludes that the professional and social communities that students are involved in benefit from their education as students learn to apply their new skills to scenarios within these communities. Conversely, the learning communities that the students are involved in benefit them as students become ambassadors for the schools and share their varied experiences to enhance the learning experiences of others (Most, 2011).

### ***University and School District Collaborations***

There are many teacher certification programs similar to Project LEAD that choose to form partnerships in order to offer community-embedded learning. These relationships have become popular because in recent years, institutions of higher education have been charged with helping K-12 schools improve student achievement (Myran, Crum, & Clayton, 2010). These relationships are frequently sustained for many years when universities and school districts collaborate to develop goals that are beneficial to both organizations (LeCornu & Peters, 2009). The goals that are developed as a result of these partnerships may not always be identical for the school districts and the universities. Nonetheless, they can be complementary in nature. For example, the University of Texas at San Antonio worked to create a program with the San Antonio Independent School District (Ramalho, Garza, & Merchant, 2009). The university benefited from the experience because the students who were enrolled in a graduate program focusing on diversity and social justice were provided with hands-on experience in a culturally diverse environment. The school district, on the other hand, received programming, mentoring, and professional development opportunities.

While there are benefits related to university and school district collaborations, there are also challenges. One of the most prominent challenges is related to the realization of goals. It is not atypical for goals to evolve during partnerships. However, they must remain balanced (Myran, Crum, & Clayton, 2010). Koch and Borg (2011) encountered challenges related to the goals and context of their program. These challenges occurred when new decision makers and instructors were selected. In these cases, the instructors' and decision makers' visions were not succinct with the original intent of the program. As such, it is asserted that all replacements should understand the purpose of programs and components such as collaborative planning, consistent

communication, adequate staffing, scheduling, and financial commitments that are essential to their continuation.

## **Methodology**

### ***Population***

The population of this study consisted of 30 teacher-leaders that participated in the Project LEAD program. Most of the participants worked in urban schools and only had a bachelor's degree before they entered the program. They had an average of 13 years of teaching experience.

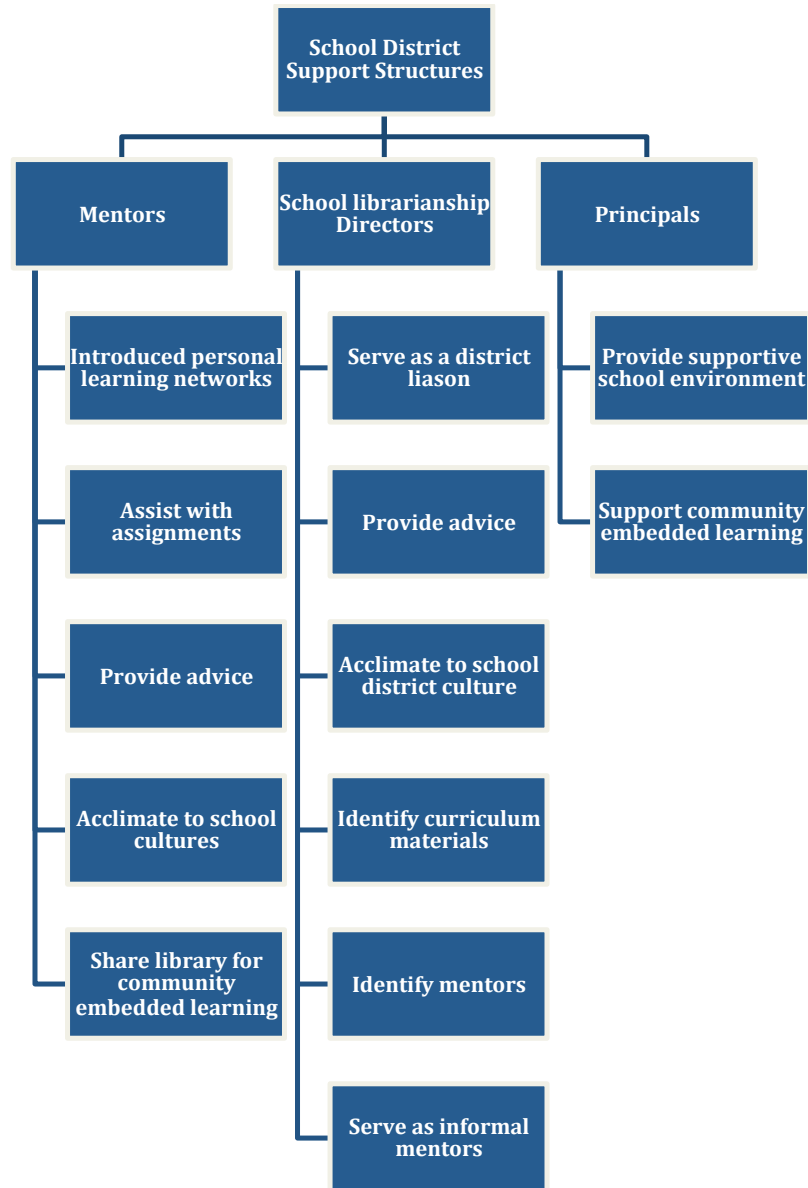
The participants were recruited for the Project LEAD program when Florida State University (FSU) formed a partnership with six school districts in Florida. This partnership enabled the Project LEAD directors (two FSU professors) to collaborate with the school librarianship directors in the districts to identify highly qualified program participants. As a result, the participants of this study were provided with full scholarships to complete the Project LEAD curriculum in conjunction with a master's degree in library science. Because of the partnership between the school districts and the university, the participants were afforded assistance within their school districts that included support from mentors, principals, and the school librarianship directors.

The school librarianship directors offered varying degrees of support. A few purchased books for the participants. School librarianship directors also invited the participants to professional development activities and were often instrumental in serving as liaisons with school principals and assisting the participants with securing substitutes and time off to attend conferences. All of the school librarianship directors identified mentors within the school district for the participants. These mentors helped the students to complete assignments, introduced them to their personal learning networks, and assisted with implementing hands-on collaborative projects for class assignments.

School principals were instrumental during the participants' degree programs because each participant continued to teach full time while completing their degrees. The principals influenced the school climates. The Project LEAD program was quite hands-on and required the students to complete community embedded learning activities such as implementing lessons, working in school libraries, exploring new technology, and participating in conferences. The activities were easier to complete when the principals were supportive. (See Figure 1 for an overview of the school district support structures.)

### ***Data Collection and Analysis***

A mixed-method design was used to implement this study because the researcher worked closely with the participants and the participants were chosen for their leadership potential. A mixed method design is defined as research that uses, "qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis techniques in either parallel or sequential phases" (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003, p. 11). According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2007), merging the two methods provides better results than just using each method alone. For example, quantitative research may not provide the context for responses. Giving respondents the opportunity to explain their answers can offset incorrect data interpretations by researchers. Similarly, qualitative research is prone to bias resulting from interaction with the respondents and difficulty in generalizing results from small groups to large groups.

**Figure 1: School District Support Structures**

Data was collected in two phases. First two paper-based self-administered surveys were mailed to the participants to collect responses for the study three weeks before the participants graduated. The data from the surveys were analyzed. Then a focus group was conducted to allow further triangulation of the results. According to Creswell and Plano (2007, p. 172), triangulating results permits researchers to compare both forms of data to search for congruent findings". Finally, peer examination or the process where findings, "are reviewed and commented on by

several nonparticipants in the field" (Zohrabi, 2013) served as another way to ensure the validity of the study. Five additional researchers examined the results.

The first survey was the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI), designed to assess self-perceived transformational leadership behaviors in five dimensions: Modeling the Way, Challenging the Process, Encouraging the Heart, Enabling Others to Act, and Inspiring a Shared

Vision (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). These dimensions correspond to the types of leadership practices highlighted during the degree program. The LPI is considered to be a valid and reliable instrument for measuring transformational leadership (Brown & Posner, 2001; Fields & Herold, 1997; Hautala, 2005). It has also been applied to study the leadership skills of educators (Abu-Tineh, Khasawneh, & A-Omari, 2008; Joseph, 2009; Koh, 2008).

The second survey was a questionnaire designed by the researcher that consisted of closed and open-ended questions. This questionnaire's purpose was to collect demographic data and information about each participant's program experience. This included information about the skills the participants learned during the program, the participants' satisfaction with their mentors, district support, and climate within their schools. The survey was pre-tested and reviewed by leadership and school librarianship experts to ensure its content validity.

The Spearman rank correlation was used to determine the relationship between the respondents' perceptions of mentor support and the number of mentor contact hours (Research Question 2), perceptions of school district support (Research Question 3), and perceptions of school support (Research Question 4) with the LPI, and the LPI subscales. Qualitative data obtained from the open ended questions about what the participants learned in each leadership dimension (Research Questions 1) were placed in themes using the software Nvivo. During the focus groups, the students were asked if they would like to share any additional information about the program support structures or experiences during the program. These responses were not coded, but they were used to provide insight into the students' experiences in the discussion of the results.

## Findings

### ***Research Question 1: Skills Learned***

Before the researcher could determine if the support structures provided during the program had an impact on their leadership development, it was necessary to determine if the participants felt they learned new transformational leadership skills. The students were asked to describe the skills they learned in each of the transformational leadership dimensions during the program. These responses were analyzed to gain a better understanding of the skills learned and how they were applied during the participants' community-embedded learning experiences. The participants provided 129 responses detailing the transformational leadership skills they learned. (See Figure 2.) A majority of the responses reflected the participants' new skills in the dimension of Challenging the Process.

**Challenging the process.** According to the respondents, the program taught them the skills needed to analyze situations within their schools and to provide feedback about the situations. Many of the participants were able to speak more confidently about community needs because they learned how to research and interpret data to support how decisions should be made. For example, a participant wrote, "I open my mouth more because I feel more qualified and that my opinion has more credibility." Another stated, "I have been more outspoken on issues brought up

in faculty meetings, and I have used the teaching strategies I learned to teach students and teachers.”

The examples further indicate that the participants learned that being confident enough to share their skills enabled them to facilitate change. Challenging the Process or risk-taking requires the confidence to challenge norms. Challenging the Process also requires a leader to have enough confidence in their decision-making abilities to try new alternatives (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). A leader’s self-confidence in their own competency adds to their credibility, as people find it difficult to follow individuals that do not believe in their own capabilities (Kouzes & Posner, 2011).

**Inspiring a shared vision.** Another transformational leadership dimension with many responses related to skills applied within the participants’ schools was the dimension of Inspiring a Shared Vision. Project LEAD assignments frequently emphasized the need to influence school reform by promoting shared visions and goals as part of a leadership role. The Project LEAD students began to use the strategies that they learned in class to have an impact on the implementation of school missions. A student shared an example of working to revise a mission and vision statement. This participant wrote, “Today I took the third grade team to lunch. We drafted new vision and mission statements and four or five behaviors that demonstrate this vision and mission. It’s been e-mailed to our principal.”

The students were taught that advocating for a cause is an integral part of promoting shared visions and goals. Several students noted that one area lacking in their schools was technology integration. A student remarked, “One of the things I saw missing at my school was integrating technology in instruction. Project LEAD classes taught me how to use technology and encouraged me to share the technology integration with my school staff and administration.” Therefore, students frequently used technology as a way to inspire school stakeholders. This point was illustrated with a participant remarked, “The emphasis on technology integration in Project LEAD has helped me become an advocate for technology use at my school.”

A cursory look at the participants’ statements would reveal that they simply talked about how to implement technology or had lunch with colleagues. A more thorough review of the participants’ statements, however, reveals that these seemingly simple acts were actually leadership activities. The participants’ behaviors are leadership activities because according to Kouzes and Posner (2007), transformational leadership involves celebrating small victories that can lead to big changes. The participants took action to inspire colleagues to explore new possibilities by promoting interaction and advocacy. Transformational leaders understand that open dialogue is needed to embrace diversity and to promote mutual consensus.

**Modeling the way.** The participants were already role models before they began the program. However, some of them indicated that they were able to learn new role-modeling skills, which they implemented while they were still enrolled in the program. One example was when a participant shared, “Being a Project LEAD Fellow taught me how to work together to achieve our goals. I have begun to carry that over in the department at work.” Another participant continued on to say that she learned to, “. . . encourage teachers to take risks with technology, showing enthusiasm when implementing changes in curriculum that involve using new technologies.”

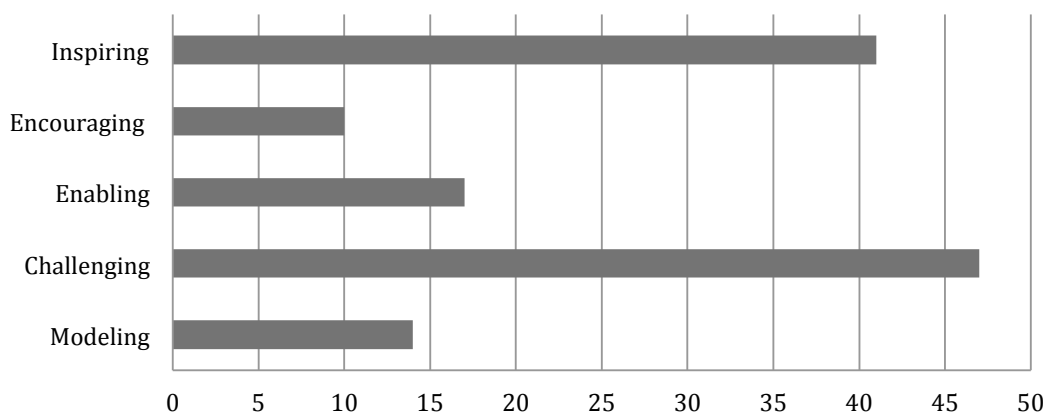
**Enabling others to act.** The dimensions Enabling Others to Act and Encouraging the Heart were mentioned the least in reference to the skills that the participants learned. The students frequently related the Enabling Others to Act dimension to promoting diversity and respect for individual needs. A statement from a student demonstrated this idea: “Considering diverse perspectives and real-world cultures is more important than ever in our global economy. Students feel valued when their unique life experiences are related to learning, and they develop compassion while learning about others.” Participants also approached diversity by becoming part of collaborative teams that support diverse perspectives. “Project LEAD has made it second nature

to move in and out of teams, grade levels, and school leadership, and to develop connections between teams.”

**Encouraging the heart.** The participants related the Encouraging dimension to celebrating the accomplishments of peers. They noted that they found addressing these accomplishments

improved the overall climate of their schools. An example of a participant celebrating accomplishments was shared in this quote: “It’s important to recognize the achievements of others. At every team meeting, we begin with ‘glows.’ Everyone shares something that he or she feels proud of completing. At first many people didn’t have much to say, but it caught on, and the glows set the tone of meetings.” A different participant concurred by writing, “It is so important that we celebrate each other’s accomplishments within our field. Simply through e-mails or a phone call or attending peer seminars . . . very important.”

**Figure 2: Frequencies of Reported Leadership Dimension Behaviors**

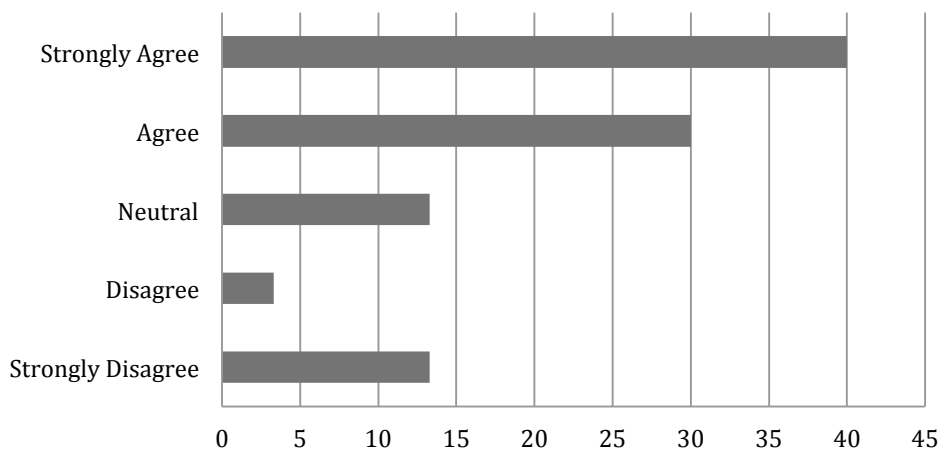


### **Research Question 2: Mentor Support**

The school librarianship director in his or her school district assigned a mentor each participant. Participants were asked how satisfied they were with the support they received from their mentors. (See Figure 3.) About 70% (or  $n=21$ ) respondents answered that they were satisfied to some extent with the support that they received from their mentors. Another 16.6% ( $n=5$ ) responded that they were dissatisfied to some degree with the support provided by their mentors. The rest of the participants (13.3 % or  $n=4$ ) were neutral. While there was no significant relationship between the participants’ perceptions of mentor support and the LPI and its subscales, there was a relationship with the amount of time the participants spent with their mentors. Participants that spent more time with their mentors scored higher on the LPI ( $r_s = .492$ ,  $n = 30$ ,  $p = .014$ ) and the LPI subscales for Encouraging the Heart ( $r_s = .492$ ,  $n = 30$ ,  $p = .006$ ), Enabling Others to Act ( $r_s = .426$ ,  $n = 30$ ,  $p = .019$ ), and Modeling the Way ( $r_s = .508$ ,  $n = 30$ ,  $p = .004$ ).



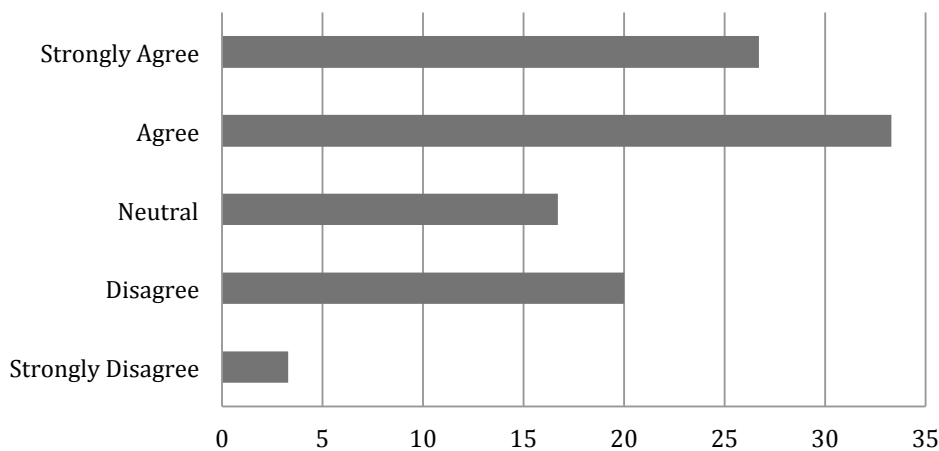
**Figure 3: Percentages of Satisfaction with Mentor Support**



***Research Question 3: School District Support***

Each school district had a school librarianship director that worked with the program participants. When asked to comment on their satisfaction with the support offered by their school districts, a majority of the participants (60% or  $n = 18$ ) responded that they were satisfied with the support offered by their school districts. Next, 23.3% (or  $n = 6$ ) disagreed to some extent that they were satisfied with the support offered by their school districts. The remaining participants (16.7% or  $n = 5$ ) were neutral. (See Figure 4.) There was no significant correlation between the respondents' perception of the support offered by their districts and the total LPI score. The Spearman rank correlation further revealed that there was no significant correlation between the respondents' perception of the support offered by their districts and the LPI subscales.

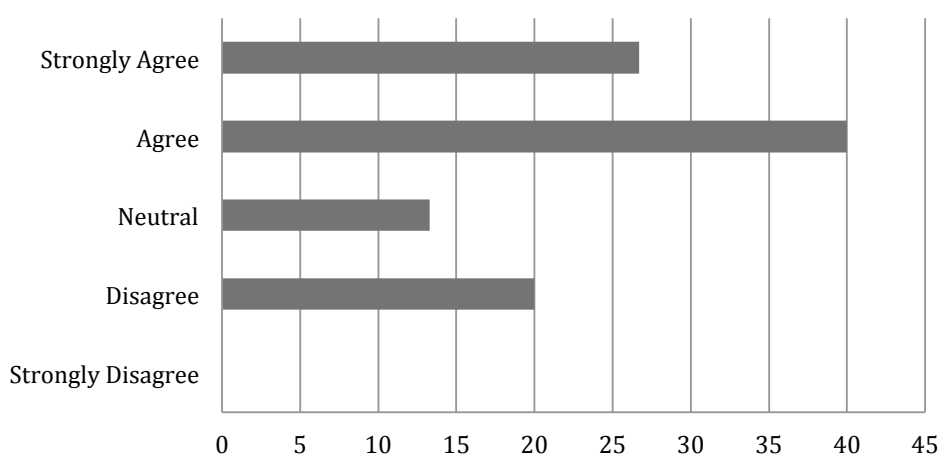
**Figure 4: Percentages of Satisfaction with District Support**



### **Research Question 4: School Climates**

Participants worked full-time during their degree programs. Given the research that indicates that principals impact school climates (Gülsen & Gülenay, 2014; Halawah, 2005), a question was included to determine how satisfied the participants were with their school climates during the program. (See Figure 5.) Most (66.7% or  $n=20$ ) of the participants strongly agreed or agreed that their school climates supported their leadership development. Twenty percent (20% or  $n=6$ ) disagreed that their school climate supported their leadership development. The remaining participants (13.3 % or  $n=4$ ) were neutral. A significant relationship did not exist between the respondents' perception of school climates and the total LPI score or any of the LPI subscales.

**Figure 5: Percentages of Satisfaction with the School Climates**



## **Discussion**

### **Satisfaction with Support Structures and Cohorts**

There were situations when the students did not feel supported within their schools. Some of them concluded that their school principals were not willing to accept suggestions. This was evident in a comment made by one of the participants, who asserted, "Currently, my school has a very negative culture, and we have gone through a transition of principals. There have not been a lot of opportunities to change the environment."

Despite their school climates, the results of this study were contrary to research suggesting that negative school cultures can discourage leadership development (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). The participants' satisfaction with support from the school district and support within the schools did not have a significant relationship with the LPI. As the researcher analyzed the data from the surveys and focus group, it became evident that there was another layer of support that the students relied upon heavily that was not included in the survey. It was the cohort format of the program. The entire cohort of students matriculated through the online program together. Yet each student could also rely upon the cohorts that existed within their counties. The large cohort of students formed an online community of peers with a wide variety of expertise and strengths to access. However, the district cohorts were more personalized and allowed the participants to have face-to-face study sessions as needed.

Perhaps under normal circumstances, when students are trying to complete a degree program without being in a cohort or with students who have not been recruited for their leadership capabilities, these factors would have hindered the participants' LPI scores. It is also not typical for a degree program to have such an emphasis on developing transformational leadership skills. Furthermore, it is atypical for students to have extended support structures that require them to interact intricately with a cohort, mentors within their school districts, or school librarianship directors. Hence the participants had many support structures to rely upon in the event that they experienced a hardship.

It can be inferred that factors likely to impede the leadership development of pre-service school librarians can be counteracted with support structures such as cohorts, mentors, and the assistance of school librarianship directors. For example, there were instances when students felt overwhelmed with completing their coursework, maintaining healthy relationships, and continuing to work. They cited having support from their cohort, professors, teaching assistants, and mentors as one reason they were able to continue. This extensive support system helped them to sustain their progress until they completed the program. During the focus group two participants reflected on different aspects of the support structures. The first student said:

"We were treated almost like queens in our county. Our person [school librarianship director] was so supportive. I mean she introduced us to the school board. We were invited to all the professional days, invited to the end of the year celebration and recognized there. I mean she was really just supportive, so we always felt she had our backs."

Another student continued by saying:

"I think it was good that there was so much support. And we were made to feel so special. Because looking back now, knowing how I felt half way through, had I not had such a positive beginning, I think that it would have really affected me more in the middle when I wondered do I really want to do this. Can I really make it? But I had such a positive beginning and I formed those friendships quickly and saw the support. I had help from the people here at FSU. I think that really helped me to keep going."

### ***Using Embedded Learning for Leadership Development***

According to the respondents, the program helped them set better examples within their schools. A participant stated, "When I was doing this program, my librarian in my school was looking at me like, "Wow!". Because this was some stuff that she hadn't even done. I was already doing it. And that kind of made me feel like a leader."

The students' comments support research that indicates that community embedded learning is beneficial for providing students with practical experiences (Haythornthwaite, et. al, 2007; Most, 2011). The students learned about the ways positive thinking and actions can shape the school culture. They also began to participate in more leadership roles for advising and planning like the Parent Teacher Association and school accreditation committees. Engaging in activities that benefited their schools helped them to inspire their colleagues and students. A respondent wrote that the program instilled in him that, "Being a leader within the school to shape its culture will require me to create networks of people that share a vision, organize and plan, communicate clearly, and motivate others to work together."

The participants felt that sharing the knowledge they learned during the program helped them to inspire their administrators. The respondents wrote about their plans and actions within their schools. One proclaimed, "I am on a path to helping teachers and administrators feel more comfortable with technology." They became more aware of the "broad picture" and how their

efforts related to the school-community environment holistically. This is consistent with the assertions of Taggart and Crisp (2011), who praised community - embedded learning for improving the self-esteem, community awareness, and interpersonal skills of students.

### ***School District Cohorts for Distance Learning***

Findings from this study have implications for cohorts in distance education. Namely, some of the students mentioned that working and meeting specifically with the people in their district cohorts was extremely helpful to them when completing assignments. The meetings became an additional support network. During these meetings, the participants developed a morale that enabled them to complete the program when they felt overwhelmed.

Additionally, when asked what they felt they gained from the program, several participants said they acquired a cohort of friends. The cohort was central to the success of numerous respondents in the program because of the positive, cohesive environment it provided. A participant wrote, "Trust was extremely high within our cohort, not just county-wise but program-wise. I feel comfortable online with teamwork now. I never thought it was possible before. But coming together in person a few times solidified the relationship." This statement reveals that taking part in the cohort encouraged the students to stay focused on their goals. Furthermore, the cohort afforded each participant an instant network of innovative professionals with whom to interact after he or she completed the program. Similar to the findings of Ferreira (2007), this research concurs that the students who participated in the program would not have enjoyed such a rich learning environment without the school district and university collaborations that resulted in the cohorts.

### ***Building Partnerships Between School Districts and Universities***

There were lessons to be learned from building partnerships between school districts and a university. It is important for school districts and universities to nurture relationships and to keep each other informed of critical events. This was done frequently during the program. Still, there were instances when district administrators retired or were replaced. Comparable to the challenges shared by Koch and Borg (2011), the replacements did not share the same vision for the program and did not interact with the students as much as their predecessors. In these cases, the students expressed a void in the support they were accustomed to receiving. Monthly meetings, written agreements and, manuals detailing the roles of all participants should be included in the program. Taking these steps can help ensure that the mission and vision of collaborative programs are maintained.

Similar problems occurred when some of the school district mentors left and were not replaced. This required the students to seek help from other students' mentors. As noted earlier, the time the students spent with their mentors had a positive relationship to their LPI scores. Therefore, mentors should be interviewed by university personnel to determine their intentions for participating prior to committing to work with students.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study was designed to examine the influence of school district support structures available for the Project LEAD students on their leadership development. It is evident that providing the students with a platform to apply the theory they learned during their degree program had a tremendous impact on their professional practices. The results of this study

indicate that it is important to provide educators enrolled in degree programs with ongoing, community embedded learning experiences so that they understand how to implement the theory they are learning. Community embedded learning is effective for educators because it refines their professional skills and improves their school districts. Moreover, professors teaching in degree programs have the opportunity to evaluate whether the theory that is being taught in the classroom is practical in K–12 settings.

The study does have limitations, including that it is restricted to a cohort of 30 participants who were specifically chosen for their leadership abilities. The Project LEAD courses are not currently offered in a cohort format. Instead, students are able to enroll and take the courses for the certificate individually. The 30 students that participated in this study had a unique opportunity to test the Project LEAD curriculum. Unfortunately, there was no cohort to compare the participants to. Therefore, a mixed method design was employed, allowing the researcher to explore the program's impact in multiple ways. This study included open-ended questions on the survey and a follow-up discussion during the focus group in which students were asked about the program's impact. Although there is no cohort to compare them to, their acknowledgement of the program's benefits and the impact of their experiences should be considered when examining the components of the program.

While it can be argued that the participants were already teacher-leaders, it can also be asserted that leading as a teacher and leading as a school librarian require two different skill sets. Classroom teachers specialize in interacting with subsets of students while school librarians must effectively interact with the entire school community to make an impact. Many school librarians have classroom teaching experience (Mardis, 2007). Still research suggests that teachers who become school librarians need assistance such as mentoring while transitioning into their new roles (Mardis, 2007; Solomon & Rathbun-Grubb, 2009). As demonstrated by this program, mentoring can be established either through a formal program or through informal activities such as sharing information, modeling optimal behaviors, and providing networking opportunities. Regardless of the structure, mentoring is important for new school librarians because they need specific guidance about their roles in schools, which many classroom teachers who do not have the appropriate experience cannot offer (Baaden, 2008; Smith, 2013).

It must also be acknowledged that the original goal for data collection was to examine the impact of the Project LEAD curriculum on the participants' self-perceived leadership behaviors. Only a few questions were included to address the participants' experiences with support structures, and this report is limited to responses to those questions. Although the cohort emerged from the discussion as a significant support structure, none of these questions directly related to the cohort as a support structure. In the future, additional questions are needed to examine other factors that were relevant to the participants' perceptions of the support structures within the school districts. While the results provide insight into the relationship between support structures and the transformational leadership development of pre-service school librarians, research within a larger population is needed. This additional research should include the self-perceived and observed leadership behaviors of the participants.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that the format of the program established through the university's collaboration with the school districts contributed to the program's success as a way to promote the leadership development of pre-service school librarians. School environments change as new educational trends, technology, and legislation emerge. Offering pre-service school librarians support structures that facilitate community embedded learning opportunities is a way to improve the chances of them becoming resilient leaders of school reform.

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