

Preparing Metacognitive Educational Leaders: How Placing Critical Thinking at the Heart of Our Program Is Transforming Our Students

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In this article the authors provide a roadmap on how they shifted a program in educational leadership to reflect the changes that are taking place in K-12 education. The article examines how one program responded to the impact of issues, like using data and the changing face of schools, by designing a program to produce leaders who are reflective thinkers able to lead schools and the people who serve children through problems that did not exist a decade ago. This process led the authors to a conclusion that they must nurture candidates to become metacognitive thinkers.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is, at its essence, “the capacity to generate energy and passion in others through action” (Fullan 23).

There are higher expectations placed on educational leaders today than ever before. They are expected to build and maintain relationships with all stakeholders while simultaneously making decisions that impact all of these stakeholder groups. They are required to solve problems, manage time, and collaborate, while also independently resolving time-sensitive issues on a daily basis. Educational leaders must have extensive knowledge of effective instruction, social-emotional learning, and trauma-informed and culturally responsive practices. In addition, most educational leaders work an average of 60-70 hours per week, yet are told to be sure to “take care of yourself” to avoid burnout while continuing to engage in their own professional learning to remain on top of current educational trends and legislative changes.

While balancing all of the above expectations, more than anything, educational leaders are expected to *move* people.

As professors of Educational Administration at The College at Brockport, a local branch of State University of New York (SUNY) just outside of Rochester, NY, we are obligated to not only understand the shifting landscape in education and its direct impact on educational leaders, but also have a commitment to prepare future leaders to be successful in this changing climate. In addition to the above list of expectations, our American school system has experienced drastic changes just in the last 10 years - changes that occurred so quickly yet educational leadership has not kept up. Countries such as Finland, Canada, Japan, and New Zealand - while not facing all of the same challenges as US schools -

professionalize education and value educators, and provide models of quality leadership for our educational systems. Yet our schools present an image of teachers and leaders walking through quicksand, unable to move forward while being devoured by the fast-paced changing demands placed upon them.

THE SHIFTING LANDSCAPE OF AMERICAN EDUCATION

So how has education changed? Let's examine the list below by thinking about the direct impact these changes have on our role as professors of Educational Leadership.

- **Increasing gender diversity in school leadership:** Traditionally, school leaders have been males, but in the last two decades we have seen a shift in the percentage of women stepping into leadership roles in schools. According to a 2016 study conducted by the National Center for Educational Statistics (Nces.ed.gov, 2016) within the U.S. Department of Education, the percentage of female principals increased in public schools between 1987–88 and 2011–12 from 25 to 52 percent. Specifically, during the 2011–12 school year, 54% of new public school principals were women (Nces.ed.gov, 2016). Enrollment statistics in our own program mirror this trend: 74 of 105 students or about 71% of the students in our School Leadership program are women, and 50% of our candidates in our School Business Leader program are women.
- **Younger school leaders:** In addition to a shift in gender, we are also seeing a greater number of educators transitioning to school leadership earlier in their career. According to the same NCES study, the average age of new principals in 2011-12 was 43.0 years, with experienced principals an average of 11.6 years older (54.6 years old). The difference between the ages of new and experienced public school principals was smaller in 1987–88, an average of 8.7 years (Nces.ed.gov, 2016). We have also seen these trends reflected in our program.
- **Increasing numbers of school principals:** U.S. schools are also seeing more principals assigned to the job than in years past. Specifically, from the 1987–88 school year to the 2011–12 school year, the total number of public school principals grew from 103,290 to 115,540, a gain of 12 percent (Nces.ed.gov, 2016).
- **Changing racial demographics of principals:** Although principals in U.S. public and private schools are predominantly White, the proportion of White principals decreased between 1987–88 and 2011–12 in both public and private schools. During the same time period, the percentage of Black principals did not change significantly, and the percentage of Hispanic principals increased by 4 percentage points from 3 to 7 percent (Nces.ed.gov, 2016).
- **Increasing diversity in student populations in public schools:** From the fall 2003 through the fall 2013, the number of White students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools decreased by almost 3 million. In contrast, the number of Hispanic students enrolled during this period increased by 3.5 million, and since the fall 2002, the percentage of students enrolled in public schools who were Hispanic has exceeded the percentage that were Black (Nces.ed.gov, 2016). In addition to changes in racial diversity, schools are seeing increased rates of students living in poverty. In the nine county Rochester area, from where we draw almost all of our students, 19% of the children are considered poor, and in the Rochester City School District a staggering 88% of the students live in poverty, the second poorest among comparably sized cities in the nation. Rochester is also the 5th poorest city in the country overall. Black and Hispanic poverty rates in the nine county region are 34% and 33 %

respectively compared to the rate of Whites at 10 percent (Rochester Area Community Foundation, 2013). However, rural poverty is also an issue in the nine county area with poverty rates in towns ranging from 2 percent all the way up to 41 percent. Indeed 1 in 5 children in the area are considered poor. In addition, Rochester is the fifth most segregated city in the nation as measured by the Manhattan Institute 2012 Policy Report (Rochester Area Community Foundation, 2013). These regional data require our students to be aware of the role bias plays in schools, the impact of trauma on students, and how to provide adequate resources for higher-needs students despite limited budgets (i.e. students with disabilities, undocumented students, bilingual and non-native English speakers).

- **Adoption of national curriculum standards:** The adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) impacts how schools adjust the way they view both curriculum and instruction, requiring educational leaders to have increased knowledge of CCSS and the associated shifts to instructional practice so they can support teachers through these changes. The statewide adoption of CCSS in New York remains controversial, largely due to its connection to changing state assessments, and has resulted in a statewide movement where parents are opting their children out of these assessments. Significant percentages of students opting out impacts a school's standing with the State Education Department.
- **Proposed Changes to Federal Spending:** Changes in leadership at the U.S. Department of Education after the election of 2016 point to a new era of shifting priorities. For example, impending cuts to Title II grants for teacher and principal training, 21st Century community learning centers, and teacher quality partnership grants, as well as a shifting focus on public schools of choice, promise new challenges for educational leaders and our program.
- **Increased need to collect and use data:** The ages of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) placed student performance in the national spotlight. State education systems responded by placing higher demands on schools to increase student achievement. In New York, schools faced significant changes all in the *same* school year - changing curriculum and changing state assessments - requiring educational leaders to increase their focus on data collection and analysis. While there is uncertainty around accountability measures at the national level, New York currently has no plans to reduce state requirements of schools.
- **Increased emphasis on accountability:** In addition to changing how students were measured, NCLB and ESSA also placed teacher performance in the spotlight, thus impacting teacher evaluation. New York, for example, requires all schools to adopt an Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) for all certified teaching staff, an initiative that came at the same time as changing assessments and curriculum. Under APPR in New York, teacher evaluation scores were directly linked to student performance on state assessments. All data collected by schools are either published or easily accessible to the public.
- **Increased use of technology, both in and out of the classroom:** In today's world, technology advances faster than anything else, and educational leaders are expected to consider how to keep schools current with their use of technology despite limited budgets. In addition, social media has changed how quickly and broadly information is shared. Today, school leaders must understand the various forms of social media and the issues associated with them involving parents, students, and staff.

- **Teacher and leader shortages, particularly in high-poverty areas:** The U.S. is facing its first teacher shortage since the 1990s, and these shortages are most greatly felt in the areas of Special Education, math, science, and English-language education. According to a 2016 study released by the Learning Policy Institute, the US experienced a 35% decline in enrollment in teacher education programs from 2009 to 2014. In addition, the study showed that in 2014, on average, less than one percent of teachers were uncertified in low-minority schools, while four times as many were uncertified in high-minority schools. Teacher attrition — the number of teachers leaving the profession for a variety of reasons — remains high and is the single-biggest contributor to the shortage. Teacher turnover is especially high in poor and disadvantaged schools. The greatest factor cited for teacher attrition is job dissatisfaction; leaders today need to boost and maintain high morale and nurture their staff in support of teacher retention (Sutcher et al., 2016).
- **Adoption of National Leadership Standards:** Our program recently completed and was accredited through the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), which aligns the Educational Leadership Policy Standards (ELCC) to our assessments. However, new leadership standards are forthcoming in 2018, which will call for more internal assessment revisions in order to maintain accreditation.
- **Different types of schools are represented in our program:** Our leadership program serves educators from a variety of educational settings, including public, private, charter, nonprofit, prison schools, and regional educational centers/providers. In the past, you did not have to be certified to be a school leader outside of public schools; today, more educational organizations seek leaders who have received specific training and certification, and who have more experienced leadership skills. Our changing student demographics bring a variety of background and experiences to students' thinking about their coursework, and this requires our courses and professors to be prepared to meet these diverse needs.
- **Duality of schools:** The diversity of our students requires that our course tasks address the leadership issues and skills that transcend all educational settings while also preparing leaders for the specific needs they will face in their future role based on location. For example, we encounter leaders whose school will provide a rigorous International Baccalaureate (IB) program, requiring the leader to support the implementation of programs that prepare students to be global citizens. In contrast, in the same class we might have a student who will lead in a rural school that cannot even offer more than one foreign language or any electives for students. This leads to a greater need for differentiated tasks and experiences, as well as professors who have broad knowledge of the leadership issues in a variety of educational settings.

THE IMPETUS FOR CHANGE

This is an extensive and exhausting list whose impact on our program is monumental. And never before have we felt the need to shift how we prepare future educational leaders. In years past, the belief that “leaders are born, not made” and that only certain people are cutout for educational leadership supported a program that was content-driven. In this program, students were taught the nuts and bolts of school management tasks, i.e. how to create a budget, hire a teacher, create a schedule, etc. Today, in order to effectively and successfully meet the demands of contemporary education, we must expect our

program and its professors and coursework to “move” our students to a leadership mindset so they can be responsive in this ever-changing educational landscape.

As Fullan (2011) explains in his book, *The Change Leader*, our students and schools need “change agents” rather than managers of people and things. We share Fullan’s belief and propose that *leadership is a mindset*, a “state trait.” To do this, our program aims to intentionally prepare future leaders who are metacognitive, critical thinkers and collaborative decision makers. In the specific examples that we present in this chapter, you will see how through redesigning course tasks and structure, as well as overall program goals, we are producing leaders who can think, understand the context of various situations, and use evidence to make both cognitive and metacognitive decisions.

Our work remains in progress; what we share are the beginning stages of this necessary program change and the immediate impact it has had on our students and faculty. Our story tells of how we are embracing what it means to truly be change agents in order to transform our department, our students, and the quality of educational leaders in our community.

INFLUENCES FOR CHANGE

“You can’t find the answers outside yourself-you have to start inside and look for the best external connections to further develop your own thinking” (Fullan, xii).

The work of Fullan and Hargreaves and others guided and influenced our thinking as we worked to transform our department the past three years to reflect the changes in our field associated with the factors cited in the previous section. We recognized that there were elements of our program, like our internships, that were meeting the needs of most of our students; yet much of the coursework reflected a view of leadership that was managerial and hierarchical - a model based on organizational efficiency and accountability but not reflective of the changing nature of educational organizations and students.

We do not discount the need for educational leaders to “sweat the details” of management; they need to. But we also recognize the need to change our program to emphasize the value and importance of relationship-building and trust, and teaching our future educational leaders to communicate and engage with teachers to collectively reform teaching and learning (Leona, 2011). We also needed to empower our future leaders to think about the faculty and students that they will be serving the next thirty years. New leaders will be working with a generation of digital native students and faculty. They replace the so-called “analog generation” who grew up with less technology and a greater likelihood of working under hierarchical leadership models. But today’s student in our program and the students that they will teach will grow up digitally connected and are already pushing back on issues like the work environment and school schedules associated with an agrarian past. So, in conjunction with this, we recognized that online learning, combined with a focus on critical thinking and metacognition, needed to guide our transformation.

Writers and thinkers in both the field of education and the broader fields of business and social science influenced our transformative work. We found commonalities among and between these writers. For example in his book, *The 8th Habit, From Effectiveness to Greatness* (2004), Stephen Covey writes that leadership involves communicating people’s worth and potential to them so clearly that they see it themselves. He goes on to say that leadership should focus on modeling, aligning, and empowering those you lead (Covey, 2004). And with what he calls knowledge workers (and what are educators if not this?), we must prepare leaders to focus on releasing people’s potential and not controlling them. These ideas closely echo those of Daniel Pink (2009) and his research on intrinsic motivation for skilled workers. His ingredients of motivation include the ideas of autonomy through teamwork, mastery and purpose, or the desire to be involved in something larger. We wanted to change our program to be less a series of courses required by the State of New York, the standards of our discipline, and our CAEP certification process to one in which our students recognized that leaders must be self-directed and self-monitor their attitudes and behaviors. This was a tall task.

In our work, Fullan and Hargreaves have shown our students and us other ways to view leadership and the future of our field. The authors contrast proponents of a business capital model, who view education as a market and teachers and leaders as disposable, flexible and temporary, with the Professional Capital model which has been adopted by “high performing economies and educational systems around the world” (16). In this model schools and learning institutions are based on trust and communication. We recall the adage in our field that “it is about the students” and, of course, that is true; but we maintain that it is just as much about the adults who are working with generation after generation of those students.

THE EVOLUTION OF OUR THINKING

The work of the National Research Council, *How People Learn*, and other researchers on the science of learning led Jeff to get a grant and write a book chapter on the development of critical thinking in online and hybrid courses. The purpose of this research was to “investigate, design, and implement rigorous questions, assignments and assessments that would lead to critical thinking in an asynchronous online or hybrid course” (32). This work was based on three assumptions:

1. Technology is not pedagogy. In online learning pedagogical teaching skills and curriculum design are at least as important as technological skills.
2. Learning a complex body of knowledge online requires questions, tasks, and assessments that are designed at multiple levels of a learning taxonomy.
3. More media does not appear to enhance learning, however asynchronous online communication like discussion boards has been found to lead to more self-reflection and deeper learning.

For this grant we collected data from students in our program on online learning and critical thinking. When asked to describe their experiences in critical thinking and what that construct meant to them, we discovered how much most students wanted to stretch themselves to think at higher levels. A small sample of these data on student responses included:

- A person who thinks critically does not accept information as fact without considering the source of the information and the context in which it appears.
- It wasn't until I examined and researched topics in my Educational Administration coursework that I became aware of the importance of critical thinking and its connection with the writing process.
- The online questions were posed so that critical thinking was needed in order to respond. Sources of either class texts, research, or theory was applied to responses in order to support the answers.
- Reading and considering the responses of my peers online increased my desire and ability to think critically.
- Critical thinking prevents me from jumping to erroneous conclusions based on what evidence I hope to see.
- It made me ponder, “Am I engaged in critical thinking?” My thought would be that if you are already wondering, then you probably are because critical thinking takes consideration and metacognition - thinking about thinking.

That last statement was powerful to us because we were both thinking and writing about the relationship between critical thinking and metacognition. Our scholarship informed our practices and program changes. In our research and work we had come to believe that metacognitive approaches to instruction helped our learners take control of their own learning if they:

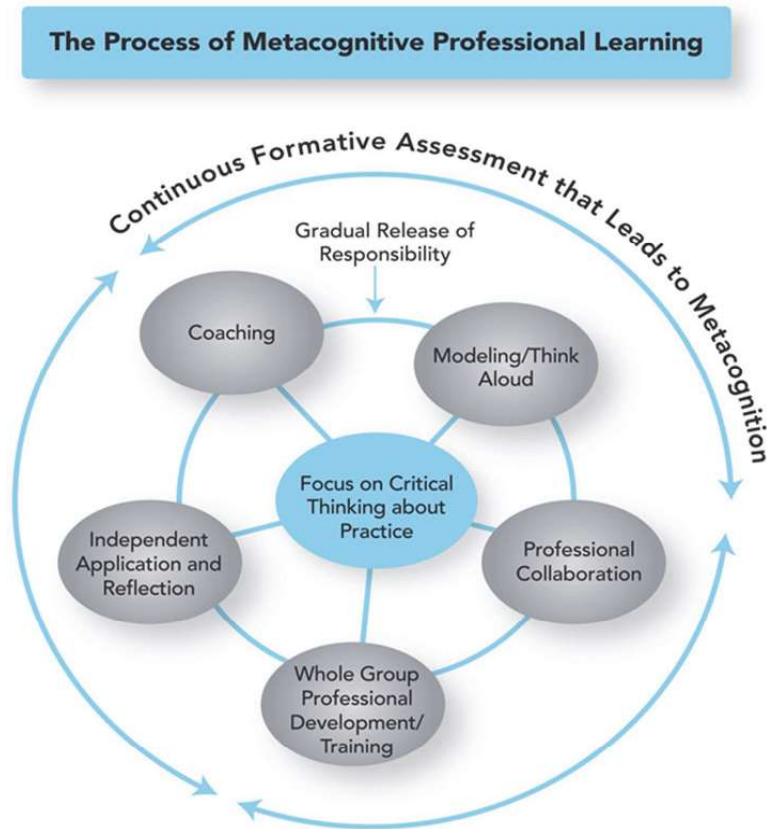
- Recognize what they understood and when they needed new information

- Recognize the strategies they need to assess their own understanding
- Realize the importance of building the individual theories
- Recognize their intellectual strengths and weaknesses (National Research Council, 2000).

Building upon these ideas we started work on an article and conference presentation that served to inform our work. We recognized that our challenge was to design and implement coursework that reflected our belief systems on continuous growth while giving our learners more opportunities to embrace and think about their own growth. We agreed with the work on critical thinking - that while everyone thinks they are doing it, much of their thinking is distorted, uninformed, and prejudiced (Paul & Elder, 2014). We also saw the idea of critical thinking as the thread connecting not only our program but also the student learning standards in the common core curriculum and all professional learning for adults (Donnelly & Linn, 2014). In our research we revisited the work of Pearson and Gallagher's (1983) Gradual Release of Responsibility Model and completed our own model of Metacognitive Professional Learning (Donnelly & Linn, 2014) that came to guide and inform both our work in the schools and with the students in our Educational Leadership courses.

Our model guided us as we redesigned assignments and assessments. Note that at the center of the model is our commitment to focus our students on critical thinking about practice. Branching out from the center are five professional learning practices grounded in Gradual Release of Responsibility (GRR).

FIGURE 1
THE PROCESS OF METACOGNITIVE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING MODEL
(DONNELLY & LINN, 2014)



We view GRR as a nonlinear approach to professional learning; the important idea in all the practices of our model is the gradual release or scaffolding of the learning of our students. We know that in our

program we have teachers and counselors with anywhere from three to twenty years experience in their current positions; they are at very different places in understanding. Therefore, our professional learning practices are flexible and based on the needs of the learner, whether it is understanding how to run an effective meeting, learning how to observe teachers, developing a school improvement plan, or any of the other competencies we have designed in our program. The ultimate goal of all coursework and learning experiences is to engage students in continuous formative assessment of their leadership development in order to increase metacognition.

TRANSFORMING COURSE TASKS AND ACTIVITIES TO PROMOTE METACOGNITION

In order to promote critical thinking *within* our courses, we have revised course tasks and assignments. Specifically, we are moving away from the traditional research paper towards relevant, current scenario-based tasks that allow students to apply research and leadership skills to contextual situations they might (and most likely will) encounter in the field.

For example, in our Building-level Leadership course, students historically selected from a list of current school management topics, conducted research on related best practices, and composed a 3-4-page paper. Most recently, this assignment transformed into a partner-collaborative presentation where students are given one of 10-12 school managerial scenarios and are asked to present their recommendation to addressing the scenario based on (1) interviews with acting school leaders and (2) research of best practices (see Figure 2). Students present their scenario and suggested course of action to their peers and provide a professional bibliography as well as relevant artifacts that can be used for future reference. In this task, students have a chance to not only learn more about how to address specific aspects of building-level management, but to apply what they learned within a specific context. Using their research, students must make decisions by synthesizing what they learned with their own leadership style, and provide a rationale for their decision.

FIGURE 2
SAMPLE TASKS ON BUILDING-LEVE LEADERSHIP

Maintaining Safe School Facilities

Part I: As AP, you are walking the halls of the school when you hear shouting coming from the main office. As you get closer, you see a man arguing with a staff member. Just as you are getting ready to intervene, the man turns and walks away from the office, toward the classrooms. You try to find out what he needs but he ignores you and keeps walking.

- Describe the emergency action steps/procedures that you put into place immediately.
- What examples of current emergency plan procedures and protocols can you find that represent best practices in similar situations?

Part II: A half-hour before lunch is to be served the sink backs up and sends sewerage water all over the food service area and into the cafeteria. The cafeteria workers refuse to serve the food because of their fear of contamination and the smell in the cafeteria. They call their boss who tells them to leave the area until it is cleaned up and the health inspector checks it out. The sewerage smell is beginning to drift down the corridor into the classrooms. The custodian goes to the area and says that the water is still leaking out and a plumber should be called. He estimates that it will take a few hours to clean up the sewerage and disinfect the area. He says that it would not be ready for the end of the day. Some of the cafeteria workers are complaining of feeling sick to their stomachs. You are concerned about the smell that is beginning to permeate the area.

- Describe the immediate action steps you take in response to this situation.
- Provide examples of food safety codes or regulations, as well as other regulations regarding hygienic conditions in schools, that will help guide your decision.

Social Media

You have just been hired as the new principal of a [rural/urban/suburban] K-5 school following the tenure of the previous principal who was the school leader for 17 years. Your superintendent has asked you to increase your parent and community outreach using current forms of social media.

- Develop a plan for how you will use social media to communicate with stakeholders, including the social media platform(s) you will use and how you will use them (i.e. frequency, topics, who will be in charge of messaging, how you will launch these initiatives).
- In addition, be sure to identify best practices when using social media as a school leader. You may wish to review your school/district's social media policy as part of your research and share this with your peers.

In our School Law course, the professor takes a similar approach, making all assignments scenario-based. In this course, students research current New York State laws and regulations, as well as federal laws, and apply them to specific scenarios that a school leader will encounter on any given day (see Figure 3). In addition, students engage in roleplaying scenarios where multiple stakeholders are involved and multiple perspectives need to be considered when applying the law to make decisions (Figure 4). Again, this approach to learning -- an intentional course design focused on promoting critical thinking and metacognitive decision-making -- shifts the thinking from the professor to the students and prepares educational leaders who can be responsive yet knowledgeable when making decisions.

FIGURE 3 EXAMPLES OF BRIEF SCENARIOS FROM SCHOOL LAW COURSE

STUDENT TRANSPORTATION: A parent enrolled her first grader in a non-public school. The family subsequently lost their house due to a fire and moved into a hotel out of the district. The parents intend to find a new location in the former district. The parents registered the student in the new school district, but expected the former school to provide transportation to the non-public school. The former school district refused. The parents appealed the decision. Should the district's denial of transportation be upheld? Why or why not?

DISCIPLINE PENALTY: A child was found in possession of a total of 25 grams of marijuana distributed among 13 smaller bags. The district proved that the child passed a bag to another student and suspended the student for a full year. Another student found in possession of 25 grams of marijuana was only suspended for two months. The mom of the first child appeals the decision arguing the year suspension is excessive. Should the district suspension of the first child be upheld? Why or why not?

CUSTODY: The mother of a 12-year-old female student wrote to the school stating that she is now separated from her husband, the student's father, and directed that neither the husband/father nor his significant other living with him may visit or pick up the student from school. The mother referred to possible danger to the student from the husband. The mother included a copy of a court order providing her with sole custody and the husband with visitation every other weekend and on Wednesdays and Wednesday nights. The husband arrived to pick up his daughter at the end of school on a Wednesday. The district permitted the student to leave with him, and the mother appealed its action. Should the district have permitted the husband/father to pick up the student? Why or why not?

FIGURE 4
EXAMPLE OF ROLE PLAYING SCENARIO FROM SCHOOL LAW COURSE

SCENARIO: The district has brought 3020-a charges against a certified, tenured teacher. The teacher is being charged with misconduct, insubordination, and conduct unbecoming a teacher. The teacher allegedly engaged in conduct “intimidating a 17-year-old female student into posing for explicit photos in a classroom closet that was used for storage, to have engaged the teen in inappropriate activities including fondling her breasts and genitals as well as posing for the photos under the pretense of attracting college recruiters and employers; encouraged the student to look sexier, and that he had to see more of the scantily clad teen for the supposed college portfolio.”

The teacher is a nationally regarded history teacher, and is regionally known for his methods and effective teaching, having been praised for his interdisciplinary lessons, use of multimedia in the classroom, and use of brain exercises and memory tools. An overwhelming majority of his students at the predominantly low-income, minority school regularly pass the global history and geography state exams and is a two-time “Teacher of the Year.” The Board of Education does not want to settle the case because they want to send a message and because of the high profile nature of the case.

Group 1: As the Assistant Superintendent and staff you have analyzed the costs and benefits of proceeding with or settling the case. Prepare a written report and be prepared to explain to the Board (with the assistance of the other cast members) the disciplinary process, the legal issues, and the reasons that settling the 3020-a charges is more cost effective and preferable than proceeding with a hearing and how you would mediate the matter. Submit the written report with Group 2’s submission as one document. Present the District’s position orally in class session 4.

Group 2: As the District’s teacher’s representatives, you have analyzed the costs and benefits of proceeding with or settling the case. Prepare a written report and be prepared to present to the teacher (with the assistance of your cast members) the disciplinary process, the legal issues, and the reasons that settling the 3020-a charges is more advantageous than proceeding with the hearing and how you would mediate the matter. Submit the written report with Group 1’s submission as one document. Present the union’s position orally in class session 4.

Cast of Characters: Group 1: e.g., Superintendent, Assistant Superintendents for Finance and for Curriculum and Instruction, Human Resources Director, Principal; Group 2: Teacher’s Union representative from regional office; Unit’s President; Teacher, Unit’s Vice President, other.

Another example of how we have transformed our coursework to allow students to think more critically about the work of leading change in schools is our course on Leading Instructional Improvement. In this course, students learn the ins and outs of school improvement planning by assessing their current school/organization using the New York State Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness (DTSDE) rubric. The New York State Education Department (NYSED) uses the DTSDE rubric to assess and evaluate schools across the state that are at risk of closure due to poor performance. Through coursework, students increase their understanding of NYSED criterion for school quality by applying this knowledge to assess their own school and plan for needed improvement. The outcome is a sample School Improvement Plan (SIP) -- a document that most, if not all, school leaders across New York create prior to each school year whether they are in need of improvement or not (Figure 5). A quality school improvement planning process is a best practice for all school leaders, and our course embeds students in this decision-making process through an authentic analysis and assessment of their own school. Semester after semester, students report actually implementing their SIP in their school or organization in order to create needed change. This is the ultimate goal of our program, and the need of educational leaders today: educational leaders who can “move” people.

In addition to designing course tasks that require our students to apply their learning to relevant scenarios, our courses intentionally engage students in increasing their self-awareness. For example, in our introductory course, Foundations of Educational Leadership, students take leadership skill inventories

and read about multiple theories of and approaches to leadership in order to identify their areas of strength and growth and set metacognitive goals for themselves during their time in the program.

In multiple courses, professors engage students in identifying their personal biases and assumptions in order to think critically about how these impact their leadership decisions. Specifically, students in the 6-credit Hybrid Foundations of Leadership course have to complete at least seven online discussion assignments scored using the Critical Thinking Value Rubric published by the American Association of Colleges and Universities that includes the categories of Explanation, Evidence, Influence of Context and Assumptions, Influence of Student Perspective, and Conclusions (Association of American Colleges & Universities, 2017). In one assignment students are given readings on poverty and stereotyping, and after reading are asked:

1. Please take the risk to share some of your own stereotypes (or generalizations if you want to use a more comfortable word) with us about the poor or any other group that the article made you think about. Where do you think your views come from and what are the limits of your knowledge about them?
2. Is there anything you can do to change your perspective? Please explain what you can and why it is important in your future as a leader.

These types of tasks are typical of our online assignments throughout the program and align with our program focus on critical thinking and metacognition. We strive to create an online caring community, and recognize that sometimes people say things to their peers online that they might not say in class. For example, one student wrote of a relative who had been killed in the 9/11 attacks and his struggle not to blame “certain groups because of this” and how “hard it is not to place the blame.” Another student wrote of growing up sheltered in a predominantly white middle class community and getting a job in Rochester. In her online entry she shared a reflection from her first day on the job: “I had never been in a room with so many black people before and I was terrified.” She went on to say that her initial reaction seems silly now but “the fact was I was completely ignorant.” Still another student put themselves into the shoes of a poor black parent and how it must feel to leave work and money and be called into school for a meeting with an all-white administrative staff.

FIGURE 5
EXCERPT FROM STUDENT SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

SMART Goal: By June 2018, 70% of students in grades 2-6 will be reading on grade level as measured by the Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark assessment.						
Specific Indicator	Current Status	Action	Timeline	Resources – Please Name Source	Who’s Responsible: Primary Secondary	Evidence of Change Identify Evaluation or Progress Monitoring Tool
<i>Statement of Practice 3.5: Teachers implement a comprehensive system for using formative and summative assessments for strategic short and long-range curriculum planning that involves student reflection, tracking of, and ownership of learning.</i>	a) Teachers are beginning to develop a system to analyze and use data to make curricular decisions.	Grade level data file: demonstrating multiple measures of student data (exit tickets, anecdotal records, interim and unit benchmarks)	Twice monthly coinciding with data meetings	Common assessments	Teachers Teacher Team Leaders	Alignment of meeting minutes and data file Student performance on benchmark assessment to monitor progress toward goal
	b) Teachers are in the process of developing multiple types of assessments to ensure alignment between curriculum and assessment, or the use of the variety of assessments is inconsistent throughout the school.	Benchmark reading records administered Professional learning related to formative assessments—using anecdotal records and exit tickets to inform instruction	3-5 times per year, based on grade level and student need August 2017 Every other month, thereafter	Leveled Literacy Intervention Fountas & Pinnell Assessment system Guskey EngageNY	Grade level teams AIS Coordinator Teacher Team Leaders Curriculum Coordinator	Professional Development Plan Walkthrough “look-fors” and conversations about formative assessments
		Teachers will use multiple measures for formative assessment	Daily/Weekly	Guskey EngageNY	All teachers Teacher Team	Formative assessment data will be demonstrated in student data files Walkthrough “look-fors” will show use of formative assessments

In our Building-level Leadership course, students participate in a one-day shadowing experience of a current school leader who works in a different demographic than their own. For example, a teacher in a suburban elementary school might shadow a principal in an urban high school, or a high school guidance counselor in the city might shadow an elementary principal in a rural school setting. After shadowing the school leader, students reflect on this experience in writing in order to increase their self-awareness and metacognitive decision-making abilities. The following questions help to guide this reflection and analysis:

- Identify your biases and assumptions that you bring into your observation experience, e.g. high school principals work harder than elementary principals; elementary principals deal with less behavioral issues.
- Based on your observation experience, analyze your biases and assumptions for accuracy. What did you observe that challenges/confirms/extends your previous biases and assumptions?
- Analyze the impact of your biases on assumptions. How will these biases/assumptions affect your role as a school leader? What steps will you take to minimize their impact?

Engaging our students in analysis of their biases and assumptions throughout our program is essential when we think about the changing nature of our schools and students. As noted previously, we are seeing an increase in racial and socioeconomic diversity among students. In the Rochester area alone, our students could obtain a position as a school leader in either an urban school where the population is over 90% African-American and Hispanic and over 90% Free/Reduced priced lunch (FRPL - a measure of student socioeconomic status in schools), or in a rural school where the student population has a higher rate of FRPL and over 90% White with a subgroup of students from migrant farming Latino families. Therefore, the impact of a school leader's biases and assumptions is significant when making decisions and forming relationships.

In another one of our courses, students continue to deepen their self-awareness by engaging in a reflection about their "Signature Presence." By definition, *Signature Presence* is what you specifically bring to your work and play that nobody else brings. When you are authentic, influential, and connected, you exhibit this signature. It is always potent and interdependent and never at the expense of you or the people with whom you interact (O'Neil, 2000). Using the questions in a graphic organizer to guide their reflection (Figure 6), students critically analyze their signature presence in order to (1) better understand their impact on those around them, and (2) intentionally leverage their presence to be more effective in their role. After independent reflection, students are encouraged to ask a critical friend to complete this same graphic organizer, providing feedback about how others perceive their colleague's signature presence. Each semester, students report that this exercise supports their professional growth; not only does it allow individuals to self-identify areas of strength and weakness, but it also allows their trusted colleagues to both confirm and adjust their thinking about the messages they send to others.

FIGURE 6 EXCERPTS OF REFLECTION

Imagine someone is observing you exhibiting your signature presence. What will they see, hear, feel, and think in each of these areas?

- What is your physical presence (body language, stance, energy level)?
- Voice and speech – what words do you use? What is the tone and quality of your voice? How much do you speak (or not)?
- What are you wearing and why?
- Actions – Where do you sit or stand? How do you move around a room? What is your level of focus?

Describe your impact on others when you are exhibiting your signature presence.

Such a task is an excellent example of how we strive to promote metacognition in order to develop educational leaders who, through their self-awareness, intentionally harness their strengths to impact student success and who are open to continuous growth and development.

There are other examples similar to these across all courses; these tasks and assignments will continue to evolve as our program-wide understanding and emphasis of our vision, as it aligns with current educational needs, also evolves. Not only do these tasks demonstrate our program's commitment to our vision -- creating leaders who are critical thinkers and metacognitive decision makers -- but they also exemplify the understanding and application of quality leadership skills and knowledge in today's schools.

TRANSFORMING COURSE STRUCTURE TO PROMOTE METACOGNITION

There is no cookbook full on how to be an educational leader; a principal's first day on the job can bring any number of situations for which a person is not prepared. Just like newly certified doctors, educational leaders jump right into the thick of their work on day one. It's impossible to know exactly what it means to run a school without actually doing the job. This is why we, in addition to changing the way we engaged our students within courses, also made several changes to how courses are structured to intentionally increase how students participate in relevant and realistic field experiences.

In their final two semesters in our program, students take two courses - Central Office and Internship - that place them directly into the field working with current school and district leaders. In the Central Office course students must be prepared to bridge the gap between the inner workings of individual buildings and the broader context of the entire school district or educational organization. A major assignment in the course is for groups of students to complete a project for a school district in the region and, if applicable, present the results of that project to a Board of Education, Administrative cabinet, or other stakeholder group associated with the school district. Past projects have looked at issues like: Advanced Placement (AP) courses in high school, more effective means of funding food service, middle school algebra, and scheduling counseling programs. These are real issues that help students understand the interactions and strategies needed to serve in a central office position and aid the district in a study that they may not have the resources to complete.

Internship is the intersection of all of the skills, experience, and training that students have learned to-date in the program, and is an experience that is as close to being a full-time educational leader as possible in a situation where the student is not actually hired as an administrator. In fact the student, at this point in the program, is qualified for a Certificate of Internship (issued by the New York State Education Department) allowing a student to serve in an administrative position that would normally require certification. During this individualized course, each student works with a full time building-level or central office administrator (mentor) for 40 hours per week over the course of seven weeks in

accomplishing administrative tasks. The Internship offers opportunities for more holistic tasks, i.e. staff development over a semester, budget development from beginning to end, or recruitment and hiring of personnel. One objective common to all students during the Internship is the further refinement of job-seeking skills (investigating a vacancy, writing a cover letter, writing a resume, and interviewing).

In addition to their field placement, students participate in three seminars throughout the semester. The purpose of the seminars is to provide students with additional shared learning experiences and to prepare them for graduation and certification. To increase metacognition during their internship, we use the seminar to promote collaboration and critical thinking around key leadership issues. For example, we recently added a workshop to our first seminar on “Having Difficult Conversations” where students role-play specific scenarios that require skillful and courageous communication with various school and district stakeholders. At times, we use real scenarios in which students have found themselves in order to share the learning from one student’s experience with others. In seminar two, students participate in collaborative conversations about their field experiences, using questions like those below to guide their thinking:

- What’s one thing that you’ve done (i.e. a completed task, an action/reaction to a situation, or a decision you made) that surprised you the most?
- What’s one task that you’ve completed that you didn’t know how to do? What did you learn about yourself by working on this task?
- What projects are you currently working on? Explain one thing you are currently doing and how you are making decisions in order to complete this task.
- Tell about a time when you felt overwhelmed by the job in front of you. How did you handle these feelings?
- How are you making time for yourself and your self-care during your full-time internship?

By intentionally posing questions that require students to reflect critically about their developing leadership practice, we are creating metacognitive leaders who will hopefully continue this reflective practice after graduation.

TRANSFORMING PROGRAM STRUCTURE TO PROMOTE METACOGNITION

Our program is unique because it is the only post-Master’s program at our college. In New York, Educational Administration is a Certificate of Advanced Study (CAS) that students can earn in either or both School Building Leadership (SBL) or School District Leadership (SDL). Most of the students enrolled in our program have served as teachers or counselors for a number of years. They have families, jobs, and numerous responsibilities. In the past, upon entry into the program students committed to attend class from 5:00-9:00 PM on Friday nights and 9:00-4:30 on Saturdays after having worked all week in schools. Over the years students who lived in outlying areas had grudgingly stayed overnight at a hotel. Hence the decision to turn our program into a hybrid was at first a practical one. We wanted to eliminate the Friday night classes. As former principals and teachers we both remember how tired we were at 5:00 PM on Friday; that model did not make sense to us. But in addition, as we researched online learning, we found that transitioning into a hybrid program not only had practical benefits but also had the potential to lead to deeper thinking.

Jeff started his research by reading a meta-analysis by the USDOE and was surprised to find that students in online courses performed modestly better than those receiving face-to-face instruction (Means et al, 2010). The authors of the report also suggested that the strongest online coursework could prompt students to reflect on their levels of understanding the content. This indicated that well-designed online prompts and questions could lead to metacognition. Other findings in the meta-analysis indicated that online education had potential for creating engaging content and processes. Then Jeff looked at the work of Noddings and the idea of creating caring communities within the context of hybrid coursework and found that caring classroom communities include receiving and responding to other’s perspectives

(Noddings, 2013). He saw parallels to the work we were doing on metacognition. So together we closed the circle. If we offered the best of both worlds - face-to-face meetings on Saturdays with quality online components to replace the long weekends - then we would create an environment for our students that was supportive, trusting and caring with the added bonus of leading to metacognition.

REFLECTIONS ON OUR LEARNING

When you try to make change, you will most certainly experience challenges, and we have our share of them. This year as we made more change than in years past, we noticed specific things that serve as obstacles to consistency across our program and the success of all students.

- It is difficult to “move” people because they do not want to recognize their biases and stereotypes and the impact these have on their practice. Despite our best efforts to promote critical thinking and metacognition, we experience some hesitation when it comes to reflecting about bias. Connected to this, it’s easier to give students the “cookbook” rather than create cognitive dissonance; not all students are ready, or willing, for this level of critical thinking.
- As a state university, we rely greatly on adjunct professors making it challenging to find consistent faculty who are aligned with our philosophy. We work hard to find highly qualified faculty who are willing to collaborate around course planning, and make investing in human capital a priority.
- Since ours is a postgraduate program, our students are full-time educational organization employees who are busy. Therefore, we see a variance in the level of commitment to coursework, making it hard to assess each student’s readiness to be a leader.
- There are students entering our program who are not ready to be educational leaders. In New York, candidates only need one year of successful teaching experience to apply. However, education programs are often viewed as “cash cows.” As the college struggles with low enrollment numbers, this impacts the pressure on and expectation of schools of education to keep enrollment numbers up. Rather than selectively screen applicants they self-select their way into our program.

In working to address these obstacles and challenges, we learned that in the face of such adversity, three things remain constant.

RELATIONSHIPS MATTER. Students will not allow themselves to be open to sharing their critical self-reflection around their growth and development of a leadership mindset without trust in the program and our professors. First, we demonstrate competence in our work; we are knowledgeable about our content, organized in our course design, and prepared. Second, we model the same level of critical thinking and metacognition that we encourage in our students. In sharing our own professional stories, we are able to candidly discuss how we grew as leaders through both successes and failures. Third, we take a personal approach when working with all of our students. We take the time to get to know students and their interests, both personal and professional, and allow for considerable collaboration among students so they, too, value the relationships they form among their peers.

A GROWTH MINDSET OF OUR STUDENTS IS A MUST. Our students progress through stages in their development of a leadership mindset. Historically, most students shift their mindset halfway through the program from that of a teacher to that of a leader; it is obvious when they start to view themselves as leaders. We have learned to be patient with our students, recognizing that each student makes growth at a different rate. For example, we allow students to resubmit assignments, stressing that each task is about the learning rather than the grade. We scaffold learning by chunking course tasks and providing exemplars, as needed. We also require peer review and response of student written reflections and journals to allow students to learn from and with each other rather than only receiving feedback from

course professors. In our patience and belief that all students can learn, we have seen students progress from being timid, fixed in their thinking, and/or lax with their schoolwork into assertive, systems thinkers who demonstrate pride in their work. We have also been able to support students in finding the professional path that's right for them. The challenge for us is how to maintain a growth mindset even of those students who consistently display a lack of leadership mindset.

HONEST FEEDBACK IS A GIFT. We have to give our students honest, critical feedback of their growth and performance, including group processes in the courses, performance in on-site experiences, and/or readiness for a school leadership position. To do this, we take the time to respond thoroughly to student work; we ask questions to push thinking and provide direct comments when student work is not accurate or complete. Often, we engage in difficult conversations with our students about their performance and its impact, and we view these conversations as opportunities for professional growth. While in our program, students have the opportunity to make mistakes that don't yet impact the future students in their schools.

SO, WHAT'S NEXT?

Just as we want our students to be metacognitive, we, too, are metacognitive thinkers who reflect on our own practices and consistently think about how to improve the quality of our program. And we have many more things we hope to accomplish in the next 2-3 years. Below is a list of actions that outline some of our long-range action items.

- **Formation of an Advisory Board:** We gathered a group of ten local educational leaders, some of whom are program graduates, to ensure that our assignments and tasks are relevant and current, and to create contacts in local schools and districts for our interns. Our goal is to continue to meet with this board three times each academic year in support of program goals and initiatives.
- **Partnership with Brockport Central School District:** This year, our department partnered with the school district in our college town to address issues related to poverty and education. In April of 2017, the district will host a poverty conference for schools across the region, and Jeff will serve as one of the presenters.
- **Beginning stages of forming a relationship with a Rochester city school:** We are working closely with the principal of one elementary school to help support her with specific challenges and needs. Currently, we made a commitment to place one intern there each summer to help with summer programs. This intern will have specific skills related to urban school leadership, literacy instruction, and special education, and will receive additional on-site leadership coaching from one of our professors to ensure quality and effectiveness.
- **Implementation of a Teacher Leadership certification program:** In the fall of 2016, we launched our Teacher Leadership program, a 12-credit certification course of study for students who want to investigate educational leadership without making a commitment to the full program, yet with the opportunity for a seamless transfer into the Educational Leadership program. This program supports our commitment to a capacity building model of educational leadership grounded in professional capital.

We recognize that our work is in progress; we still have much we want to accomplish to transform our program. We want to make sure that we continue to "move" our students to being metacognitive leaders. To do this, we are certain that underlying all of our goals is our commitment to creating critical thinkers through cognitive dissonance.

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