Chapter 2

A New Approach to School Development

Rose M. Ylimaki and Lynnette A. Brunderman

Abstract In this chapter, we further explore and contextualize school development amidst the tensions between contemporary policies and the educational needs of students. We conceptualize school development as a process that mediates among tensions that result in a Zone of Uncertainty. We then describe our application of school development in the Arizona Initiative for Leadership Development and Research (AZiLDR). Content was initially drawn from findings from the International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP) exploring leadership in high-needs, culturally diverse schools and related leadership studies. Our approach differs from other school development models in at least four ways. First, the approach is grounded in education theory as explicated by John Dewey and others. Closely related, our approach attempts to balance evidence-based values with humanistic values. Third, our approach is grounded in our empirical research and related studies of leadership in culturally diverse schools and communities. Fourth, our approach is process oriented and contextually sensitive for schools as they are situated in the larger community and serving culturally diverse populations. Finally, we develop leadership through a collaborative approach in that we work with school teams as a unit.

Keywords School development · Policy · Education theory · Research-based practice

In this chapter we further explore and contextualize school development amidst the tensions between contemporary policies and the educational needs of students. Figure 2.1 (below) illustrates our conceptualization of school development that mediates among tensions that result in a Zone of Uncertainty. As we described in

R. M. Ylimaki (✉)
Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, AZ, USA
e-mail: rose.ylimaki@nau.edu

L. A. Brunderman
University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ, USA
e-mail: lbrunder@arizona.com

Fig. 2.1 Tension between Centralized and Decentralized Policies and Practices Research Base for School Development: ISSPP and Related Work

Chap. 1, school development is historically, culturally and politically situated. Contemporary policies have created new tensions between centralized expectations (e.g., curriculum, assessment, evaluation, evidence-based programs and governance) and decentralized trends that illuminate the importance of school culture, diversity, values/norms of individuals and groups. The policy trends toward curriculum and assessment centralization along with decentralization in school improvement efforts are common in many national contexts, including those highlighted in this volume. Mainstream school development approaches have been constructed to hold schools accountable and demonstrate evidence for quality and equality of outcomes as required by policy. The designers of these models recognize that schools must operate within what we refer to as the Zone of Uncertainty with its tensions.

Prior to our initial application of school development in the Arizona Initiative for Leadership Development and Research (AZiLDR), we had conducted research on principals in successful schools as part of the International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP) and related leadership studies. The ISSPP is a network of researchers from 27 different countries, including Sweden, Australia, and the United States. The methodology of the ISSPP includes (1) data collected from multiple perspectives (principals/headteachers, assistant principals, parents, students, support staff and teachers; (2) comparisons of effective leadership in diverse contexts ranging from small primary schools to large urban secondary schools, most

of which were embedded in culturally diverse communities; and (3) the identification of principal/headteacher qualities and practices necessary but not sufficient for success in any school context. Case studies have been conducted in four strands, including a strand on leadership in high-needs, culturally diverse schools. Findings from those case studies from Arizona, other states, and other nation states were explicitly utilized for AZiLDR (e.g. Ylimaki et al., 2012; Bennett, 2012; Jacobson et al., 2005a, b; Gurr, 2015; Höög et al., 2005). Our approach differs in at least four ways. First, our approach is grounded in education theory as explicated by John Dewey and others. Second and closely related, our approach attempts to balance evidence-based values with humanistic values. Third, our approach is grounded in our empirical research and related studies of leadership in culturally diverse schools and communities. Fourth, our approach is process oriented and contextually sensitive for schools as they are situated in district, states, and nation-states and serving culturally diverse populations. Finally, we develop leadership through a collaborative approach in that we work with school teams as a unit.

Description of the Arizona School Development Project

The Arizona Initiative for Leadership Development and Research (AZiLDR) project also grew out of a desire to assist persistently underperforming, culturally diverse schools and to increase their capacity for continuous school development while mediating between policies and student needs. Our definition of school development again is a continuous growth process designed for school teams charged with education amidst tensions between the competing demands of tighter centralization and individual school needs. Leadership in our school development project is characterized by a leadership team approach. AZiLDR, thus, incorporated mechanisms to build leadership capacity among the team and others, and for diffusion of content and process throughout the organization. In addition, we purposely connected school leadership teams with district, regional and state leaders.

For our purposes, we assumed leadership capacity to be grounded in traditional humanistic values of education, as well as understandings about organizations and outcomes. In our design of the school development model (AZiLDR), we posited that school team members (teachers/administrator/coach/district representative) would function as a miniature democratic community, using evidence or data as a source of reflection and continuous growth for the organization. They would examine and make judgements about what worked in the past as well as trends across various sources of data in order to develop plans for future improvement, engage in change processes, and examine feedback on its effects. All of these leadership practices occur amidst the complexity and uncertainty of the contemporary policy and societal situation. Thus, leaders must not only mediate among policy, evidence-based values and humanistic education values to meet the needs of increasingly diverse students, but must also teach their school communities the meaning of the enacted policies, the needs of the students, how they are applying the policies, and

how to think critically about policy implications for society. Unlike many dominant school development approaches, the AZiLDR approach focused explicitly on working with leadership teams, including formal leaders (principals, district leaders), state and regional leaders, as well as teacher leaders to build team leadership capacity with the ultimate goal of building whole school capacity.

Applying Dewey's arguments in *Schools and Society* (1907) and *The Child and the Curriculum* (1959) along with Biesta and Burbules (2003), we also highlight the tension between external and internal aims, further focusing on continuous growth for leadership teams as they engage in deliberations and pedagogical interactions for continuous school growth or development. At the same time, we recognized that school personnel bring their own individual habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) or funds of knowledge (González et al., 1995) to the democratic community deliberations (Eisner, 1979; Englund, 2006) and reflections around evidence and plans for growth (Ylimaki and Brunderman, 2019).

School members also bring conscious and unconscious biases to conversations, for example, around achievement gaps and racial inequities. In our model, therefore, we see education with (culturally responsive) pedagogical interactions and evidence-based interactions as interrelated. Thus, we incorporated understandings from culturally relevant leadership (Johnson, 2007; Khalifa et al., 2016) and funds of knowledge (González et al., 1995) along with our own evaluation results of the project (e.g. Ylimaki et al., 2014). For example, drawing on this body of research, we facilitated discussions and modeled ways that leaders could work with staff to identify inequities, disrupting the status quo, infuse students' cultural knowledge into the work of teaching and learning, and include parents and community leaders in the process of social change for the benefit of students.

In developing our model, we also used empirical research findings to inform the content provided to participants. Over time, many empirical leadership studies have focused on school and leadership practices that contribute to school development and ultimately student learning. Initially, we drew upon findings from the International Successful School Principalship Project (ISSPP) (Day et al., 2016; Gurr, 2015; Klar and Brewer, 2014; Drysdale et al., 2014; Ylimaki & Jacobson, 2013) that expanded the effective schools literature (e.g. Edmonds, 1979; Hallinger and Murphy, 1986; Purkey and Smith, 1982) to an international sample and to focus on the principal's leadership. Effective leadership studies (e.g. Edmonds, 1979; Hallinger and Murphy, 1986) provided important understandings about "best practices" common to schools that improved outcomes for all students regardless of socioeconomic status. These best practices included use of data for reflection, creating and maintaining a supportive school culture, building trust and relationships among all staff and with community, developing shared leadership team capacity, understanding motivation, and engaging professional learning communities focused on curriculum, instruction, and formative student assessments. Further, in light of increasing student plurality, the project considered studies regarding how to bridge students' funds of knowledge with academic knowledge (Moll et al., 2006), our previous studies of leadership in the sociocultural dimension (Ylimaki et al., 2012), leadership capacity at personal, interpersonal, and organizational levels (Bennett

et al., 2013), and leadership as a multi-level pedagogical activity (Uljen and Ylimaki, 2017). Surprisingly, despite the emphasis on instructional leadership in the school effectiveness studies, education theory itself (Dewey, 1897, 1916, 1938) has received little attention. Additionally, despite global demographic shifts, cultural relevance has not been explicitly addressed in the intervention models reviewed in Chap. 1.

More specifically, the Arizona school development project was designed to provide district and school leaders with a sustained (18–36 months) process focused on curriculum/pedagogical work within and between school leadership teams, other teachers, and district and state leaders. The project conceptualized leadership as a shared, pedagogical, and often mediational activity within and between levels, grounded in trust, relationships, communication, and decision-making processes, all of which include using evidence (formative, external/summative) as sources of reflection. The project focused on three interrelated processes: (1) interpersonal, democratic (team member) interaction and reflection on content/pedagogy, (2) time for planning for diffusion of activities specific to the needs of each school site and (3) a research-based delivery system. It is important to note that we worked primarily with leadership teams that demonstrated a readiness to engage in this process; if the organizational culture was not developed to include open communication and trust, progress was slower. We worked with teams throughout the school development process to build collaborative processes and strategies to assist them at their school sites.

First, interpersonal interaction and reflection were integral components of the project, grounding the work accomplished by school teams. Teams received guidance in team development, reflection and mediation processes and conflict resolution skills. Time was provided throughout the project for team members to reflect at both the individual and team levels. Reflection was around the content they received as well as specific related issues at their own sites and ways to mediate those needs.

The second interrelated process centered on the planning stage. Teams were provided significant amounts of time to plan together to diffuse the content at their school sites. Additionally, using a structured planning and feedback cycle adapted from the Step-Back Consulting Model (Wagner et al., 2012), teams provided feedback to one another to enhance the refinement of their plans. During this structured feedback cycle, Team 1 presented their plan, then listened as Team 2 asked clarifying questions. Team 2 then considered the problem and plan as if it was their own, considering next steps, gaps in the plan, things to avoid, etc. During this time, Team 1 listened and took notes. Finally, Team 1 rejoined the conversation, reflecting on what they learned and how it felt observing another team take on their issue. Both teams together reflected on the implications that arose from the discussion, and prepared a written summary of the learning.

The third process was a research-based delivery system (Desimone, 2009). The delivery system featured direct instruction during institutes (10 days annually attended by all school teams), monthly regional network meetings for the purposes of both reflection and content follow-up, and in-school coaching and walk-through observations. Institute content was designed to address both the research-based best

practices for school improvement and the information derived from the needs assessments completed by each school staff and the principals. Topics included, for example, professional learning communities, school culture, the state version of the Common Core (a national curriculum mediation), data as a source of reflection (i.e., survey results, summative/formative assessment data and other pertinent data), parent-community involvement, recognition of individuals, and culturally relevant practices. The ten institute days were distributed throughout the school year, thus providing sustained support. Institutes and regional meetings were experiential, modeling processes to intervene and mediate among common core standards, individual learner (student, teacher, leader) needs, and local school-community traditions. Importantly, institutes and other meetings also provided school team participants and district leaders with structured (discursive) spaces for dialogue and reflection within and between levels; time for school planning to diffuse the process and content was embedded within all meetings.

It is important to highlight the team composition throughout the project. Each school team was comprised of the principal, teacher leaders, the instructional coach (if applicable), and a district representative. Principals were encouraged to choose team members from the teaching ranks who had influence with their peers, representing a variety of experience levels and viewpoints. With the ultimate goal of diffusing the learning throughout the school as part of a microcosm of democratic education, this was imperative. The district representative was chosen in consultation with the superintendent; this individual was an integral part of the school team, offering insight and buffering them from competing district initiatives that could derail their progress. Additionally, regional coaches provided expertise to school teams, participating in all phases of the project. State representatives were also included in order to facilitate leadership team mediation with district and state policy.

The Arizona school development project was piloted and refined over several iterations. The racial/ethnic/gender demographics across phases are illustrated in Table 2.1.

During the initial project implementation (2011–12), schools were drawn from the statewide sample of Tier III¹ schools (252) with 45 schools selected for participation in the project. The selection was largely dependent on superintendent support and participant willingness to commit to all aspects of the project for the 18-month period. Schools were located throughout the state of Arizona. As indicated in Table 2.1, most principals had less than 3 years at their sites, with many in their first year.

Many lessons were learned from this phase of the project. Most participants were either single principal representatives from the schools or attending with one other teacher. At the initial Institute meeting, numerous attendees expressed that they did not know why they were at the training but had simply been told by their superintendents to attend. This lack of buy-in affected the retention rate of schools

¹A Tier III school is defined as any state Title I school in improvement, correct action or restructuring as designated by the U.S. Department of Education (2009).

Table 2.1 Participants and demographics of schools served over three phases

	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
# Schools served	45	7	19
# Participants	80	35	101
% School-rural	56%	14%	53%
% Schools-urban	25%	72%	37%
% Schools-suburban	19%	14%	5%
% Community college	—	—	5%
Ethnicity—Latino/a/Hispanic			
Principals	27%	58%	57%
Staff	14%	32%	61%
Ethnicity—White			
Principals	60%	33%	43%
Staff	60%	68%	38%
Ethnicity—Native American			
Principals	11%	8%	—
Staff	3%	—	1%
Ethnicity—Other			
Principals	2%	—	—
Staff	23%	—	—
Gender—Female			
Principals	62%	25%	75%
Staff	74%	58%	88%
Gender—Male			
Principals	38%	75%	25%
Staff	26%	42%	12%
Principal tenure— <3 years	88%	17%	29%

in the project. Another aspect that impacted the retention rate was that many of the superintendents (who had agreed to the participation of their schools) mandated numerous competing initiatives that prevented those participants from fully attending and implementing what they were learning. Additionally, nationally recognized speakers were contracted to provide services at the Institutes throughout the project. Although they were well-received, participants were primarily passive recipients of information rather than active participants in processing and applying that information. Thus, moving forward, it was determined that school teams were critical to success, as was district representation on the team in order to mediate any competing demands of the district. Finally, Institutes were redesigned to provide work time for teams in order to process information and plan for dissemination and implementation at the schools.

The second pilot served seven school teams; each team was accompanied by at least one district representative. Teams ranged from four to six members, depending on the size of the school. As seen in Table 2.1, the majority of the principals in this study were experienced; in fact, 43% were near retirement with another 43% having

between 5 and 10 years experience. This phase included state and regional representatives.

During this phase, in addition to offering Institutes, regional networking meetings were included and facilitated by project staff. This was designed so that teams would be supported at least monthly. The inclusion of the district representatives allowed teams to focus on the work without numerous competing demands. Additionally, the team structure ensured that the work of the team would be better diffused into the work of the entire school. It was determined through participant feedback and facilitator observation that more individualized coaching was needed to optimize the application of the learning at each site. It was also decided that group walk-through observations with immediate processing by multiple team members would facilitate understanding of instructional leadership.

The third phase of the project incorporated the team structure, district representation, team walk-through observations and processing, as well as individual site coaching visits. Prior to beginning the training, project staff met with each principal and district representative to assist them in determining the makeup of the school teams. Thus, each team was comprised of the principal, assistant principal if appropriate, instructional coach, and teacher leaders who had influence with the school staff. In this third phase, schools were located throughout the southern Arizona region, with 5% of the participants representing the local community college. Again, most of the administrators had a tenure of more than 3 years.

This group benefited from the team structure, regional networking groups with a facilitator, individual school coaching, facilitated walk-through opportunities, and district and regional representation. However, the large size of the group (over 100 participants) with 19 schools at different places in the development of school culture and trust, inhibited the individualized attention that they could receive. Thus, it was determined that a group size of 7–10 schools would be ideal.

Methods

Over the past 5 years, 71 Arizona schools participated in the project. Data collection and analysis has been ongoing. At the beginning of the project, participants took a survey (Bennett et al., 2013) modified by the authors as a pre-assessment prior to the beginning of the first training, and a post-assessment at the end of the project. Using this 181-item survey, the researchers examined principals' and teachers' leadership knowledge and practices essential for school turnaround, including principal-specific knowledge, skills and practices as well as capacity for progression through school development. Here, capacity was determined by the alignment between the principal responses and their staff perceptions of leadership skills and practice. All questions in sections 2–8 contain Likert-scale responses.²

²Both principal and staff surveys consisted of the same 137 Likert-scale items.

The principal survey was comprised of identical section content with the addition of one section that assessed the extent to which the principal perceived they demonstrated the practice of successful leadership characteristics in 16 different areas (e.g., reflection, relationship-building, planning, and professionalism).³ Ten more open-ended questions were added to allow more elaboration in each section and at the end. All scales of the survey achieved acceptable levels of reliability in the pilot study (Alpha coefficients were .95 and .97 for teachers and principals, respectively). Survey results were shared with participants and used as a source for reflection and planning.

Finally, we used the Arizona Department of Education website to determine letter grades for schools with differing levels of participation (full participation, partial participation, and no participation). State assessments and data were used to analyze movement of lowest quartile students, within-school gaps, and graduation rate changes, all of which impacted the state letter grade designation. During the third phase of the project, Arizona changed the state assessment and suspended reporting letter grade determinations for 3 years; therefore, this information was not available for the third iteration of the project.

Results also informed semi-structured qualitative interviews (35–40 min) and observation settings in schools. Interviews were conducted by interviewers (outside of the internal researchers), paid by the grant and trained in qualitative interviewing techniques. Interview questions featured leadership practices in relation to the three stages of turnaround leadership (Leithwood et al., 2010), including levels of capacity building, collaboration, community involvement, assessment literacy, curriculum, and overall priorities. Interviews were designed to examine participants' (principals and teachers) understandings of turnaround stages, conceptions of leadership, and capacities. Specifically, semi-structured interviews were conducted during the last two institutes in order to determine the perceptions of changes in capacity building that occurred throughout the intervention period. Observational data was noted during walk-through observations, site visitations, and through observations of the team interactions.

Results

The Arizona model has served 71 focus and priority schools over a five-year period. Essentially, the model was designed to build team leadership capacity for sustainable school development in schools that were persistently underperforming but not yet designated for turnaround status. Results were analyzed using quantitative (a pre- and post-survey measuring leadership and school capacity; school letter grades based on student outcomes) and qualitative methods (interviews and observations). This section begins with an overview of pilot test results from the Arizona schools followed by results from refined iterations.

³ Additional principal survey items contain Likert-scale responses.

Survey Results

According to Bennett et al. (2013), principal respondents in the first phase of the project gave themselves high-capacity scores on the majority (81%) of 16 additional Likert-scale items on the principal-only survey portion. Principals considered themselves as cultivating a supportive professional atmosphere. They scored themselves highly on their capacity-building efforts to help people feel honored and thrive (Mitchell and Sackney, 2009). They believed that they fostered respect, self-reflection, modeled professional attributes, and expected the same for others. Principals also noted confidence in their ability to foster staff commitment for change; principals believed they fostered a climate of ongoing renewal and improvement (Mitchell and Sackney, 2009). Additionally, the principals generally indicated few tensions related to their work in schools, feeling somewhat insulated from pressures that might require choosing between competing values or prioritizing compliance with district requirements over doing what was best for students, or avoiding participation outside the school (e.g., committees, professional development) altogether.

While these quantitative findings suggested principals possessed high self-capacity for developing people, commitments, setting direction, and effectively managing some aspects of the instructional program within their schools, these views were not equally shared by staff. Most capacities for building sustainable improvement at the beginning of the intervention period ranged from low to medium and revealed some discrepancies or weaknesses. Participants were keenly aware of accountability pressures and the need to comply with mandates requiring tools for curriculum change (e.g., curriculum maps, benchmarks), yet had difficulties in defining success. They valued a supportive, professional, collaborative, and democratic working environment in their schools, but lacked authentic connections with their communities and did not seem to value their contributions or support.

For Phase 2 of the project, generally the principals gave themselves very few high ratings, rather tending to focus on the growth that was necessary. Across all schools, the areas with the greatest need were Curriculum and Instruction, Assessment Literacy, and Culture and Capacity. These areas showed the largest gaps overall between teacher and principal perceptions. More specifically, respondents identified the lack of collaboration (among staff as well as with the community), articulation of the vision, the development and use of common formative assessments, and adequate resources as areas of need. Perceptions about students were often couched in deficit thinking.

Phase 3 survey results generally resulted in higher ratings of themselves by the principals than by the staff. Trends across all schools, however, indicated a lack of shared decision-making or soliciting input from stakeholders, and a lack of emphasis on instructional leadership, with both principals and teachers indicating little time spent in classrooms or assisting teachers to improve their practice. Additionally, little or no emphasis was placed on working with the community or engaging in culturally responsive practices.

Fig. 2.2 Changes in school letter grades– Test group 1

Fig. 2.3 Change in School Letter Grades – Test Group 2

Improved School Letter Grades

As stated earlier, Arizona changed the state assessment, and suspended the assignment of letter grades to all schools for 3 years, thus affecting the ability to present this data on Phase 3 of the project.

Figure 2.2 shows that, in the first test group, full participation in AZiLDR training increased the likelihood of an improved accountability rating by one to two grade levels. Specifically, over 50% of those schools that participated in all AZiLDR sessions and activities improved their letter grades by one or two letters. A few schools with lower levels of participation (i.e., some, none) were still able to make improvements. Those schools that had participated, either fully or partially, in the intervention showed greater improvement overall than those schools who had not participated in the training, with greater improvement defined by increased letter grades.

Figure 2.3 shows results for the test group 2. Over 80% of schools that fully participated improved their school letter grade by one grade.

Qualitative Interview Results

Results from interviews of principals and teacher leaders during Phase 1 indicated that their schools were making positive changes regarding formative assessments, data use, and growth in some community interactions, but noted that they were largely lacking in more authentic forms of engagement. Here we encouraged participants to retain clarity about the importance of authentic collaboration to education aimed at democracy. In much the same way, we encouraged teams to use student outcome data and other student data as a source of reflection; we worked to facilitate schools toward higher capacity for collaboration, using evidence from the survey as well as interview data. Participants also reported the need to move beyond their low capacity status and develop into high capacity learning communities but described little consciousness of the broader socio-cultural dimension and cultural-political shifts in developing the potential for sustainable improvement in the Arizona context (Ylimaki et al., 2012). The varied implementation of PLCs was evident in the multiple and sometimes conflicting district priorities, range of instructional leadership perspectives, and levels of resistance. As one principal stated, PLCs “forced us to look a little bit deeper at our data and think about who was involved genuinely and who might be excluded or ignored. That was kind of alarming... We maybe had that before and really didn’t focus on it.” In many cases, priorities shifted away from building authentic and culturally respectful relationships with families and communities, which served only to reinforce deficit thinking and lack of coherent direction within schools for collaboration and cultural responsiveness. This deficit thinking is illustrated by a principal in a high Native population school: “It’s very important for us to try and help those students coming from those homes so that they have a better chance at the future. I live where the educated people live. And I said that if you get a good education, you can live down there too.” In these instances, team members were asked to think about their agency to leverage changes in opportunities available for all students.

Prior to the beginning of Phase 2, interviews were conducted with a sample of teachers and principals within the project schools. Strong trust in the principals was evident; however, several issues were identified immediately by teachers. These included a lack of focused vision for the schools, limited capacity for collaborative leadership, and deficit thinking.

In all schools at the beginning of the project, the focus was on the state letter grade (outcomes) rather than on humanistic values of education and enhancing teaching and learning for all students. One teacher described,

“You know, I really don’t think we have a real, definite vision. I think right now we were a C-minus school... So I know that is definitely one of his visions, is to get us to improve our C-minus standing. But other than that, I don’t think we all know...”

Deficit thinking was also revealed across the board. Yet teachers believed they were doing what was in the best interest of students.

“Well, right now, because the Hispanic culture tends to be very kind of laid-back, you kind of really have to push. They’re very much, what’s the word, “mañana,” “tomorrow,” that’s the word., it’s their culture. So they’re not in any big rush, that’s their culture. So I get that. So it’s my job to not necessarily rush, but keep it steady. And I’ve learned that, because I came from the east where that wasn’t the culture, it was okay to rush, it was okay to push, it was okay to rrrrr [car vroom noise] all the time. Here you can’t do that.”

This information was used to refine the curricular focus and processes for Phase 2.

By the end of Phase 2, participants were applying the leadership skills that they had learned over the course of the project. For example, interview data indicated that the principals and teacher leaders developed a shared mission for school improvement. As one principal put it,

“Since we started, I have seen changes in the school vision and mission, the directions that we are going in the capacity-building groups that we have, our curriculum action team, as well as the revamped and rejuvenated leadership council with better direction... We have better communication across the board and better professional development for our staff focused on student learning.”

As another example, during the course of the project, participants increased their data literacy skills and use of data as a source of reflection in their daily practices. As another principal noted, “we are using data and the strategies we learned in the institutes in our PLCs... Primarily we’ve been modeling leadership processes and making data-based decision-making. Everyone has a voice at the table, but the voice needs to be informed by research and data. It is helping slowly.”

Capacity building was key. One principal noted, “we executed a great turnaround so that when I left the school a couple years later, we had been recognized as an A+ school of excellence for the state of Arizona...” One assistant superintendent, who served as his district representative and attended all of the institutes, believed that the project made a difference to the capacity of the school to move forward. He stated,

“[The School Improvement Project] has provided the research, the systems, the applications to start small, look at the low-hanging fruit, start to build momentum, have clarity in purpose and direction, and get the buy-in to start moving forward... it’s showing the principal how to build teams to have, for example, to help with issues on curriculum and culture. It is no longer just the principal trying to lead the way. It’s all encompassing of staff trying to get on board.”

Interestingly, during final interviews, no mention was made of culturally relevant pedagogy, yet at the same time, there was no evidence of deficit language.

Finally, Phase 3 began with school teams analyzing their own school data, including achievement data as well as the survey data. When talking about that analysis, one principal talked about the school survey results, stating, “I think looking at the trusting culture among the staff – that was a huge area, that they don’t really trust; and collective efficacy was bad – they jump out at us...”.

In contrast, at the end of Phase 3, a principal shared, “I think just reflecting through is that it’s not me. It’s this team of people communicating and determining these are the needs. This is what we need to do. This is where we get feedback from teachers what they need, and now let’s put it together. That’s what I think has been

really wonderful this year.” In other words, teams such as the one in this quote recognized the value of diverse perspectives engaged in collaborative deliberations and reflection using multiple sources of data.

Data suggested that participants had limited understanding about effective leadership practices, including the importance of trust and school culture, early in the project. School culture and a focused vision were areas of concern for many schools; however, progress was evident. One principal shared,

“But, the biggest thing is we have been able to build our leadership team....and really look and see, what is our school culture? What defines [us]? So we have been able to refine our vision. We came up with our school beliefs. We have 4 core beliefs. And I have even come up with the Principal’s Purpose. I also asked for the teachers to write about their purpose.”

A teacher on her leadership team was enthusiastic about the changes occurring; she stated, “...definitely shared collaboration time, shared vision. I don’t feel like Katie’s telling us what to do. I feel like Katie’s involving us in the process, and that has never happened before ever.” Building the capacity of the site to continue was a focus of the project. One principal, who was retiring at the end of the school year, was excited about what could continue to develop:

“It’s on a positive note... I’ve enjoyed it. I’m still sitting here with my team going, “Okay, we need to do this next year, dah dah dah,” and I have no idea if it’s going to happen or not. They would like it to happen. I know they’ll carry forward, or hopefully whoever takes over will be open to where we’ve been, and where we were thinking we would be going, and I’m sure they’ll add their own expertise. We want it to be better, and it will be...”

Another principal focused on shared accountability. He stated,

“We have increased accountability at [our school]. This does not mean people are scolded or face disciplinary action more often. This means we have made our goals and outcomes clearer. We have also further defined individual roles and what they look like so that people can truly be more included and feel their own importance to our shared goals. The further we move along with every individual having clearly defined roles/value/and importance to our team, the more people embrace that and make us more effective as a whole school.”

Although there was still evidence of deficit thinking, the idea of asset-based instruction was at the beginning stages. One teacher reported, “I try to integrate things that are related, like topics that are related to the students...So, I chose a topic that they know in order to teach them a new strategy. So, that way, I’m now teaching a new topic and a new strategy. So, I try to integrate things that have to do with agriculture and things related that students can relate to...” And while the evidence-based reforms described earlier (e.g., Mass Insight, UVA, Chicago) all identify culture, these models do not go deeply into the cultural bias and deficit thinking that restricts or inhibits goals of equality and freedom.

Many participants spoke at length about the school development process itself. Both school leaders and team members were generally very positive. The interactions with other teams were highlighted, with one teacher sharing, “Just by talking to the other teams, some of them are also going through the same problems, seeing the same things. Some of the things that we’re doing, a lot of times, sparks ideas for them. Some of the things they’re doing sparks ideas for us.” The walk-through

process resonated with the participants, with one teacher highlighting this aspect of the process. “Walk-throughs...wow, that was an amazing ... because I had an idea what my team does, but I don’t have a chance to go into my 7th grade team, just as he doesn’t have time to go into his 8th grade teams. What I expected them to see wasn’t necessarily there. We actually collected data and then we shared it with our teams.”

Finally, team members appreciated the structure of the institutes (taking teams away from their schools) although it was difficult. One principal shared, “...it gave us a time to think and really process, and maybe still not process as far as we need to, but I so appreciate that because it made the noise, all that outside noise, go away for a little while so we’re going to do this, and now here we go with it, and then we’ll come back to it again, and push forward with it. I think that was the helpful piece.”

Across the three phases of school development implementation, we consistently observed the importance of providing teams with an immersion experience away from schools during the institutes. The other two delivery modes, however, were conducted within schools, including regional meetings and school observations.

In Part II of this volume, we provide additional detail on the key elements of the school development process: (1) values and culture, (2) leadership capacity, (3) use of data for reflection and feedback, (4) curriculum and pedagogical activity, and (5) strengths-based approaches for diversity. Within each chapter, we highlight, as appropriate, the processes of school development within the Zone of Uncertainty, including democratic community, readiness for change, reflection and mediation, planning and implementation for capacity building. All of these processes are grounded in education theory for democratic nation-states as well as understandings of culturally responsive practices. It is important to note that these elements and processes are not linear or isolated, but rather work together to support continuous school development.

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