

Fall 2021

Program Improvement Through Graduate Student Leadership Development Plans

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PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT THROUGH GRADUATE
STUDENT LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PLANS

By

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A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Education

Major: Educational Leadership

Under the Supervision of Dr. Tamara Williams

Omaha, Nebraska

October 29, 2021

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Abstract

Program Improvement Through Graduate Student Leadership Development Plans

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The purpose of this qualitative case study was to inform program improvement for one Metropolitan University graduate educational leadership program by reviewing adult educational personal leadership development plans completed during semesters Fall 2019 through Spring 2021.

At the beginning of their educational leadership program, graduate students complete a personal leadership development plan, also known as the L3 Learning, Leading, and Legacy Plan. In-depth review of these plans resulted in understanding the professional context and individual professional aspirations of future educational leaders. The variety of aspirations and current professional context is a reminder for all programs of the complexity of adult learners and the importance of personalization. As a result of this review, program recommendations include continued systematic adult reflection on professional leadership aspirations as well as personalized support for each adult learner. Additionally, program instructors and leaders should leverage Knowles Andragogy Framework to inform programmatic decisions.

Acknowledgements

I am forever grateful to so many individuals for supporting me along this journey. First, my mother Patrice. While she was here on earth, she always reminded me I had work to do. After she passed, it took me thirty days to get back up and get to work. Every time I wanted to give up, I could hear her telling me I needed to finish. I crossed the finish line and I know she is proudly smiling down on me. To Ashley, thank you for taking this ride with me. If it wasn't for you constantly hounding me, I never would have started this journey. You have been there to listen to me complain, study, laugh, and cry with me, all while still saying "You Got This!" To the two men in my life, Terrance and Keenan, thank you for your never-ending love and support. Thank you for taking on the extra tasks and responsibilities while I chase my dreams. I know you have spent many nights and weekends with left-overs and guy time, now it's time to get back to having fun together.

To my work colleagues old and new, thank you for the kind supportive words. Just asking how things were going let me know that you cared about the direction I was going and believed that I would get there. Kim and Dani, thank you for lifting me up when I was down and making sure I got the self-care I needed. All the premature Dr. Clark's gave me the perseverance to complete the challenge.

I am also in debt to the faculty and staff of the Educational Leadership Program at University of Nebraska Omaha. For every question that I asked (and there were many), each member took the time to listen and give me an honest answer. The encouragement and advice given over the years led me to see something inside myself that I did not

know was there. Specifically, my dissertation committee chair, Dr. Tamara Williams, I never would have made it without you! Every time another hurdle arrived, you pushed just enough to make sure I would make it over and run through to the finish. Your calm kept me calm and I am forever grateful to you.

“It always seems impossible until it’s done.” Nelson Mandela

PREVIEW

Contents

Contents

Chapter 1	1
Situating The Study	1
Theoretical Framework.....	2
My Experience	10
Purpose Statement	12
Central Research Question	13
Supporting Questions	13
Significance of the Study	13
Chapter 2 Approach.....	14
Setting.....	14
Population	14
L3 Plan	14
Central Research Question	15
Supporting Questions	15
Operational Definitions	15
Document Analysis	16
Chapter 3 Results.....	19
Central Research Question	19
Supporting Questions	19
Chapter 4	32
Phase Two Analysis and Results	32
Participants.....	32
Conclusion	38
Chapter 5	41
Literature Review	41
Role and Importance of Building Leadership.....	41
Continuous Professional Development	44
Developing Curriculum and Assessments.....	46
Personalized Experience	49
Chapter 6	51
Recommendations for Supporting Adult Leadership Development.....	51
Current Standards.....	51

Evolution of PSELs.....	52
Licensure Requirements	53
Creating Exemplary Leadership Programs	54
L3 Plan	55
Principal Preparation Program	56
Limitations	57
Conclusions.....	58
References.....	69
Appendix.....	74

PREVIEW

List of Figures and Tables

Chapter 1

Figure 1. Andragogy Framework

Chapter 2

Table 1. Operational Definitions List

Chapter 3

Table 2. Professional Context: Current professional role and duties

Table 3. Professional Context. Short-term aspirational role by current professional role

Table 4. Professional Context: Long-term aspirational role by current professional role

Table 5. Professional Context: Perceived PSEL strengths by current professional role

Table 6. Professional Context: Perceived PSEL weakness by current professional role

Table 7. Number of L3 Plan goals created by current professional role

Table 8. PSEL categories of goals, perceived strengths, and perceived weaknesses

Table 9. Number of L3 Plan goal created by Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Chapter 4

Table 10. Instructor Goals categorized by Knowles Framework

Table 11. Goals for Student Support Leaders categorized by Knowles Framework

Table 12. Goals for Teacher Leaders categorized by Knowles Framework

Table 13. Current Role in Education by Percentage

PREVIEW

Chapter 1

Situating The Study

The path to becoming a leader may be a lifelong journey. Deciding whether to move from the classroom to an administrative position involves a great deal of thought. Educators are drawn to leadership for a variety of reasons. Many educators want to make a difference in the lives of students and want to broaden that span of influence beyond the classroom by becoming an administrator (Lortie, 2009; Malone, Sharp, & Walker, 2001). Administration, itself, has many different options of varying roles such as building principal, curriculum leader, dean of students, district-level specialist, and so on. The immediate and long-term aspirational roles for those entering leadership can vary as much as their reasoning for entering administration. The beginning arc of an individual's educational leadership journey includes the professional context leading up to choosing administration, the goals set during leadership development, and the dreams for the future.

Most formal administrative positions in schools and districts require an administrative certificate. Administrative certification requirements are state-specific. For example, in Nebraska you must have completion of a baccalaureate degree, completion of a Teacher Education Program at a state approved college or university, completion of a Master's degree and an Education Administrative Program at a state approved college or university, have taught for two years, completion of the Human Relations Training Requirement, completion of the Special Education Training Requirement and passing the PRAXIS Educational Leadership: Administrative and Supervision exam with a score of 146 (Nebraska Department of Education, 2019). Certificate requirements, including the

Administrative Praxis summative assessment, help ensure high-quality skills and knowledge for our educational leaders in positions of influence for our schools, students, and families. To earn certification, adults pursuing formal leadership roles in their schools and districts, must choose a graduate-level educational leadership program which aligns with the state certification requirements. These programs create learning opportunities in which adult learners can develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for successful educational leadership.

Therefore, the purpose of this study qualitative case study was to inform program improvement for one Metropolitan University graduate educational leadership program by reviewing adult educational personal leadership development plans completed during semesters Fall 2019 through Spring 2021.

Theoretical Framework

Learning is a lifelong process. Although we know this is true, we also know that each individual learner is different. As adults continue their education through post-secondary programming, institutions are seeking the best ways to prepare them for a post-secondary degree. An adult leadership development journey is intended to be unique.

Figure 1. Andragogy Framework

	Andragogy Framework
Principle	Description
Learner's Need to Know	Creating a sense of why for adult learners is essential in education and leadership. Adults need to understand the value in what is being presented and how it can apply to their current life objectives (Sang 2010). Correlating short-term objectives with long-term goals is likely to yield higher sustained interest in learning and progress.
Self-Concept of the Learner	As a person matures, his self-concept moves from that of a dependent personality toward one that is self-directed. Adult learners often have a sense of responsibility for their own decisions and want to be treated by others as being capable of self-direction (Knowles, et al. 2012). Allowing adults to learn together through collaboration and autonomy helps create a self-directed environment that may increase the retention of core information and problem-solving abilities.
Prior Experience of the Learner	An adult accumulates a growing wealth of experience, which is a rich resource for learning. Drawing on prior experience and knowledge is another way adults can learn

	for themselves and collaborate with others (Sang 2010). Educators and administrators should incorporate learning experiences that account for similarities and differences among the group, utilizing activities such as collective discussions, case studies, and simulation exercises (Knowles 1976). Introducing concepts through discussion may open adult learners to new ideas that may challenge or solidify existing biases as they comprehend the information (Knowles, et al. 2012).
Readiness to Learn	The readiness of an adult to learn is closely related to the developmental- and life-related tasks of his or her social role. Adults tend to know when they are ready to learn based on the content and how useful it is at the time (Sang 2010). Educators and administrators can identify this level of readiness by exploring areas of interest and experiences through group discussion and other assessments and then relating back to program- and course-specific goals and outcomes (Knowles, et al. 2012).
Orientation to Learning	There is a change in time perspective as people mature—from future application of knowledge to immediacy of application. Therefore, adult learners are more likely to embrace and commit to problem- and life-centered methods than subject-centered learning. Rather than concentrating on subject matter for future implications as the sole orientation to learning, adults prefer having information as it pertains to real-life application (Knowles, et al. 2012).
Motivation to Learn	The most potent motivations are internal rather than external. Adults are motivated to learn as they experience needs, interests, and benefits that are satisfied through learning. Factors such as career needs, advancement opportunities, family obligations, setting standards for children, and overall self-satisfaction are some of the various reasons that adults further their education (Park and Choi 2009). These factors are often the driving force that keeps adult learners motivated to progress and achieve (Knowles, et al. 2012). Educators and administrators should be aware and respectful of these motivators as they are unique and often personal, with ties to self-esteem and quality of life.

One person who investigated the idea of adult education is Malcolm Knowles.

Knowles is considered by many as “the father of adult education” (Sopher, 2003).

Malcolm Shepherd Knowles was born on August 24, 1913, in Livingston, Montana.

Knowles received his B.A. from Harvard University in 1934. In addition, he earned both his M.A. in 1949 and his Ph.D. in 1960 from the University of Chicago. Knowles has been in education since 1935. He began his work by observing differences in the learning preferences and needs between adults and children. Through his observations, Knowles learned the following:

1. Adults think and act differently than children with regard to learning (Knowles, 1990).
2. Adults and children approach life with different perspectives (Knowles, 1990).

3. Adults entering a learning environment reverted to their childhood teacher-centered school behavior and were unable to control their learning environment (Knowles, 1980).

4. Adults leave adult education programs because of conflicts between what they need and what the programs offer. (Knowles, 1980).

Knowles published more than 197 articles and written and edited thirteen books. (Sopher, 2003). During a banquet in July 1967 and then a published article in April 1968 Knowles introduced the idea of Andragogy. In the speech entitled *Andragogy, Not Pedagogy*, Knowles stated that there was a distinct difference between pedagogy- “the art and science of teaching children” and andragogy- “the art and science of helping adults learn”. Although the term andragogy has been explored over many years, Malcolm Knowles was considered the father of adult education and one of the first to present the idea of andragogy.

During his study of andragogy, Knowles introduced that there are three overarching assumptions to differentiate the ways adults learn from children. The three assumptions include self-concept of the learner, orientations to learning, and the role of experience. These assumptions became the basis for Knowles development of the six principles to support his philosophy of andragogy.

Knowles (1973) interpretation of andragogy included the following six principles:

1. The need to know
2. The learner’s self-concept
3. The role of experience
4. Readiness to learn

5. Orientation to learning
6. Motivation

In the first principle, the need to know, linking short term objectives with long term goals will likely help an adult learner become more interested in what and why they are learning. If they know the reason they are learning, adults process more effectively. It is important for adults to know the relevance in learning and how it can apply to their current life objectives (Sang, 2010). This aligns with strategic thinking that is needed for adult educational leaders. Leaders see the big picture and can tie the immediate actions to long term plans. In the L3 document, this is represented by linking short term objectives with long term goals which will likely help an adult learner become more interested in what they are learning. According to the data found by the researcher, adult learners feel more confident receiving training on programming before they move on to the next level of administration. As educators, they want to investigate information further. Completing research in various areas and understanding what lies ahead, adult learners recognize the impact knowing students inside and outside of the classroom. Many would like strategies on getting families more involved in their child's education and building relationships with students and families. Being an active instructional leader is important through learning the SAT process, how data drives instruction, goal setting, and interventions is beneficial to administration. In addition, before they participate in administrative positions, adult learners would like to know information beyond the classroom or building such as budgets, facility maintenance, etc.

In the second principle the learner's self-concept, to increase the retention of core information and problem-solving abilities adult learners should learn through

collaboration which will lead them to become self-directed. As the adult learner matures, they move from a dependent personality and work towards becoming self-directed. This increases the desire of the learner to become more independent. In 1993, Pratt stated “...self-direction has become a keystone in the arching methodology of andragogy; the needs and experience of the learner take precedence over the expertise of the instructor” (p. 19). To increase the retention of core information and problem-solving abilities adult learners should learn through collaboration which will lead them to become self-directed. As adults continuously collaborate, the information shared and gleaned becomes a valuable tool for future endeavors. In the L3 document, this is represented by the adult learner describing their long-term aspirations. When the learner knows what they want to accomplish, they are more willing to learn from others and will take the proper steps to get there. According to the data found by the researcher, adult learners continuously take responsibility for learning into their own hands. They want to make sure they are being consistent and effective all while supporting co-workers. Adult learners take classes, attend seminars and conferences at universities as well as through various organizations that provide professional development throughout the year. They understand that volunteering and participating in leadership opportunities will help them in the future. Literature that is supportive and conducive to the learner is also a useful resource. Adult learners know that it is up to them to keep current on information such as resumes and cover letters. The best leaders have the desire to learn and grow.

In the third principle, role of experience, educators and administrators should collaborate as much as possible for adult learners to be successful. Knowles (1990) theorized personal experience defines an adult’s identity. As an adult accumulates a

growing wealth of experience, it becomes a rich resource for learning. Through discussion, adult learners may learn new ideas and information. Educators and administrators should collaborate as much as possible for adult learners to be successful. This would include activities such as collective discussions, case studies, and simulation exercises (Knowles, 1976). In the L3 document, adult learners were able to pinpoint areas for growth and specific activities in class and fieldwork to help ensure they reach their goals. According to the data found by the researcher, adult learners draw on prior experience when moving into leadership positions. Many believe that leadership starts in the classroom, and they want to make sure that they have mastered that before moving into leadership. Learners want to regularly use data collection to create goals and meet objectives for the improvement of students. They want to learn how to effectively and efficiently handle situations to improve the educational environment. Adult learners believe that working with all stakeholders to properly prepare and transition students through elementary, middle, and high school is beneficial to the success of an effective leader.

In the fourth principle, readiness to learn, growth is evident through the data because adult learners express how they would like to stay in a position for a longer period and grow before they move on to the next position. This principle is closely related to the developmental and life related tasks of his or her social role. As adults' social roles and responsibilities change, they become ready to learn and prepare themselves for new roles and responsibilities (Knowles, 1989, 1990). In the L3 document this is expressed by learners constructing challenging, but attainable goals for their own professional development. Through these goals learners are required to have a rationale

for the goal, the skills/competencies to be learned, and activities/actions to reach this goal. Adult learners want to participate in activities that align more with their passion. They think that it is important to seek out a mentor if one is not assigned. One learner would like to know the impact that teachers of color have on both students of color and white students. They feel as though recruiting teachers of color sends a welcoming and supportive message for the school environment. More knowledge of instructional practices across multiple grade levels is important for a learner to be a well-rounded leader in a building. Educators understand that as they move up into leadership positions, they will need to know state laws. They want to be able to support and make the best-informed decisions for staff, students, and stakeholders being in an administrative position.

In the fifth principle, orientation to learning, it is important to have classes in which there are speakers from which the adults can learn. This principle focuses on tasks or problems adult learners must solve (Knowles, 1989, 1990). Knowles states that depending on your life experiences and level of maturity your perspective on certain situations will change. With that being known, adult learners are no longer interested in subject-center learning but are more likely to embrace and commit to problem and life centered methods. It is important to have classes in which there are speakers from which the adults can learn. They will be able to apply this information to real life experiences when they get into their position. In the L3 document, this is expressed by learners describing who is in their network of support and learning. Informal mentors, new relationships with peers, and guidance from faculty and sitting administrators are essential for personal growth. According to the data found by the researcher, adult learners have many ideas of activities that will ensure they get experience for the future.

They want to be able to observe board meetings, administrative teams, and instructional coaches to gain more information. Some indicated that they are already coordinating workshops and giving presentations to improve instruction. Others would like to get feedback from students, teachers, and families; attend and participate in school events; as well as learn about the process of selections of schools.

In the sixth principle, motivation, school leaders should be aware of what motivates the adult learner to get them to reach their full potential. Adult learners thrive off intrinsic rewards such as feelings of satisfaction and personal accomplishments (Knowles, 1989, 1990). School leaders should be aware of what motivates the adult learner to get them to reach their full potential. In the L3 document, this is demonstrated by students being able to list their strongest and weakest scores from the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSELs). When students can personally identify what types of experiences can provide them with an opportunity to lead, it is motivation to reach their goals. The data analyzed by the researcher shows that many adult learners in this section are most interested in anything related to data, curriculum, and instruction. Adult learners want to understand instructional planning. This will help them to better understand test scores and the overall purpose so that they are able to help them in the future. Many believe that learning the SAT process is essential to student growth. Goal setting, interventions, progress monitoring, and data collection ensures the betterment of our student learners.

For the purpose of this study, it is important to know and understand the philosophy of andragogy. The andragogy framework can be utilized to enhance the adult learning experience through campus and online base student services (Kasworm, 2012).