ACCELERATING CHARTER PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENT: THE DYNAMIC INTERACTION
OF ACTION-REFLECTION CYCLES, CUSTOMIZATION, AND DEVELOPMENTAL
PARTNERSHIPS DURING FIELD EXPERIENCE

by

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ABSTRACT

Leaders of charter schools need a unique combination of knowledge and skills to effectively guide their schools. Research shows that internships and residencies offered during pre-service preparation programs to provide aspiring school leaders with supervised practical leadership experience in real school contexts make a crucial contribution to developing these special capabilities. Experts agree however, that most preparation programs fail to deliver really effective field experiences. This is particularly true of traditional university programs taken by these leaders, which, unlike charter-specific programs, are not designed with their particular leadership needs in mind.

This thesis reports on an inquiry designed to cast light on what influences the effectiveness of development activity during preparatory field experiences and to identify how traditional university programs might improve the efficacy of their offerings for such principals. Using a mixed methods approach to facilitate a contextually sensitive and nuanced understanding of current development practices, this exploratory study used a statewide quantitative survey to identify a group of practicing charter principals who reported effective field experiences. Analysis of transcriptions from in-depth interviews with twelve of them provides a rich picture of the positive impacts of current practices.

The findings show that effective field experiences are possible for charter principals in traditional as well as charter-specific program pathways, and that these pathways share core characteristics. They are composed of: intense action-reflection cycles performed while engaged in a real job; customized and partly self-directed developmental work; and the exploitation of a range of developmental partnerships formed to deal with immediate challenges that also provide longer-term emotional support and expertise.

The originality of the thesis lies in identifying and synthesizing these critical dimensions that together lead to accelerated situated learning during field experiences. Practical ideas are put forward for improving the efficacy of traditional university-based programs for aspiring charter principals, proposing
they become more principal-centered and self-directed, and take account of the interplay between structural features of a chosen preparatory pathway and the personal characteristics of each principal. It recommends using the more flexible, dynamic, and integrated development processes presented in the thesis to guide field experience design.

The form and content of this abstract are approved. I recommend its publication.

Approved: Paul Teske
DEDICATION

For my father, Keith Kinsella, and in loving memory of my mother, Valerie Kinsella.
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CHAPTER I

EXPLORING THE UNCHARTED TERRITORY OF CHARTER LEADER FIELD EXPERIENCE

Well-designed and supported field experiences have long been heralded as a means of giving aspiring school principals real and challenging opportunities to make the transition between classroom-learned theory and actual practice (Bottoms & Egelson, 2012; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). However, despite a growing consensus on their characteristics, research suggests that for many would-be principals, the craft designed to help them “navigate the swift, unpredictable currents” of school leadership, is in reality “leaky, rudderless or still in the dry dock” (Fry, Bottoms, & O’Neill, 2005, p.3). For charter school principals, who lead the fastest growing sector of public education in the United States, these craft are particularly likely to be inadequate, given that their roles are ‘amplified and extended’ (Campbell & Grubb, 2008) in comparison with the traditional public school principals for whom the majority of preparatory field experiences are designed.

This problem caught my attention as a former secondary school teacher who trained and was certified in England through a job-embedded graduate program that I judged to be highly effective. From day one of my teaching career I had a real teaching position in a school, and was responsible for the learning of hundreds of students in my subject area. A colleague acted as a teacher-mentor: observing my lessons; giving me substantive feedback; and reflecting with me on lessons – in the process providing specific guidance on how to improve my practice. With this support, I completed the training year successfully while confirming my passion for teaching, and enjoying the responsibility for delivering an almost full timetable. Having experienced the benefits of what was in effect, preparatory field experience for teachers, I became interested in how this approach was being used to prepare charter school leaders for their new responsibilities, and to see if I could make an original contribution in this field.

In this chapter, I situate my inquiry into charter leader field experiences within the broader context of principal preparation programs, outline the research problem, and introduce the questions that guided my research. I then describe my research approach, highlight the potential significance of this
research for practice and theory, and conclude with an overview of the remaining five chapters that comprise this dissertation.

A ‘Gold Standard’ for Preparing Charter School Leaders

To understand the likely attributes of effective field experiences for charter leaders, it is helpful first to have an appreciation of the preparatory programs of which they are an integral part. Traditional preparation programs, run by university schools of education, have trained the vast majority of school principals since the 1940s. In recent years these programs have been subject to a high volume of criticism, following increasing evidence of the importance of effective school leadership for sustained education reform (Peterson, 2002; Levine, 2005; Hale & Moorman, 2003), and insights into the skills and practices of effective school leaders (Leithwood et al., 2004; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). A number of problems have been highlighted, but most germane to this research were the limited emphasis they placed on instructional leadership roles associated with effective school leadership, and their pedagogical approach, which contained few practical and applied elements (Orr, 2011; Levine, 2005).

In the wake of these revelations, significant attention has since been paid to best practices and innovations in leadership preparation programs. This heightened interest revealed the emergence of a number of alternative preparation programs, who sought to exploit and address the gaps left by many traditional university programs. Amongst these new providers, who included school districts, non-profits, and a variety of partnerships between stakeholders (Jackson & Kelley, 2002; Orr, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2004), were a new breed of programs designed specifically with charter school leaders in mind. Such programs, run by national non-profit organizations like KIPP and Building Excellent Schools, as well as growing number of local charter school networks like the Denver School of Science and Technology, share many characteristics with innovative programs highlighted in best practice research (Davies & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Cheney et al., 2010).

In common with these innovative programs, the charter-specific programs, which invest heavily upfront in recruitment and selection, place substantial emphasis on giving principals practical leadership experience in real school contexts. They invest significant attention to customizing their programs for
each participant, and provide ongoing coaching and feedback from a variety of sources (Cheney et al., 2010). In addition, they focus on roles central to running a charter school (Campbell & Grubb, 2008; New Schools Venture Fund, 2008), including budgeting, human resources, and facilities management. These programs currently represent the ‘gold standard’ for charter school principal preparation, despite the fact that there is a limited research base supporting them. However, because they do not have the capacity to train many aspiring leaders, they are likely to remain a relatively niche offering (Campbell & Grubb, 2008), and most aspiring charter leaders will have to look elsewhere for their training.

**The Amplified and Extended Roles of Charter Leaders**

To understand why charter specific programs are regarded as the best option for aspiring charter school leaders, it is helpful to get some perspective on how the role of a charter school leaders differs as compared to the traditional public school principal for whom most university programs were and are designed. The key differences in leadership stem primarily from the bargain charter schools strike with districts and states: more school level autonomy in exchange for higher levels of accountability for the results that they get in terms of student achievement (Bulkley, 2003). These higher levels of autonomy create additional leadership demands of the principal, resulting in their role being compared to that of a superintendent of a small school district, a CEO of a for-profit business, and a non-profit executive (Campbell & Grubb, 2008; National Alliance of Public Charter Schools, 2008). While charter school leadership demands vary according to the leadership structure of the school, and the type of charter school it is, it is clear that the charter leader role is broader than that of traditional public school principal, and has been likened to doing it “on a high wire” (Campbell & Gross, 2008, p.9).

Research suggests that this ‘tightrope walking’ involves a greater emphasis on school operations and school management: from budgeting; hiring; and managing facilities; to managing a school board; marketing their school; recruiting students; and advocating for charter schools in their district and state (Gross 2011; Hentscheke, 2010; Gergen & Vanourek, 2008). These challenges are further amplified for charter leaders that develop new schools, since they also have to find initial funding, locate a facility, build a student and staff body, and generate community support from scratch (Luekens, 2004).
Balancing the numerous hats that charter school leaders have to wear is particularly challenging in an age where principals are expected to focus on driving instructional leadership within their schools (Hess, 1998; Fry et al., 2006; Cunningham & Sherman, 2008; Leithwood et al., 2010). Research has found that principals are second only to teachers in their influence on academic results, and that they tend to influence student achievement indirectly, through their direct influence on school staff, organizational structures, and school climate (Seashore Louis et al., 2010; Hallinger & Heck, 2011). Related work on the behaviors and practices of effective principals (Hallinger, 2005; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Leithwood et al., 2004; Boyd et al., 2009) highlights the importance of instructional leadership, direction setting, developing people, and organizational re-design.

The extent to which charter leaders are able to focus on their instructional roles while simultaneously running the management and operations of their schools is unclear. However, researchers have suggested that amplified charter responsibilities may detract from leaders’ abilities to spend sufficient time on leading instruction in their schools. In theory charter leaders who are in schools that are part of a larger system, like a charter management organization, should have fewer operational and managerial responsibilities (Gross, 2011). However, recent research found that charter leaders reported spending more time on management tasks than their traditional public school colleagues regardless of their school structure (Cravens, Goldring, & Peñaloza, 2012). Regardless of their organizational structure it is clear that charter leaders need to be strong, highly skilled, and experienced educational leaders, perhaps even more so than traditional public school leaders, so that they have the personal resources to also attend to their extended responsibilities (Luekens, 2004; Campbell, 2010). For these reasons, effective preparation is critical, and it can be argued that field experience becomes particularly critical, especially for those charter principals taking traditional university based programs that do not pay explicit attention in their coursework to areas of charter amplified responsibility. Here in particular, a well-designed field experience could make the difference between a successful and an unsuccessful preparatory program experience for an aspiring charter leader.
What ‘Golden Standard’ Field Experience Looks Like

Despite their limited capacity, charter specific programs, along with some of the more innovative alternative and university programs, cast light on the likely components of a successful and effective field experience. These programs tend to place emphasis on the following features: an extended period of field experience; high levels of customization based on participant needs; extended support in the form of mentoring and coaching; active participation in the work of a school leader; high levels of feedback and supported reflection; varied and often more informal support relationships; and high levels of participant responsibility for directing their own learning (Cheney et al., 2010).

These characteristics are emphasized in addition to the standard requirements for effective field experience that are highlighted in the majority of research on principal internships and field experiences. The standard requirements are designed to help participants make strong links between classroom-learned theory and real practice. They include authentic opportunities to practice central leadership roles, as well as support mechanisms in the form of mentors, coaches, and others who can direct and facilitate the reflective process that are considered key to effective development (Hallinger & Snidvongs, 2005; Fry et al., 2005; Hess & Kelly, 2005; Milstein & Kruger, 1997).

Theoretical support for standard and exemplary field experience characteristics is found in several areas. Situated learning theory suggests adults learn best when they are deeply embedded in an authentic context, and can benefit from the social nature of learning (Bandura, 1997; Wenger, 2007). The importance of self-directed learning is emphasized in adult learning theory where adults who already have a wealth of knowledge are often thought to be in a better position to decide on the what, where, and how of future learning needs (Mezirow, 2000; Taylor, 2000). Theorists also point to the importance of being able to iterate cycles between ‘doing’ and ‘reflecting’ (Kolb, 1984; Schön, 1983) to deepen the quality of learning, as well as to having expert and peer forms of support (Gray et al., 2007; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004).

Despite the existence of fairly clear and specific basic guidelines for effective field experience, there is significant evidence that many programs nevertheless fail to deliver on these features (Levine, 2005; O’Neill, Fry, Bottoms, & Walker, 2007); and in particular do not provide principals with the
authentic leadership opportunities and support that they need. This is likely to be true for charter school principals in particular, 75% of whom train in traditional university based programs (Gross, 2011), and who are likely to therefore have field experiences in traditional public schools that cannot provide them with the opportunity to practice in the context they will actually be operating in.

This is particularly problematic because it has been suggested that context is “perhaps the single most important influence on reflection and learning” (Boud & Walker, 1998, p.196). If this is true it means that we need to understand and accept that the social and cultural context in which reflection takes place has a powerful influence over what kinds of reflection it is possible to foster, and the ways in which it might be done. But as yet little research has explored what effective reflective practice looks like and how it works in real contexts. Viewed in this way, the lack of specific research into field experiences undergone by charter school principals is an important gap to tackle, and I address this in the following section.

**Effective Field Experience: Problems and Opportunities**

The portrait painted in this chapter so far is of an unmet demand for charter school leaders, who have a complex role to perform, that is not well understood in research, in particular with regard to the balance between instructional and more operational leadership requirements. Exacerbating this problem, there is a fairly low overall standard of principal preparation, particularly in the traditional university programs that most aspiring principals take. Promising new charter-specific programs have a capacity problem, as well as a limited base of empirical support. Compounding all of this, research on field experience, a period that seems to hold the key to making a successful transition to practice, remains relatively uncharted territory in terms of contextually situated understanding about what happens during effective field experiences. From my perspective, this state of affairs represents both a problem and an opportunity.

The problem is that these programs do not have the capacity to meet the existing demand for charter leaders, and the situation is only going to get worse. Since the first charter school was founded in Minnesota in 1992, they have become an increasingly significant way of delivering public education in the United States. Recent statistics show that, as of the 2012-13 school year, there were 6,000 public charter
schools educating more than 2.3 million students (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2013). This research indicated that the sector is growing rapidly, almost doubling the number of schools in four years (1,700 more since 2008), and with an 80% increase in students in the same time period. With almost one million students currently on waiting lists for charter schools (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, 2013), this growth looks set to continue. This snapshot of unmet demand becomes more troubling when combined with findings from a recent study that reported almost three out of every four charter leaders (71%) expect to leave their schools within five years (Gross, 2011).

The looming supply gap that these figures point to, suggests that there is a need for new thinking concerning how this sector goes about closing this gap. Furthermore, there is clearly a need for research that looks at current methods of principal preparation and how they might be improved. As I have pointed out in this chapter, even though most new charter principals receive their training from traditional university programs, very little attention has been paid to their capacity to meet the particular needs of charter school leaders. In addition, it is clear that although field experiences are regarded as crucial in both alternative and traditional programs, many of them fail to deliver the substantive and authentic practice experiences that are required for them to provide an effective transition from the classroom to real practice.

As a result of these several considerations, I decided to focus on what constitutes effective charter principal field experiences, to identify the features of existing practice that might be worth building on, and to see what might need to change. In particular, I wanted to explore this relatively uncharted territory to see whether existing field experience pathways provided by traditional university programs might have the capacity to prepare charter principals effectively. Given that these traditional preparation options are both more widely available and less expensive than the charter specific program routes, they could present an opportunity for a relatively easy way to meet the growing demand for well trained charter school leaders.
Problem, Purpose and Key Questions

My research problem can therefore be stated as follows: the charter school movement is growing in leaps and bounds, and is generating an increasing demand for properly trained and prepared principals to continue this process. Charter principals face a wider range of duties than their traditional school counterparts, including administrative tasks handled by school districts, as well as some more new entrepreneurial challenges to do with the increased autonomy levels that are at the heart of this movement to improve school education.

Due to the success of this movement, and the increased demand for good leadership, there are now clear signs that there is going to be a shortage of properly equipped principals to take on these challenges. Apart from the challenge of finding and selecting suitable people to move into this growing field, the charter school movement finds itself hampered by several other factors: most charter principals complete field experiences in traditional schools which do not provide the breadth and challenge that such new principals require; and current preparation programs are seen to fall short – by the charter principals themselves - of what is really required to fit them for the new roles. There is, therefore, a need in the field for research that looks more broadly for potential solutions to these issues.

Given the limited empirical base on aspiring charter school principal field experiences, it was important to speak to practicing charter school principals who described their training as effective. From them I could build a picture of what effective field experiences looked like from a participant perspective, and find out more about how they worked from a developmental perspective. I wanted to see what commonalities their field experiences shared, and whether and what charter principals who trained in traditional programs missed out on in comparison with those that completed charter specific preparation programs. I also wanted to explore how specific components of field experiences such as mentoring and reflection played out in real situations, and how they interacted. I also wanted to see if there were lessons that could be taken from charter specific program field based experiences to enrich the traditional program offerings.

To address this problem, and cast light on the areas of interest highlighted above, I developed the following three questions to initiate and guide my research:
1. **What kinds of impact does the overall structure and infrastructure of the field experience element of preparation programs have on the effectiveness of the learning process during field experiences for aspiring charter school leaders?**

2. **How are commonly upheld characteristics and features of effective field experiences e.g. real opportunities to lead, mentoring, reflection, and so on, experienced by aspiring charter school leaders?**

3. **In what ways do these characteristics and features enhance learning and help to develop leadership capabilities of aspiring charter school leaders?**

In addition to the specific questions outlined above, I was interested to see the extent to which effective field experiences facilitated opportunities for participants to get practical experience in areas of charter-amplified responsibility, and if/how they facilitated the customization of the field experience to the needs of the participant. In both of these areas, charter-specific program field experiences purport to offer a significant improvement on the traditional university program offerings, but it is not evident from research whether and how traditional programs are able to customize their offerings to meet the developmental needs of particular aspiring charter school leaders.

**Research Approach**

I used a mixed methods approach to this research for pragmatic reasons. Firstly, little specific data pertaining to the quality of charter school principals field experiences exists, and because field experiences are inextricably linked to the programs in which they are situated (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007), it was important to get a broad view of the overall state of charter principal preparation. For this reason I used a quantitative survey to generate this grounding data. I then used the results from this survey to identify a suitable group of principals who reported having effective field experiences as part of their preparation. With this group, I used a series of qualitative interviews to elicit the richer and subtler details of their individual field experiences.

My methods were primarily and deliberately of a qualitative nature because charter principal field experiences have been the subject of scant research so far, and because I wanted to cast further light
on features of field experience that have been studied in the context of traditional principals. Such research has provided guidance on, for example, the important criteria for successful mentoring relationships, and the importance of active levels of participation in leadership activities (Barnett et al., 2009; DeVita et al., 2007).

**Rationale and Significance**

As outlined throughout this chapter, the rationale for this study stems from my increasing awareness of the importance of field experiences in the preparation of school leaders, and the limited evidence of how they work in real contexts, as well as my personal experience of highly effective job-embedded development. As highlighted in this chapter already, the charter school sector is an increasingly significant force in K-12 education in the United States. Given its current rate of growth, and its prominence in recent federal reform initiatives like Race to the Top and No Child Left Behind (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Campbell & Gross, 2012), finding out more about how to develop leaders of this sector most effectively is of critical importance.

From a theoretical perspective, this research has the potential to make substantive contributions to theories of experiential learning, by giving an in-depth and nuanced understanding of how people learn from experience in specific contexts. For example, although models of learning such as Kolb’s action-reflection cycle (1984), and Schön’s reflection-on and –in-action (1983), are very helpful heuristics, my research offers concrete insights into how those cycles look in practice, and gives a situated perspective of what can enhance the quality of the learning process in specific circumstances. It a similar way, my research should enrich the knowledge base on how the structure of field experience can impact the quality of learning, by drawing out the interactions between potential explanatory factors, such as being situated in a charter school or a traditional school for field experiences, and being job-embedded versus being in an internship. This research also may help cast light on what effective mentoring relationships need to look like, and why and how they may need to vary given an individual’s development needs. Finally, my research could contribute to the relatively scant knowledge base on charter school leader
development, highlighting the extent to which the amplified responsibilities that leaders in these more autonomous schools have, impacts on their developmental need during their field experiences.

This research also has the potential to make a significant impact on practice, by coming up with specific and concrete recommendations to inform the work of preparation program designers, administrators, and participants, and to increase the likelihood that the field experience components will be effective. I also believe this research could inform on-going conversations at district and state level, given the US Department of Education’s current focus on strengthening the outcomes of principal preparation programs, and on developing principal pipelines.

**Organization of Chapters**

The five chapters that follow this introduction reveal my approach to uncovering insights into the nature of the authentic preparatory field-based learning experiences from the perspective of practicing charter school leaders:

In Chapter II, I present a review of the fields of research within which this dissertation is situated, and highlight theoretical ideas and insights from practice that helped to inform my work. I start by noting the growing recognition of the importance of field-based learning within formal principal preparation programs. I then highlight research that emphasizes the importance of full time field experiences, and which points to the efficacy of charter specific programs for aspiring charter principals. I show how this belief is premised on the emphasis these programs ostensibly place on charter-amplified leadership roles, as well giving aspiring principals many opportunities to practice authentic leadership tasks. At the end of the chapter I draw together a table of potential explanatory factors for effective charter leader field experiences.

In Chapter III, I explain the pragmatic worldview that underpins my research, and describe the rationale for the mixed-methods approach that I used. I outline the sampling procedures for the two phases of data collection, and explain how I analyzed and interpreted the data that resulted from my survey and 12 in-person interviews. At the end of the chapter I highlight potential research limitations, stemming both from the qualitative methodology, and my specific research design.
Chapter IV highlights the findings from the first phase of my research, involving a survey of 101 practicing charter school principals in Colorado. These results reinforce previous findings from charter school pre-service preparation programs. They show that a majority of charter school leaders were trained in traditional university-based programs, and that overall they did not feel well prepared, particularly when it came to the areas of their role amplified in a charter context. They also show that while most principals reported that their field experiences contained exemplary features like mentoring and exposure to real world problems, more than half of them still did not get opportunities to actually practice in areas central to their school leader roles. I describe the positive relationship that existed between field experience activity levels and overall program evaluation in my sample, which I used to determine my interview sample. I also explain that participants reported a high level of exposure to, and appreciation of, experiential forms of in-service professional development activities.

Building on these findings, in Chapter V I outline the results derived from my interviews with practicing charter principals, all but one of whom turned out to have been in fulltime leadership roles during their field experiences – a factor which in hindsight has significantly influenced my eventual findings. My first finding is that it is possible for aspiring and novice charter leaders to have effective field experiences on two traditional university program pathways. I contrast these pathways with two others: a National Charter path, and an Experienced principal path, and in so doing highlight structural differences between the pathways that have significant influences on the nature of the field experiences participants can have. I introduce a three-part model to explain how the field experiences of principals in my sample shared three core characteristics, and then discuss the nature of each characteristic, and how it varies by program pathway. I point to the importance of job-embedded pressure to create intensive action-reflection cycles, where principals benefit both from doing followed by feedback, and observing followed by questioning. I then highlight the importance of principals’ taking responsibility for customizing their own developmental continua of practice, and show that the result of this, are highly responsive, dynamic, and varied developmental activities. I also point to a role for multiple ‘developmental partnerships’ that are often more informal than the standard principal-mentor relationship, and which offer reciprocal benefits to all parties involved. Finally, I show that over time, these relationships can grow to constitute a
network offering similar benefits to those found in a community of practice. In this way they can be seen to have huge potential value for charter leaders, helping them to overcome a sense of isolation that seems inherent in the role, as well as to address charter-specific skill gaps in practice.

Finally in Chapter VI, I synthesize my findings and present their implications for practice and future research. I develop a model for effective charter principal field experiences that I term an ‘ecology of practice’. In this model I describe three roles for an aspiring principal during field experience: as a performer, doing a real job; as a “bricoleur”, or a kind of professional development ‘handyman’; and as a relationship builder. In doing this, I highlight the critical importance of viewing principal development through field experience as a dynamic and living process, and place emphasis on the importance of the principals themselves playing an active role in customizing the developmental opportunities they have. I then make recommendations for practice, which all relate to taking seriously the implications of both the preparation pathway and the participants background and needs. Specific recommendations include: using a broader definition of support relationships, ‘developmental partnerships’, to enhance the support given to aspiring and novice principals during field experience; encouraging network building from the outset of field experience; placing aspiring charter leaders in charter schools for their field experience; and adjusting the timing of field experiences so that these coincide with an aspiring principal’s appointment to a leadership post. I then make related suggestions for future research.

**Key Terminology**

*Alternative preparation program*: I use this term to indicate a preparation program run by an organization other than a university. This could include charter-specific programs run by non-profits and other third parties, as well as districts, and collaborations between different groups.

*Authentic*: I use this term to describe field experience activities that are equivalent to those faced by practicing school principals in the every day realities of their job, in contrast to activities that are in some way ‘set up’ for training purposes.

*Charter-amplified*: I use this term as shorthand for the extended roles and responsibilities that charter school leaders have, as indicated in the limited research on this topic (see e.g. Campbell & Grubb, 2008; Campbell & Gross, 2008).

*Charter school principal*: This could mean a school founder, chief executive, or even a leadership team, but in this research it indicates “the person who has overall responsibility for the management of..."
the charter school” (National Association of Public Charter Schools, 2008, p. 7), regardless of their title.

**Effective:** In this research, field experience effectiveness is self-defined by the practicing charter school principals that constitute my sample. It does not relate to any external measures of efficacy such as student results, or to any kind of principal evaluation scores.

**Field Experience:** pre-service training for aspiring principals that is often called an internship, practicum, or residency, where the participant spends time observing, participating in, and leading instructional and managerial activities in a school. In this research it also includes field-based activities that are part of formal preparatory programs undertaken by novice and more experienced principals.

**Practical:** I use this term to mean actual ‘doing’ of leadership activities in real school leadership context, as opposed to theoretical or classroom based activities. More common in the literature is the term “hands-on”, but the term “practical” is preferred in this research. It has close links when used in this way with ‘authentic’ as defined above.

**Traditional preparation program:** A program run by a school of education in a university. In using this term I exclude from it university-based programs that have been recognized as innovative or exemplary in the research literature.
CHAPTER II

IN SEARCH OF EXPLANATORY FACTORS FOR CHARTER LEADER FIELD EXPERIENCE

Towards the end of Chapter I, I highlighted the components of field experience regarded as essential to its success, as well as theories purporting to explain how learning from experience works. This chapter adds depth to this framework. It starts with a snapshot of the formal preparation programs that develop school leaders, and reviews research on how charter leader needs may differ from their traditional school counterparts. I then present theoretical research on learning from experience, before focusing specifically on what is known about what effective field experiences look like, and how they work. At each stage I identify gaps and explore significant questions, before drawing together lessons from the chapter in a conceptual framework. I end the chapter with some thoughts on how this framework informed my research approach and my interpretation of the results.

History of School Leader Development

The vast majority of charter leaders in the United States are trained in traditional university programs (Gross, 2011), although recently charter-specific programs have emerged that cater to a small number of high quality candidates. This review highlights features of traditional and more innovative programs that have implications for their field experience components. These programs set the broad context for field experience, and it is helpful to understand them because it is very difficult to completely disentangle the field experience components from the programs they are a part of (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007).

From One Pathway to Many

University-based educational administration programs, linked to state licensure requirements, have been the dominant source of school leader preparation and development since 1945. Over the past thirty years they have been subject to a growing level of criticism (Davis et al., 2005; Elmore, 2000; Levine, 2005; Murphy, 2006). Their detractors argued that they failed to keep up with new demands facing school leaders in an era of increased accountability for student achievement, and that significant reform was
needed (Peterson, 2002; Hale & Moorman, 2003). Programs were criticized for their neglect of the
instructional and transformation leadership roles and practices that are now regarded as essential
(Elmore, 2000; Hallinger, 2005), and for their emphasis on the more administrative side of the principal
role. They were also censured for providing limited opportunities for principals to apply their learning, and
in particular for failing to deliver substantial field experiences (Orr, 2011; Levine, 2005; Young, 2002).
More generally programs were faulted for having low admission and graduation standards, and lacking
rigor. Levine (2005) suggested that programs were in a ‘race to the bottom’ (2005, p. 23), and that the
majority were beyond repair.

Partly in response to such bleak pronouncements, program structures and approaches
proliferated. These new programs place emphasis on the importance of context for school leader
development, following evidence that different administrative competencies are needed to lead different
types of schools (Leithwood et al., 2004). Some programs are run as partnerships with specific school
districts, others are school district initiated, while a third group has focused on preparing particular types
of school leader, such as charter school leaders, or turnaround school leaders (Davies et al, 2005). Most
programs targeting charter school leaders fall into the third category, and they have been able to
innovate rapidly due to their small size. Before focusing on these programs, I outline general exemplary
program characteristics in general.

**Exemplary Program Characteristics**

Significant attention has been paid to identifying effective leadership preparation programs
(Jackson & Kelley, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 2005; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Cheney et al,
2010; Orr, 2006; Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012). Research has identified key features of effective pre-
service preparation programs (Davis et al., 2005; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007), and case studies have
been done of programs that illustrate these features, including some of the bigger charter leader
preparation programs (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Cheney et al, 2010). In a review of this literature,
Orr and Pounder (2011) highlighted features that separated average from exemplary programs. In terms
of content, these programs are research-based and place emphasis on educational leadership practices
associated with school improvement (Bottoms & Egelson, 2012; Darling-Hammond et al, 2007). They also
offer a coherent curriculum that makes links between theory and practice, and is based on adult learning theory (Davis et al., 2005). From a methodological perspective, such programs use varied approaches, but most place emphasis on field-based internships, problem-based learning, and provide professional supports for participants in the form of cohort groups and mentors. Additional features such as standards-based assessments, and rigorous recruitment and evaluation processes are also highlighted in the literature (Davis et al., 2005; Jackson & Kelley, 2002), but as mentioned earlier, are not focused on here due to the emphasis of my research on the field experience component itself.

Many of these features are also cited in reference to ‘exemplary’ in-service programs. In addition, research on these programs has emphasized the importance of having a learning continuum that takes principals from pre-service through the induction period, and beyond. It has also stressed the use of multiple avenues of support, including, collegial networks and peer coaching, both of which provide support for problem solving, and can grow to serve as ‘communities of practice’ (Darling-Hammond et al. 2007; Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012). However, a recent report by the George W. Bush Institute reported that only five states require principal preparation programs to include all of the components believed to be critical for effective leadership development (Briggs et al., 2013), so a gap remains between what is regarded as important, and what gets covered in preparation programs.

**Charter Specific Programs**

Research on programs specifically targeting charter school leaders is very limited, but a recent report by the Rainbow Leadership Alliance (Cheney et al, 2010) included a focus on the KIPP program, which in conjunction with work done by the National Charter School Research Project (Campbell and Gross, 2008; Campbell & Grubb, 2008) and the New School Venture Fund (2008) gives a reasonably coherent picture of how such programs differ from other preparation programs. Based on these sources, charter specific programs emphasize practice-based training (Cheney et al. 2010), and provide extensive levels of support over an extended time period.

Perhaps the key strength of the alternative programs in general is their ability to *tailor* and customize the learning programs for their principals, both in terms of content and methodology. In terms of content, many of the charter-specific school leadership preparation programs cover leadership issues
amplified in a charter context, like facilities management, human resource management; academic accountability; and charter renewal (Campbell & Gross 2008, p. 12). In terms of methodology, evidence suggests they are able to customize their approaches to meet the learning needs and styles of individual trainees to a greater extent than the traditional programs do – but as yet empirical evidence is not available to support these suppositions, beyond self-reports from programs.

**Empirical Research and Gaps.**

Despite the lack of research evaluating charter specific preparation programs, there is a growing body of research linking preparation program approaches and features and effective leadership practices (Leithwood et al., 1996; Orr, 2009; Orr & Barber, 2007; Orr & Orphanos, 2011). This research is based on earlier work on the influence of specific school leader practices on student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008), which suggested leaders’ influence here is primarily via their direct influence on staff and organizational conditions. The research on preparation program outcomes has measured graduate leadership practices (Leithwood et al, 1996); self assessed leadership knowledge (Orr & Barber, 2007), and leaders’ sense of their self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2007). Investigation of the impact of particular components of principal preparation programs on participant outcomes is still in its infancy, though one recent piece of research by Orr and Orphanos (2011) found that, of all the exemplary program features, the strongest correlation was between program and internship quality, and leadership practices.

Despite the general consensus on likely key program features, little is known about how different contexts affect the efficacy of the features, about specific aspects of the features that are necessary for powerful development experiences effective, the impact of difference conditions on their implementation, or the combination of factors that make for the most effective development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). It is likely that the quality of these program features will vary quite considerably in practice, and so this makes contextually sensitive studies of critical importance to furthering knowledge in this area.
Differences between Charter and Traditional School Leaders

Although research on charter school leaders is limited (Smith, Wohlseter, Farrell, & Nayfack, 2011), existing findings suggest that there are significant differences in the typical charter leader role, the support structures available for charter leaders, and the personal characteristics of typical charter principals which have implications for what they require for effective preparation.

Amplified Responsibilities.

The standard view of charter school leaders portrays them as having responsibilities similar to a superintendent of small school district, in contrast to the role of a traditional public school principal as a middle manager in a district organization. The only large-scale research that has addressed the differences between the roles of charter and traditional school principals is an oft-quoted survey of 400 charter leaders carried out by researchers at the University of Washington for the Charter School Research Project (Campbell & Gross, 2008). This research found that while there were many commonalities in practices with traditional school principals, there were a number of areas where charter leader roles were “amplified and extended” (Campbell & Gross 2008, p. 9), including human resources, sharing leadership, and using resources effectively.

Taking human resources as an example, research suggests the challenge is amplified in a number of ways. Firstly, recruiting teachers and staff is particularly demanding due to the lower rates of pay, increased working hours, and the existence of long term job uncertainty (Deal & Hentschke, 2004; Lane, 1998). Secondly, and related to these factors, the typical charter teacher is younger and more inexperienced than his or her traditional public school counterpart, and therefore likely to require significant support and development work (Frumkin et al., 2011; Odden, 2011; Kimball, 2011). Evidence that supports this can be found in elevated teacher turnover figures, with up to 25% of charter school teachers leaving each year, compared to an average of 14% in traditional schools (Stuit & Smith, 2009). In addition, charter leaders have to manage external groups like governing boards and community groups; roles that the limited research in this area suggests are highly challenging and require specific preparation and skills (Campbell & Grubb, 2008).
Spectrum of Support Structures

The traditional picture of an independent, entrepreneurial school leader is complicated by the emergence of charter management organizations (CMOs) that take on many of the administrative tasks that do not relate directly to student learning. These are growing in number, but the impact they have on the role of the principal is not clear from research. Cravens, Goldring and Peñaloza (2012) looked at differences in leadership roles between traditional public school principals and charter school leaders. They also considered the impact of a charter school being affiliated with a CMO. They found that charter school leaders reported a higher level of focus on managerial tasks such as building and staff management, and recruiting and hiring teachers, than traditional public school principals. However, they, and others (e.g. Campbell & Gross, 2012) have found conflicting evidence as to whether or not CMOs reduced the stress level and responsibilities of their school leaders.

Different Profile

A final charter leader difference that has implications for their development is their younger age, and corresponding lack of experience. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics shows that, like their teachers, charter principals are younger and less experienced (US Department of Education, 2012) than their traditional public school counterparts. It also highlights the falling average age of both charter and traditional principals. This is significant because research suggests that principals who have an educational background find managing charter school operations most significant, while those lacking an educational administration background, struggle with the instructional side (Campbell & Gross, 2008). With many newer charter leaders coming straight from the classroom, rather than from an administrative role, or from a business role, they no doubt face significant challenges on both sides.

Explanatory Factors

Research presented in this section suggests that while scholars and practitioners agree on what elements and processes effective programs need to have, most programs probably do not deliver effective preparation. From research on exemplary programs in general, and charter specific programs in particular, it is clear that field based learning, support systems involving peers and experts, and efforts to customize the learning experiences of aspiring principals in terms of their background, and the school
they will be working in, are vital. However, little is known about how these elements play out in real practice, and in particular in the charter school context. Evidence suggests charter leaders have expanded leadership roles, differing levels of support, and are younger and less experienced than their traditional counterparts, that their development needs are not currently being met in most traditional programs at least.

**Theories and Models of Experiential Learning**

Turning to the theoretical arguments for field experience, these experiences are supposed to “provide an extended opportunity to grapple with the day-to-day demands of school administrators under the watchful eye of an expert mentor, with reflection tied to theoretical insights through related coursework” (Daresh, 2001). They are important because they represent the last, and possibly best, chance to prepare aspiring principals for the challenges facing them as novice principals (Oplatka, 2012). There are a number of theories and models that seek to explain how experiential learning works, and why it is so powerful. The ideas below relate to the social nature of learning, the importance of it being situated in real practice, and the methods of learning from experience. I also present a frame for viewing leadership development as a career-long continuum.

**Situated Learning**

Many scholars argue that effective experiential learning requires a learner to be deeply embedded in an authentic context. Emphasis is placed on the social nature of learning (Bandura, 1997; Wenger, 2007), and scholars draw on Vygotsky’s (1978) notion that social interaction is fundamental in the development of cognition. Lave and Wenger’s work on communities of practice (Wenger, 1998; Lave & Wenger, 1991) is highly influential in schools. It concerns how “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 7). Communities of practice are argued to foster peer-to-peer learning as well as more hierarchical expert-novice relationships. In schools, communities of practice have primarily been associated with teacher development (Printy, 2008; Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 2003) and related work can be found in research on professional learning communities (McLaughlin & Talbert 2006).
For principals, research has mainly emphasized their role in creating a school-based community of practice. Despite this, research on principal social networks (Loeb & Rawlings, 2011; Hite, Williams, & Baugh, 2005), and evidence from principal surveys (e.g. Darling-Hammond et al, 2007), suggests that formal and informal principal communities’ of practice do exist in reality and are perceived to be effective (Intrator & Scribner, 2008; Campbell & Gross, 2008). There is also limited evidence this work being used to inform some innovative principal preparation field experiences (Cheney et al., 2010).

Also influential in schools, and closely related to situated learning theory, is job-embedded professional development. An increasingly popular strategy for teacher professional development over the past 10 years, the essential idea revolves around teachers coming up with solutions for real and immediate problems of practice, in a cycle of continuous improvement (Wood & Killian, 1998; Darling-Hammond, Chung Wei, & Adamson, 2010). Drawing on situated learning theory, job-embedded development has been found to be most effective when it comprises both formal and informal social interactions between teachers, and is situated in the context of their school and the classrooms in which they teach and distributed across the whole staff group (Putnam & Borko, 2000).

Cognitive Apprenticeships

These apprenticeships involve hierarchical relationships between expert practitioners and novices (Collins, Brown & Newman, 1989; Rogoff, 1990; Farmer, Buckmaster, & LeGrand Brandt, 1992). The idea here is to make the experts’ thinking visible, building on the notion of tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1967; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995), or “knowing-in-practice” (Schön, 1983). In a cognitive apprenticeship, an experienced practitioner supports a novice in real practice situations. According to the theory, they take them through a sequence of behaviors: first modeling (both behavioral and cognitively); then coaching; then fading. In the coaching or scaffolding phase, theory suggests that learners need to be in a ‘zone of proximal development’ (Vygotsky, 1978), a “dynamic region that is just beyond the learner’s present ability level” (Dennen, 2004). The student is at the same time observing, then practicing, and finally reflecting (Dennen, 2004).
Self-Directed Learning

The literature on self-directed and transformational learning (see e.g. Knowles, 1975; Mezirow, 2000; Kegan, 2000) adds to our understanding of how adults learn through experience, emphasizing the importance of developing ‘personal knowledge’ (Polanyi, 1967), which is only possible through application and experience. Although early models in this field were rather linear, more recent work (e.g. Mezirow, 2000; Taylor, 2000) places emphasis on the individual in a specific context. For example, Taylor (2000) stresses the importance of learning being individualized, with the person “at the center of their own learning” (Taylor, 2000, p. 155), and Mezirow acknowledges the centrality of “institutional, interpersonal, and historical settings” (2000, p. 24) for effective learning to take place.

Leadership Development Continuum

Adding to our understanding of self-directed and customized learning is the model of leadership development though experience as a life long process. In this way, leadership development is “not a single activity, but a set of activities, often taking place over many years (Hartley & Hinksman, 2003, p. 43), and career stages can be linked to leadership development needs (Bush, 2009; Peterson, 2002). In the UK, the National College of School Leadership frames its development work around 5 stages: emergent leadership, established, leadership entry into headship, advanced leadership, and consultant leadership.

In the United States, some states are experimenting with tiered principal licensing systems that require their continuing development. In these systems, the initial pre-service stage is followed by a separate, supervised field experience, and tied to ongoing study (Bottoms & Egelson, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2012). This stage is completed after principals enter their first job thereby providing continuity and support for the novice principal. An increasing number of districts offer extended mentoring and coaching models alongside institutes, as well as other more extended professional learning experiences (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012). Despite these promising innovations, research suggests most principal professional development is still in the more limited form of traditional one-shot workshops (Peterson, 2002).
Field Experience in Practice

With regard to the practice of field experiences, more commonly termed ‘internships’ in the principal preparation context, these are based on the clinical experiences found in medicine and architecture. Their use in principal preparation programs dates from the 1940s, (Milstien, Bobroff, & Restine, 1991), but over the last fifteen years there has been a growing recognition of their importance in preparing school leaders focused on improving student learning (Glasman & Glasman, 1997; McCarthy, 1999). Prior to this there appears to have been more of a “sink or swim” attitude towards principals (DeVita et al., 2007, p. 5), in part no doubt because of the significant resources and time commitment required for intensive field preparation that includes a mentored transition into practice (McCarthy & Forsyth, 2009). It is also due to the difficulty of designing discrete leadership experiences, given the unbounded and intertwined nature of real school leadership (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2007).

Best Practice

From the research a cohesive picture of what exemplary field experiences look like has emerged. Internship guidelines from the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) require 9-12 hours a week for 6 months, and stipulate that the field experience should be ‘significant’ and ‘sustained’ (NPBEA, 2011). Others argue that ‘gold standard’ field experiences should be full time, and last for a year (Wilmore, 2002; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). Despite these differences in duration, it is clear that effective field experiences require a significant investment of time. Three interlinked elements are regarded as essential: firstly, aspiring principals should be able to observe and then practice real leadership tasks; secondly an experienced mentor or coach should support them; and thirdly, they should engage in substantive action-reflection cycles on what they have done. A number of additional requirements are emphasized in the literature, including: strong links between theory and practice; analysis of participant developmental needs; an extended time frame of support; an explicit set of standards-based assignments; rigorous evaluation; and a clear model of leadership (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Bottoms & Egelson, 2012; Havard et al., 2010; Mitgang & Gill, 2012).
Despite agreement on the importance of these elements, research has found that there is significant variation in how these elements play out in practice (University Council of Education Administration, 2010). Perhaps the most significant variation relates to the basic format of the field experiences. Based on a survey of forty educational leadership programs, Barnett, Copland, and Sho ho (2009) reported finding three main field experience designs: full-time job-embedded internships, where aspiring principals learned “on the job”; detached internships, where interns completed required activities using portfolios and reflective journals; and course-embedded field experiences, where field experiences were fully integrated with coursework. These definitions were adapted from earlier work by Carr, Chenoweth, and Ruhl (2003). However, aside from a few case studies of exemplary program field experiences, there has been very little research in this area. For example, little attention has been paid to the impact that variations in required hours, the links between practical work and coursework, the timing of the field experience component, the number and type of school placements, and so on, has on the overall effectiveness of this period of learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007).

Implementation Issues

A number of criticisms have been leveled at field experiences in the research literature, reflecting a gap between the theory of how they should be, and the reality of providing such a high-quality experience. The primary criticisms are closely related to the three key areas identified above: aspiring principals do not get the chance to practice key areas of their leadership role, including tasks associated with instructional leadership, and areas of charter amplified responsibility (see e.g. Creighton & Johnson, 2002; Earley, 2009; Fry et al., 2006; Campbell & Grubb, 2008); they have inadequate levels of field support (see e.g. McKerrow, 1998; Fry et al., 2006); and poor links are made between theory and practice (Cambron-McCabe, 1999).

Related to these problems, researchers have found significant evidence of the impact of limited district financial resources (Daresh, 2004; Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2010; Bottoms & Egelson, 2012), as well as issues with the selection and preparation of mentors (see e.g. Calabrese & Straut, 1999; Crocker & Harris, 2002), and time required for effective experiences (McCarthy & Forsyth, 2009). Overall, it is clear that significant variation exists in terms of both the quality and quantity of internship requirements and
activities. Given that only 40 percent of training program participants who complete district internships actually go on to become principals or assistant principals (Mitgang & Gill, 2012, p.7), it is likely that for a great many aspiring principals, poor field experiences represent the end of their hopes to become a principal.

‘Gold Standard’ Examples

Much of the innovation in field experiences has come from the non-traditional programs. They have generally extended the field experience component of their programs, and tried to customize them based on participant needs, and extended support in the form of mentoring and coaching (Cheney et al, 2010). One exemplar program often highlighted in the school leader development literature is the KIPP School Leadership Program, which serves aspiring charter leaders. According to a report by Cheney et al., (2010) KIPP customize their residency experiences by allowing fellows to rotate through a number of field experience in schools based on their individual’s leadership development goals. The program stresses that individuals actively participate in the day-to-day instructional, operational, and people management aspects of their host schools, and believe that participants “learn the most from actually engaging in the work, making mistakes, and building on successes” (Cheney et al., 2010, p. 79). Also integral to the field experiences is ongoing feedback from a mentor-principal, as well as from a personal coach, cohort peers, and others in the host schools.

Overall, the emphasis is on making the residency as realistic as possible, and so actually engaging in the work, rather than just shadowing, is of paramount importance (Cheney et al., 2010). Most exemplary programs use Individualized Learning Plans (ILPs) to guide their trainees throughout their residencies/field experiences. Though beyond the direct scope of this research, such plans place the individual at the center of their training, and each is viewed as a “living dynamic document” showing how program content is customized to individuals’ learning needs (Cheney et al, 2010, p. 70). The programs also state that these documents are co-created with the participants, emphasizing self-directed learning in this way (Cheney et al., 2010). Though no research yet exists in the impact of these ILPs on field experience effectiveness, their use echoes findings from Boud (2006) that organizations are now recognizing the importance of viewing their ‘customers’ as ‘co-practitioners’.
Research Issues

Although there is widespread agreement on the importance of this phase of school leader preparation, there remains wide variety of state requirements, different programmatic ways implemented, variety exacerbated in part due to lack of serious empirical evidence linking components of the internship to leader performance and even less making the next step to student performance. Scholars have argued that literature on principal field experiences in general, and charter principal field experiences in particular, is “piecemeal and fragmented” (Barnett, Copland, & Shoho, 2009). Recent research looking at principal perceptions of the role of internship in their acquisition of skills and knowledge found that interviewees struggled “to disentangle their internship experiences from courses and other training” (Thessin & Clayton, 2012, p.799), which highlights the general challenge with evaluating preparation programs in general, and the issues with having to relying on participant reflections alone rather than more concrete performance indicators.

Explanatory Factors

Research in this section has demonstrated the strong theoretical rationale for practice-based learning, and emphasized the importance of an authentic setting for the application of new skills and knowledge, the benefits to be gained from accessing the tacit knowledge base of experienced practitioners, and the importance of viewing leadership development as an on-going process. From a practice perspective, it is clear that despite general agreement on what good field experiences look like, we do not know enough about how much of this works in practice, particularly for charter school principals. It is also evident that field experiences probably do not generally match up to best practice.

However, important gaps exist in our knowledge of how field experiences work in local contexts and on the conditions that most strongly support effective practice. Knowledge of what it might take to transfer and use any exemplary practices more generally and widely in traditional university programs is conspicuous in its absence, and is an important gap for researchers to address if field experiences in mainstream programs are to achieve their goal of facilitating an effective transition from theory to practice for aspiring principals. This review now turns to understanding the three key components of field experiences highlighted above.
Key Characteristic I: Learning Support for Field Experiences

In this context ‘learning support’ refers to personal, interaction-based, everyday support offered by other individuals and groups that are part of the wider network these principals work in. Four interlinked forms of support are discussed: mentoring; coaching; peer mentoring; and peer networks.

Mentoring

Mentoring is a crucial element in the success of aspiring principals’ field experiences (Barnett & O’Mahony, 2008; Gray et al., 2007). Most definitions define it as an “extended process of support from a more experienced colleague to help a beginner for personal and professional growth” (Villiani, 2006). It generally involves day-to-day feedback, support, coaching, advocating, and general guidance (Southworth, 2010; Crews & Weakley, 1996), and is also used as a socialization strategy to help new administrators make transitions to their new role (Crow & Matthews, 1998; Hansford, Tennent, & Ehrich, 2003). Linking with the work on development stages outlined in the previous section, mentees have been conceptualized as moving from “dependence ... to self-reliance” (Head, Reiman, & Thies-Sprinthall, 1992, p.121), though it is not clear from this work the extent to which the process is seen as linear or whether there is room for regression and oscillation between stages.

A clear picture of the characteristics of effective mentoring relationships is evident from research. They are characterized as trusting and collaborative, with aspiring principals being given the opportunity to take risks “without fear of reproach” (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004, p. 489), and to participate in a developmental continuum of practice culminating in “actually leading teams in identifying, implanting and evaluating improvement interventions” (Gray et al., 2007, p. 11). Bush, Glover and Harris (2007) note that mentoring has become more person-centered, with greater awareness of the need to match mentor and mentee, and to ensuring that mentors are carefully selected and properly trained. Though mostly characterized as formal relationships between experienced and novice principals, there is some evidence in leader preparation literature of the value of more informal peer mentoring relationships (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Simieou et al., 2010) – which I comment on later. There is also evidence that it is helpful to extend mentoring relationships beyond the initial
preparation period (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Cheney, 2010). Such extended relationships allow for an early focus on administrative matters, like schedule and budget, while leaving time for attention to crucial matters of instructional leadership (Silver et al., 2009) as the relationship develops over time.

However, a large number of mentoring programs fall well short of the ideal. Many are described as little more than ‘buddy systems’, or as consisting of a checklist of exercises for principals to go through (Mitgang & Gill, 2012). Specific issues include: mentors and mentees having unclear goals, mentors placing insufficient emphasis on instructional leadership; weak or non existent mentor training; little attention to matching mentor with mentee; insufficient mentoring time; a lack of meaningful data for evaluation; and perhaps most commonly, underfunding (Hansford & Ehrlich, 2006).

One promising line of research on improving mentoring relationships emphasizes the importance of mentoring relationships that are reciprocal (Hobson & Sharp, 2005; Crow & Matthews, 1998; Geismar et al., 2000; Daresh, 2001; Zepeda, Bengtson, & Parylo, 2012). Lambert (2002) uses the idea of “reciprocal interdependency” to explain the importance of people working together to construct meaning, and of viewing leadership as a shared process, rather than a trait that can be inculcated in an individual. Similarly, Zachary (2005) develops the concept of “reverse mentoring” (2005, p. 194) to emphasize the potential for the mentor to benefit from the mentoring relationship.

As with field experiences in general, there is a shortage of systematic research on mentoring (Daresh, 1995), in part due to definitional challenges (Healy, 1997). Most research is based on participant reactions and perceptions rather than their performance (Hobson, 2003), due to the challenges with evaluating principals’ performance. Given the particular difficulties with tracing the impact of principal preparation overall to student learning outcomes, it is unlikely that it will be possible to disentangle the effects of in individual elements of preparation, such as field experience, let alone the impact of mentoring within that specific context.

Coaching

Coaching is increasingly viewed as being both separate from, and an essential addition to, mentoring relationships, for aspiring and novice principals. Coaching has been defined as a “learning relationship” that takes place through reflective and goal-focused conversation between novices and
Experts (Rhodes, 2012). According to research, coaching differs from mentoring in three main ways: it has a shorter time frame, a focus on specific skill development, and the coach is often from outside the school system (Bloom et al. 2003; Barnett and O’Mahony, 2008; Rhodes, 2012; Bloom et al., 2005). However, such distinctions are not applied consistently, and coaching and mentoring often in practice seem quite similar (Bush, Glover and Harris, 2007). For example in both mentoring and coaching, the purpose is to provide a “highly individualized approach to learning in an experiential fashion”(Daresh 1995, p. 498).

It is also clear that effective coaching relationships share many characteristics with effective mentoring relationships. Research emphasizes the importance of building trust and rapport, being open, and of matching principal and coach in terms of educational philosophy, school type, and the school-based challenges they face (Silver et al., 2009; Killion, 2012). There is a growing literature in this area on school leaders, and it is clear that coaching, as a discrete strategy, is increasingly popular in preparation programs, particularly with exemplary programs, including those focusing on charter leaders, like KIPP.

The gaps in the coaching literature mimic those found in the mentoring literature, with very few context specific explorations of what effective coaching relationships look like, and how they seem to work in practice. One exception to this is a recent longitudinal of fulltime coaches supporting a university-based preparation program. Lochmiller (2013) found that coaches used a variety of strategies to support their novice principals: first they used instructional coaching strategies such as modeling; as the novice principal grew in confidence, they used a more facilitative approach, acting more like a consultant. He concluded that questioning played a central role in the development process, with coaches able to “force” practicing administrators to reflect on their practices, and causing them to make changes they may not otherwise have made.

**Peer Mentoring**

Although the vast majority of research on field experiences focuses on expert-novice relationships, some has reported on the importance of peer mentoring (Muth, 2002; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Hansen & Matthews, 2002). While definitions of peer mentoring vary, the key difference with traditional mentoring is that it is takes place between people of ‘equal status’ (Topping, 2005, p. 321), i.e. people who are roughly equal in age, experience, and power, but still provides task and
psychosocial support (Angelique, Kyle, & Taylor, 2002). Education scholars like Browne-Ferrigno and Muth (2004) have emphasized the benefits of these often more informal “collegial-peer” relationships in helping aspiring principals solve problems and get some of the support that they need. Others have reported the benefits of using peers as mentors beyond the preparatory phase, as a form of continuous professional development (Crow & Matthews, 1998). Cheney and colleagues (2010) work on innovative programs notes that they placed a strong emphasis on having a strong cohort of peers who pushed each other to improve, and provided honest feedback to each other during their training and beyond. In this way they were seen to function as a ‘community of practice’ (p. 87).

As with the literature on mentoring and coaching, there is very little context specific research on peer mentoring relationships, particularly relating to charter leader preparatory field experiences. One exception to this is some descriptive research on the KIPP School Leadership Program (Cheney et al., 2010). One feature of their annual Summer Institute is that four to five aspiring principals meet twice weekly to develop their peer mentoring skills. KIPP believe that it helps participants build a strong peer network, as well as getting them into the habit of giving their peers specific, meaningful feedback (Cheney et al, 2010). In line with other innovative programs they share the understanding that the best way to learn is by example—intentionally creating experiential opportunities to “see what excellence looks like in real practice” (Cheney et al., 2010, p.80). These programs explicitly state that they view “coaching as an action or a strategy rather than a particular person’s role” and that coaching can involve a mentor, but also a facilitator, faculty, or a peer. However, there are no detailed investigations of such relationships, nor evidence of the impact of peer support within charter principal field experiences.

**Peer Networks.** As mentioned in part two of this review, peer networks play an important role in supporting practicing principals, and their benefits have been heavily emphasized for teachers in particular. In a leadership development context, they can be defined as structures built between peers for building knowledge and spreading effective practices (Sipple, Killeen, & Monk 2004; Spillane, Reiser & Reimer, 2002). It is clear from reviews of the literature on education leadership (Bush, Glover & Harris, 2007; Davies et al., 2005) that networking is a favored mode of leadership learning, and evidence from surveys of charter school leaders in the US certainly supports this (Campbell & Grubb, 2008). This makes
sense because the importance of leaders having strong networks has long been recognized in the generic leadership literature too (Kotter, 1982; Luthans, 1988). Little attention has been paid to the role of field experience in helping aspiring principals to form support networks, but innovative programs like that run by KIPP, are explicitly integrating network building in their programs (Cheney et al, 2010).

Insights on the likely benefits of network building during field experience can be derived from the growing literature on principal networks (Loeb & Rawlings, 2011), and on networks in general (Bartol & Zhang, 2007). The school based work highlights structural features of networks, and shows how they can help reduce the isolation that principals feel (Garber, 1992). Beyond the field of education, researchers suggest that networking has been under-utilized as a developmental tool. Bartol and Zhang (2007) argue that networks can facilitate leadership development by helping aspiring leaders deal with challenges, and can help them build interpersonal and relational skills. This research helps clarify some of the characteristics that might be visible in effective principal networks, and that aspiring principals might seek to create. For example, citing pioneering work by Granovetter (1972) and others, Bartol and Zhang conclude that weaker ties offer better opportunities for aspiring leaders to expand their capacities, and suggest the potential for different ties for different kinds of development challenges (2007, p.395).

Support Summary

This section has shown that aspiring principals can benefit from a broad range of support relationships. Coaching, peer mentoring, and peer networks offer important variations to the standard mentoring relationship, and can strengthen the kind and level of personal support that principals get during and after their preparation period. The attention paid by innovative programs and ‘gold standard’ charter preparation program suggests they recognize the importance of these simultaneously broader and more personal forms of support, although research has yet to explore the results of this recognition on participants in their programs.

Key Characteristic II: Authentic Leadership Practice Opportunities

The principal preparation literature is clear about the importance of having authentic opportunities to practice leadership tasks during field experiences. The Southern Regional Education
Board (O’Neill et al., 2005) recommends that aspiring principals should engage in a “continuum of practice” that begins with observation, and progresses to aspiring principals participating in, and ultimately leading, school-based activities related to instructional leadership. Such involvement is argued to provide opportunities for them to adjust to “context, culture, and expectations in a given situation before they are allowed to enter into a leadership role” (Havard, Morgan, & Patrick, 2010, p. 463), improving their capabilities and confidence along the way. Guidance on specific areas that principals should get practice at are covered at a broad level by state and national professional standards (Murphy, 2006; Wilmore, 2002). Examples of these include the Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium Standards (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008), and the Standards for Advanced Programs in Educational Leadership (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2011).

**Characteristics of Authentic Opportunities**

In more specific terms, Cheney and colleagues (2010) give examples of authentic practice opportunities. These range from: debriefing major leadership decisions with their mentor principal on a regular basis; implementing a new math curriculum in two grade levels; developing and implementing a plan for improving student achievement using assessment data across multiple grades; having supervisory responsibility for a few teachers, including many opportunities for observations and feedback; and developing and implementing an innovative program and measuring its effectiveness. However, no distinctions are made as to the specific nature of charter school-amplified tasks in this report. Research also suggests that authentic field experiences opportunities may come in different forms. Although historically they have been in the form of a capstone opportunity at the end of a training program, scholars have found that multiple periods of field experience, interwoven throughout a preparatory curriculum can be beneficial (Creighton & Johnson, 2002; Bottoms & Egelson, 2012), although logistically challenging to deliver. Others have argued that aspiring principals need field experiences in a variety of school settings, in order to increase the spectrum of challenges they are exposed to (Bottoms & Egelson, 2012; National Policy Board for Educational administration, 2011).

At least some of the ‘gold standard’ exemplary charter principal preparation programs are
running their field experiences in this more integrated way (Cheney et al., 2010), although as yet there is no research on how these field experiences play out in actual practice. Central to the field experiences run by these programs is that, in addition to being a learning opportunity for the aspiring principal, they are also “a time to deliver results for a school and its students, or at least a subset of students” (p. 81). The program organizers believe that giving the principals this real responsibility, and allowing them to have real accountability for results, is essential to ensuring that the field experience really is ‘authentic’. In this way, learning effects and outcomes can extend beyond knowledge acquisition to influence the skills that they will need to have to deal with real life complexity when they take up their full time role.

**Authenticity Challenges**

Despite agreement on the importance aspiring principals getting authentic practice opportunities, it is apparent from research that many aspiring principals do not get many chances to actually lead (Wilmore, 2002; Davis et al., 2005; O’Neill et al., 2005). This is particularly in areas related to their central instructional leadership responsibilities, and for charter leader, areas of amplified responsibility too (Campbell & Grubb, 2008). Very often, field experiences appear to involve aspiring principals “shadowing” their supervisor, and taking notes on their daily routine (O’Neill et al., 2007), or doing “busy work and bus duty” (Young, Petersen, & Short, 2002). Research by the Southern Regional Education Board found that fewer than one in four preparatory field experiences required aspiring principals to actually lead activities with teachers in important instructional areas including curriculum implementation and assessment, both of which are expected of successful instructional leaders (O’Neill et al., 2007). Part of the authenticity challenge may stem from the structure of the field experience itself, particularly if aspiring principals have to squeeze it in around a full time job (Lehman, 2013), or to complete it in the summer vacation. In addition, the unstructured nature of real school leadership also creates significant challenges for program designers seeking to create authenticity (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2007).
Authentic Practices Summary

The research in this section gives a clear picture of the importance of aspiring leaders getting chances to both observe, as well as participate in and lead, a broad range of real school leadership tasks. However, it also suggests that many principals do not get these opportunities, particularly in areas relating to instructional leadership, and – for charter leaders – in areas of charter amplified responsibility.

Key Characteristic III: Reflective Practice

The theoretical justifications for field experiences in principal preparation programs align with the literature on adult learning theory (Mezirow, 1981, 1991; Knowles, 1970, 1995), and are premised upon the importance of linking classroom-learned theory with authentic practice. The basic tenet of experiential learning theory, as advocated by scholars like John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, and Jean Piaget, is just this - that learning will be more effective when it begins with experience, particularly if that experience is problematic (Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993). Kolb (1984) presents one of the most highly regarded models of experiential learning. The model comprises a four-stage process, which is dialectic and cyclical: experience; observation and reflection; abstract reconceptualization; and experimentation. As can be seen here, although experience is central to learning in this model, reflection (acting as a mediator between theory and practice), and action on that reflection, have critical parts to play as well.

Defining Reflective Practice

The literature on reflective practice in education is extensive, and has played a central role in developing principal preparation programs for at least two decades. Perhaps the most influential scholar in this field is Schön, and his book, The Reflective Practitioner: How Practitioners Think in Action (1983). In this he summarizes reflective practice as a “dialogue of thinking and doing through which [one] becomes more skillful” (Schön, 1987, p. 31). Essentially, this involves learning through and from experience, gaining new insights and greater self-awareness (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; Mezirow, 1981). Arygris’ (1976) concept of ‘double loop learning’, which suggests that reflection on the reflective process itself, questioning assumptions and values that lead to the initial outcomes, is important, also plays a useful role here.
In understanding in more depth what reflective practice is, Schön makes the helpful distinction between reflection-on-action (retrospective), and reflection-in-action (thinking while doing). In both situations the practitioners are trying to build a new understanding of their actions, and refine their expertise. In the former the reflection is more detached and conscious than the latter, which Schön regarded as central to ‘professional artistry’. For this reason, novice practitioners, according to Schön, tend to apply theories in a mechanical way because they lack the ontological skill of knowing in action (i.e. tacit knowledge) that would allow them to make subtle adjustments to what they are doing, and how they are doing it, needed to respond more effectively to the actual demands of each specific situation. In research on how experienced school principals make decisions, they were found to use reflection-in-action far more readily than their novice principal counterparts (Rich & Jackson, 2006). This supports the idea that tacit knowledge increases with experience (Sternberg et al., 2000).

This idea of staged development is developed by philosopher Hubert Dreyfus (2001) explores this idea of staged developed through a seven-stage model of skill acquisition, which supports the idea of ‘stages’ between Schön’s novice and experienced practitioners. In this model practitioners move from novice, through advanced beginner, competence, proficiency, expertise, and mastery to a top final stage of practical wisdom. According to Dreyfus, while beginners can learn from information and rules in a classroom, moving beyond the third stage requires “involvement and mattering” (Dreyfus, 2001). In essence, to acquire more advanced leadership skills, such as those required by aspiring charter school leaders, individuals have to develop a more contextually situated understanding, and in a context that matters to them personally.

The ‘Situation’ Gap

Despite the volume of scholarship on reflective practice, there is little research on the practical and situated aspects of it that might help participants in this sector to guide and develop their own local reflective practices. As discussed in part two of this review, scholars such as Lave and Wenger (1991) first pointed to the importance of capturing the situational features of effective learning experiences. The lack of detailed research in this area is a problem for at least two reasons. Firstly, evidence suggests that in many instances, principals reflect in an essentially unreflective, ritualized way (Finlay, 2008, p.1). Boud
and Walker critique much reflective practice as ‘recipe following’, with “checklists which students work through in a mechanical fashion without regard to their own uncertainties, questions and meanings” (1998, p.193). A reason for this may be having insufficient time for reflection, since doing it effectively can be very time consuming and may not be realistic in pressurized work contexts (Quinn, 1998, 2000).

Secondly, there is disagreement about, the best format for reflective practice. For example, should it be formalized, or more tacit and fluid? Does one better reflect with others in a critical dialogue, or is it about quiet introspection? At the moment, the introspective and formal modes predominate in research in this area. For example, Reynolds and Vince (2004), and Finlay (2008) note in their research that even if reflection is part of a dialogic process, the onus is on the individual to reflect and evaluate their practice. However in the context of principal preparation field experiences with novice practitioners, work is emerging that emphasizes the importance and benefits of reflection activity involving others, even stretching to the practice of dialogue: from ‘reflective conversation’ (Ghaye, 2000), where a mentor and student for example seek to solve problems in a collaborative way; to ‘collegial reflection’ (St Germain & Quinn 2005); and ‘collegial reflective practice’ (Drago Severson, 2009, York-Barr, 2001, Day, 2000, Bengtson, Airola, Peer, & Davis, 2012).

**Reflective Practice Summary**

It is clear from the research in this section that regular reflective practice is highly valuable, and that is works in a cyclical way. It is also apparent that there are likely different levels of expertise that can be developed, and that a more collaborative and relational perspective on this process is important. What remains missing is research into concepts like context, situatedness, and collaborative processes, which describe good practice, and identify the conditions that support and enhance these.

**Framing the Research Opportunity**

By critically reviewing what is known about effective field experiences, pointing to significant gaps in the existing research base that overlap in this particular area, highlighting best practice, and outlining theory that seeks to cast light on how different elements interact, I’ve highlighted the need for
an in-depth, context-sensitive, study focused on understanding both what effective field experiences look like, and how they work in practice, to develop charter school leaders.

This knowledge base and associated gaps relate to the preparation programs in general, the charter leaders that take them, and the nature and characteristics of the field experiences themselves. With regard to program structure, it is clear that significant innovation has taken place over the past fifteen years, and that a variety of options beyond traditional university programs now exist, including charter-specific programs. Key program features have been identified, and include a substantial period of field experience. In addition, due to their alignment with these program features, charter-specific routes are believed to represent the ‘gold standard’ for charter leader field experiences. In terms of what we know about the kinds of individuals taking preparatory programs to become charter leaders, it is clear that significant variation exists in terms of the length and type of prior experiences they have.

It is also apparent that leadership demands of the roles they go into vary in important ways, based to a large extend on the kind of charter school they work for, with some entering their programs as interns while others are embedded in real leadership roles. Finally, regarding the field experiences themselves, it is evident that opportunities to get practice in key areas of the school leaders role, supported by a range of experienced principals and peers, combined with a variety of forms of reflective practice, are critical. However, in each of these areas, a significant gap exists between what is known ‘in theory’ and how it plays out in specific field experience realities, for charter school leaders in particular.

In terms of best practice, charter-specific programs emerge as one of the main standard bearers. From analysis of these programs, the features with most relevance to this research were: substantial periods of full-time field experience; participants engaged in real tasks central to their school leader role; high levels of program customization to the developmental needs of the participant (both in terms of content and method); use of a broad variety of support, including peer mentors, coaches, and an emphasis on network building; and support that extends beyond the field experience itself.

The third area where this literature review has provided guidance relates to theories and concepts that seek to explain how individuals learn from experience. While some of these theories are highly complex, the following core ideas emerge relating to effective experiential learning: it needs to be
deeply embedded in real contexts; it needs to have a social, interactive element; and it needs to offer opportunities and tools to help principals learn and embody that learning in their leadership practice. In terms of specific concepts that recognize these elements, ideas of apprenticeship, communities of practice, collegial reflection, and reciprocal support, provide potentially powerful guides to structuring and supporting such learning and its embodiment in practice.

Drawing all of this research and theory together, I constructed Table 2.1 below, which serves as a conceptual framework for my research. It highlights potential explanatory factors for effective charter leader field experiences. In doing this it includes likely features of effective field experiences, which help to focus attention on what effective field experience might look like in practice; it includes participant characteristics, which are likely impact on the customization that needs to be done to make a field experience work; and it highlights key theoretical constructs that may be useful in casting light on how all the elements play out and interrelate in practice.

Table 2.1 Potential Explanatory Features and Theoretical Constructs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field Experience Features</th>
<th>Individual Features</th>
<th>Theoretical Constructs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Site [Type; Number]</td>
<td>Participant Role [During training &amp; afterwards]</td>
<td>Adult Learning Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration</td>
<td>Prior Experience [Education; Business; Leadership]</td>
<td>Situated Learning Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type [Job-embedded etc.]</td>
<td>Type of school [Support; Challenges]</td>
<td>Experiential Learning Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support [Types; Number; Duration]</td>
<td></td>
<td>Reflection in Action/Reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customization [Content; Method]</td>
<td></td>
<td>on Action/Double Loop Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective Practice [Type]</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cognitive Apprenticeships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other: Standards-based assignments, Rigorous Evaluation; Leadership model</td>
<td></td>
<td>Reciprocity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Collegial/Peer reflection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From this table, I drew three implications that I believed would be particularly influential in my research. Firstly, attention to program customization is vital. Charter principals are likely to face broader roles than their traditional school counterparts, and these charter-specific roles may require additional training relating to the amplified managerial aspects of their role, as well as potentially detracting from their ability to focus on their instructional roles. Secondly, practice opportunities take on even greater significance. Since most charter principals do traditional university preparation programs, customization, at least in terms of charter-amplified areas, is unlikely to take place in the classroom. Therefore, having
extended opportunities through field experiences to get practical exposure to the charter side of their role, gaining context sensitive knowledge and a chance to develop the skills they require, is even more important. Thirdly, having a range of support relationships is beneficial. The value deriving from forms of support beyond traditional mentoring, including peer mentoring and peer networked forms of support, are increasingly being recognized where learning is not seen as the separate acquisition of primarily technical knowledge and skills by individuals so much as a process of social participation, with learning happening in relationship. These therefore need to be seen as a vital and integral feature of effective development environments.

Based on the explanatory factors highlighted in the table, and the implications drawn from it above, the following questions emerged which shaped my methodology and subsequent analysis:

• To what extent does program format (in terms of traditional versus alternative) have an impact on the features of field experience: specifically, can traditional university-based programs provide effective field experiences for aspiring charter school leaders?

• How does program/field experience customization play out in real field experiences: specifically what is the balance between program and personal input; and what do effective developmental continua look like in practice?

• To what extent do program/field experience features have an impact on creating authentic learning from ‘doing and reflecting’? More specifically, what does reflective practice look like in real situations? And finally,

• To what extents are principals able to make use of broader support relationships, including peer mentoring and network building? How do they play out in real practice?

* * *

In the methods chapter which follows, I was cognizant of two particular factors: firstly, the importance of getting a view of the current state of charter principal preparation in a specific local context, since such information would help frame what followed; and secondly, selecting a sample that
would enable me to explore in-depth, specific, contextually situated, and effective charter leader preparatory field experiences.
CHAPTER III

A PRAGMATISTIC APPROACH TO EXPLORING UNCHARTED TERRITORY

In this chapter I describe the pragmatic world-view and a mixed-methods design that underpins this study of principal preparation field experiences undertaken by aspiring charter school leaders. I describe the methodology used for this study, including explanations of the survey and interview instruments, the participants in the sample, the data collected, ethical considerations, my approach to data analysis, and the steps taken to reduce threats to data quality.

Research Design

I made use of a form of sequential, explanatory, mixed methods research to facilitate an in-depth and contextually situated exploration of effective field experiences. Mixed methods research uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative data “for the broad purposes of breath and depth of understanding and corroboration” (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007, p. 123). This approach has several advantages over conducting quantitative or qualitative methods in isolation, many of which are pertinent to this study. Firstly, it helps create a fuller picture of the research issue, allowing for information on broad trends to be gathered, as well as allowing for more in-depth personal perspectives to be collected (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

Secondly, it allows the researcher to compensate for the weaknesses of one method with the strengths of another (Greene, 2007). For example, critics of qualitative research point to the risk of researcher subjectivity and for findings to be value-laden, where as detractors of quantitative research lament the lack of contextual detail in the data, and suggest that statistically significant data often has little real world significance (Babbie, 2010; McKnabb, 2008). By using both approaches, mixed methods research provides qualitative data that can be used to help explain and give context specific meaning to quantitative data, while the quantitative data offers up more generalizable and more easily replicable findings (Cresswell, 2003; Rossman & Wilson, 1985; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998).

A third benefit is that the sequential structure allows for an emergent approach (Cresswell & Plano-Clark, 2007, p. 83) since questions in a second phase can be refined based on the basis of what is
learned in the first phase. All of these elements were important in this research because of the dearth of substantive empirical research on charter school principal training in general, and on the field experience components in particular.

I collected quantitative survey data and analyzed it prior to the second qualitative phase, in order to get a broad perspective on trends and salient issues with regard to charter leader preparation programs in general. This served in part to provide contextual detail for the second phase, and also gave an empirical basis for selecting participants for that phase. In the second stage the focus could then be on gathering in-depth, rich, ‘thick description’ (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and perspectives on the field experience component of the preparation from a small number of survey respondents.

This research was informed by a pragmatic worldview, concerned with discovering “what works” (Patton, 2002) with regard to charter principal field experiences. Following Guba (1990), I understood the term worldview to mean “a basic set of beliefs that guide action” (p.17), and defined my approach as pragmatic because my primary orientation was to making an impact on real-world practice. I believe, like social constructivists, that individuals construct their own meaning from events, and so it is important for research to understand these views in their full complexity, rather than trying to reduce them to less useful generalizations. However, the more scientific approach of the post-positivists is also helpful in identifying patterns and potential relationships between variables of interest (Cresswell, 2008). In appreciating the benefits of both qualitative and quantitative approaches, I chose methods that were best suited for getting useful answers to the questions I had. For the second phase of this research in particular, an inductive qualitative approach was appropriate because the nature and content of effective charter principal field experiences that form part of principal preparation programs are not well understood. From a social constructionist perspective, field experience is a complex and contextually embedded phenomenon, and so it is appropriate to examine the perceptions of practicing principals regarding their own development experiences (Patton, 2002).
Data

The data used in this research was collected in two separate phases. In the first phase, in November 2012, charter school leaders in Colorado completed a survey about their preparation programs. In the second phase, between March and May 2013, I interviewed twelve practicing charter principals about their preparation program field experiences.

During 2012-2013 there were 180 charter schools operating in Colorado, catering for almost 83,478 students. This represents 10% of the total K-12 public school enrolment in Colorado. These charter schools generally outperform non-charter schools on state performance measures (Colorado League of Charter Schools, 2013). Charter schools have been in operation in Colorado since 1993, and the charter school is thriving, with 15 new schools opening in the 2012-2013 school year alone. It is also home to innovative charter leader focused preparation initiatives run by the non-profit Get Smart Schools, and charter management organizations including the Denver School of Science and Technology, and STRIVE Prep, as well as the University of Denver’s nationally recognized Ritchie Program for School Leaders.

Sample

The universe of charter principals in Colorado is reasonably small and so I made efforts to include every practicing charter school principal in the survey. Working from an initial list provided by Colorado Department of Education’s Schools of Choice Office (the unit provides support to charter schools across the state), I then cross-referenced it with data from the Colorado League of Charter Schools (a non-profit that also works to support charter schools in Colorado). A complete list was not available, but I tried to ensure that my list was as up-to-date as possible by cross checking it with publicly available information on school websites and other electronic sources. According to the latest data available, 180 charter schools were operating in the state at time of the survey. However, as some of these schools have more than one principal, for example a middle school principal and a high school principal, and because some positions were vacant, it was not possible to determine with certainty the total number of charter principals in the state at the time of the survey.
One hundred and ninety five principals were successfully sent a link to the survey. Of those, one hundred and one principals completed the survey, a response rate of 52%. The table below compares the demographic profile of my respondents with the most recent national demographic information available for charter school leaders, taken from the US Department of Education’s National Schools and Staffing Survey (2012).

**Table 3.1 Comparison of Survey Sample with National Sample**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Colorado Sample</th>
<th>National Sample</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years of Experience</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 2</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>48*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Less than 40</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40–49 years</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>27*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50–59 years</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>46.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>53.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* SASS age ranges were: Less than 45; 45-54; and 55 years or more.

For the second phase of the research, I used a non-probability based approach to select my sample, known as purposive or judgmental sampling (Patton, 1990). In purposeful sampling, participants are selected to be ‘information-rich cases’ with regard to the central purpose of the study (Patton, 1990). Preliminary analysis of my first phase survey showed a correlation between a principal’s reported average leadership activity level during their field experience and their overall average evaluation scores for their program. As the activity level increased, the program evaluation rating also increased. The extant research emphasizes the importance of aspiring principals getting the opportunity to practice real leadership tasks during their field experience, and so, following Patton (1990), I used these criteria (i.e. high activity scores and positive evaluation scores) to select most of the participants. Some participants with low activity scores and high evaluation scores, and others with high activity and low evaluation scores were also selected to act as potentially disconfirming cases (Patton, 1990).
Participants Profile and Characteristics

Although the participants were not selected to be representative, they covered a broad spectrum in terms of their years of principal experience, their preparation program type (i.e. university based or charter specific provider), and their school type (e.g. independent or run by charter management organization). There were two important characteristics that the principals shared: firstly, though they were also not selected on the basis of the format of their field experience, all of them had had full time field experiences that lasted for at least one school year; secondly, at the time they took their preparation programs, all but two of them were job-embedded, (either as novice principals, working as the principal or principal-in-training, or as a school founder-in-training, or they were experienced principals) at the time of their preparation program. I note these characteristics here because their profile is therefore significantly different to the standard picture of people in preparation programs as aspiring principals, looking to be socialized into a role they do not yet have, through a part time or summer internship (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004). As a result, all but one of the principals faced real performance pressures that influenced the nature of the situated learning that these principals experienced in dealing with the immediate and messy challenges thrown up in the real world of leading a charter school.

Below I provide short profiles of the participants in order to give a sense of them as individuals, bringing with them very different skills and experiences as well being prepared for different school roles, and having varied preparatory program experiences:

Principal 1: In his first year leading the middle school of a stand-alone urban charter school, this novice charter principal had moved straight from a classroom teacher position in the same school. He started a two-year traditional university preparation program while working as a teacher, and completed it once he had his principal role. He was working as principal, and was based in his school, for the field experience period. Although technically this was a capstone activity in the program, in reality it lasted through the whole year. His mentor was the high school principal on the same site.

Principal 2: The most experienced leader in the sample, this former school district superintendent had 17 years of leadership experience, but had only been in his role at the helm of a rural independent charter for a couple of years. He completed a traditional university program whilst setting up
a traditional public school, and his field experience took place in a traditional public school during this transitional time. His primary mentor was the district superintendent, and he also worked with a former public school principal.

Principal 3: This principal had extensive management experience in the private sector, in business and in private schools, prior to becoming the leader of an independent urban charter school. He completed an alternative principal licensure program a few years after taking on his charter school role. He had a former public school principal as his formal program mentor.

Principal 4: This principal worked as a teacher in an independent charter school for a few years prior to enrolling in a nationally recognized university training program. During the program he completed an in-house principal in training year at his existing school, and was mentored by the school’s founder.

Principal 5: This principal was a classroom teacher in a traditional school for four years prior to being accepted on a highly competitive nation-wide charter school founder’s preparation program. He had field experiences in more than forty schools across the country over a two-year training period, and was responsible for setting up his urban charter school during this time. He had a range of mentoring and coaching relationships during this time.

Principal 6: This principal worked as a teacher in an independent urban charter school for six years prior to taking a principal-in-training role in the high school there. He completed a traditional university preparation program while doing his training year, and was supported in this process by the executive director of the school.

Principal 7: This principal trained as a teacher in a residency program, and taught for ten years before working in various roles administrative roles in public schools. She then got an administrative position in a small CMO, and did her training with university program while setting up new charter school for them that she then led. This school is now a stand-alone charter school in an urban area.

Principal 8: This principal had extensive management experience in the private sector prior to working as a teacher for four years. He accepted an assistant principal role in an urban charter school run by a CMO at the same time as enrolling in a traditional university preparation program. Mid-way through
the program he had to take on the principal role full time, and was supported by the CMO director during this time.

Principal 9: This principal completed a traditional preparation program in another state, after a five-year teaching career in public schools. She was the only one in the sample to have a standard one-year internship in a traditional public school. She then moved to an assistant principal role in an urban charter school run by a local charter management organization, and did a year long training program there before becoming principal. In her first internship, her mentor was the principal at that school.

Principal 10: With an education career spanning 26 years, a number of them in leadership roles in private schools, this principal took over a suburban independent charter school seven years ago. She took a one-year alternative principal preparation program whilst working as a school leader last year, in order to attain her principal license, and was formally mentored by a retired public school principal.

Principal 11: This principal completed a traditional university program in another state, after having taught for five years, and worked overseas for a non-profit. During his internship, he was also working in an administrative position in the same traditional public school. He then took a charter leader role after completing his training. The principal of the school where he worked mentored him during his field experience year.

Principal 12: This principal trained with Teach for America then joined a nationally recognized charter school network as a teacher. He worked as a teacher for five years prior to taking their in-house principal training designed for school founders. This included field experiences in charter and traditional public schools. After eight years as a principal he took their training program again, and was coached by the same person he worked with in his first training period, in order to found a second school. He now works for an independent urban charter school.

Instruments

I carried out elite interviews (Harvey, 2011) with twelve Colorado based K-12 education experts about the state of charter leader preparation prior to completing my survey. The interviewees held a variety of positions related to principal preparation in Colorado, representing state, district and school
levels, and included senior district administrators, university preparation program directors, a charter
management organization chief executive, a representative from an independent charter school
authorizer, education researchers, a professional development center director, and a director from
Colorado Department of Education. The interviews were conducted by telephone and in person, and
lasted an average of 25 minutes. The questions focused on their perspectives about the quality of charter
school leader preparation in the state, the key leadership training needs of charter leaders, strengths and
weaknesses with programs, including the field experience in particular, and asked if there were issues
related to preparation they would like to know more about. Their feedback was largely in-line with the
extant literature that significant gaps existed in the preparation experiences of most charter school
leaders, and that job-embedded preparation opportunities seemed to be the most effective. I used their
interview responses as a check that I had covered all the key areas in my survey, and to highlight areas
where I wanted to focus my questions.

Survey Instrument

The survey was designed to collect information about the nature and quality of the preparation
programs completed by practicing charter school principals in Colorado. The questions were largely taken
from a recent national survey of school principals about their initial preparation conducted by researchers
as Stanford University (Darling-Hammond et al, 2007). Because this survey did not discriminate between
charter and traditional school principals, it was important to add and adapt some questions using a survey
by the National Charter School Research Project (Campbell & Grubb, 2008) and work by the non-profit
charter leader organization New Leaders. The items were designed to evaluate principals’ perceptions in
three main areas: their principal preparation program in general, the internship component of that
program specifically, and their subsequent professional development experiences.

I put the draft survey into web format on Survey Monkey, and then ran a pre-test with some
former traditional and charter school principals, who were asked to comment on the survey’s readability,
length, comprehensiveness, and redundancy (Presser et al., 2004). Refinements were made in the light of
their comments. The final questionnaire used appears in Appendix A.
Interview Protocol

The semi-structured interview questions that framed this research were based on factors identified in the extant literature on pre-service internships and residencies, and included mentoring, having a developmental continuum of practice, real leadership tasks, supervision, feedback, reflection, and coaching, as well as in the case of more innovative university based and non-traditional programs, more personalization, and extended periods of support. The interview protocol was based on questions asked by the Stanford University research (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007) on principal preparation field experiences, and the National Charter School Research Project’s interview questions for charter leaders on their initial preparation. These questions were refined and refocused in light of quantitative findings (see Appendix B for the semi-structured interview protocol).

Ethical Considerations

Although I anticipated no serious ethical threats posed to the participants by this study, various safeguards were employed to ensure the protection of their rights. Firstly, informed consent was received from every participant at each stage of the study, in accordance with Institutional Review Board guidelines. Secondly, I was careful to de-identify both survey and interview data, in order to keep the names of the participants confidential. Every aspect of the research was carried out in accordance with University of Colorado Denver’s Colorado Institutional Review Board, and I gained their consent for each stage of my research as per their guidelines.

Data Collection

In the first phase of the research, all the charter school principals in the state that I obtained an accurate email address for (196 in total) were sent an email explaining the purpose of the research and asking them to participate in an online survey. The email contained a link to the survey allowing for the tracking of responses. Those that did not respond initially were then sent up to 3 reminder messages, via the Survey Monkey site, with tailored requests (e.g. talking about how little was known about rural charter schools, or the importance of hearing from those affiliated with a CMO) in order to try and improve the response rates. At the same time I enlisted the support of a few well-known people in the
charter school sector (including current principals, senior figures in a charter authorizing body, the League of Charter Schools, and Colorado Department of Education’s Schools of Choice unit, and a couple of people involved in charter school professional development state-wide). I asked them to encourage their charter principal colleagues to respond to the survey. This strategy worked well, and response rates jumped immediately following such appeals.

For the second phase of research, I contacted twenty principals that fell within the purposive sampling criteria outlined above, asking them by email to participate in the second phase of research. I sent up to three reminder emails, until I reached 12 positive responses. The face-to-face interviews took place over a period of approximately eight week, at the school site of each of principals, and lasted an average of sixty minutes. Each interview followed a semi-structured format (Merriam, 2009) and consisted of seven questions with a number of follow-ups and probes (see Appendix B).

**Data Analysis**

In analyzing the survey data from the first phase of research, I used SPSS statistical software to calculate basic frequency distributions and descriptive statistics, in order to gain a picture of the broad state of charter leader preparation in Colorado. Prior to completing the analyses I prepared a codebook, created a data file, and cleaned the data following standard processes (Pallant, 2010). I then ran a number of cross-tabulations to try and discern if there were any significant patterns between the type of preparation and field experience a principal had, and their demographic and school characteristics, in order to identify features that might warrant further investigation in phase two of the research. Due to the small number of alternative / charter program participants in the sample I was not able find many statistically significant differences.

For the second phase of research the interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed by two independent transcribers via the freelance website oDesk. I crosschecked the complete transcriptions against the original recordings for accuracy and uploaded them to Dedoose, a web-application that facilitates analysis of qualitative data. The initial coding tree headings were determined by the interview questions, which were in turn determined by the literature review and survey, and I later refined them on
the basis of emerging patterns in the data. The Dedoose search function was used to check on key terms once each transcription had been coded and recoded multiple times. This process was an iterative one, involving moving in “analytic circles” (Cresswell, 2007, p. 151) between the transcriptions, the literature, my growing lists of codes, and back again. Significant use was made of the memoing function provided in the Dedoose software to link excerpts that seemed to be talking about the same issues. Ultimately the research findings were selected on the basis of the number of respondents mentioning them, and the quality of the contribution, as perceived by me in conjunction with other findings and the extant research. Based on analysis and synthesis, I was then able to think about the broader implications of this research, and to formulate conclusions and both practical and research related recommendations, which are presented in Chapter VI of this research.

**Methodological Considerations & Limitations**

The primary goal was to “understand a real life phenomenon in depth”, in this instance the impact of field experience on charter principal leadership development, “encompassing important contextual conditions”, in this case the selected research sites in Colorado, and relying on “multiple sources of evidence” (Yin, 2009, p.18), in this case the survey and in-person interviews. Given this goal, and pragmatic worldview I have espoused, the essential approach of this research was to take all steps possible to ensure the “trustworthiness” of the research, in line with Cresswell (2007). Some of the conditions that limit this study relate in general to the primarily qualitative research methodology I used, and some are inherent in the particular research design that I created. From the outset of this research I tried to account for these limitations and sought to reduce their impact where possible. An important factor to address was my own subjectivity as a researcher. The concern here is that one finds what one is looking for (Drapeau, 2002). Recognizing this possibility, I acknowledged my research agenda from the outset, as shown in Chapter I. Specific issues relating to credibility, dependability, and transferability are explained below.

*Credibility:* This concerns the validity of the conclusions I reached, both from methodological and interpretive standpoints. From a methodological perspective, I used a mixed methods approach in order

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to yield a fuller and richer picture of effective charter principal preparation field experiences. In terms of interpretative validity, the analytical processes I went through have been explained in this chapter. I was also careful to look for disconfirming evidence and variation in my sample's responses, and have presented a range of responses where appropriate in my findings, as discussed at length by Lincoln and Guba (1985). In reviewing and discussing my findings with colleagues I have also attempted to ensure that the reality of the field experiences presented by the interview participants was accurately reflected, and through providing verbatim quotes of many of their responses in this final text, provide the interested reader with the basic evidence I have used in my analysis and interpretations.

**Dependability:** Although I did not explicitly focus on reliability, many of my survey questions were drawn from pre-existing research, and the questions that my interviews were based on have similarly been used in previous studies. I have also been concerned with “transparency of method” (Merriam, 2009), documenting my procedures and in so doing, creating an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of my thinking and decision making, including memos, interview transcripts, and field notes, in order to facilitate any similar investigations in the future.

**Transferability:** The small interview sample I used could lead people to argue that this limits the possibility of generalizing my results to other groups of principals, and other field experience routes. I did not set out explicitly to provide generalizable results, but rather, by giving rich ‘thick description’ of the participants and their particular preparation contexts, I have attempted to facilitate the transferability of my research findings. Following Patton’s (1990) idea of “context bound extrapolations” (p.491), which he defines as “speculations on the likely application of findings to other situations under similar, but not identical, conditions” (p. 489), I hope that readers will be able to determine to what extent my particular findings here ‘resonate’ with them and decide for themselves whether and how findings can be applied to other settings and their own particular contexts (Erlandson et al. 1993; Cresswell 2007).

* * *

In this chapter I described the methodology used in this study. I chose to use a mixed-methods approach to investigate what works in charter principal preparation program field experiences. The participant sample was made up of 101 practicing charter school principals, who completed an online
survey about their preparation experiences, and twelve of whom were then purposively selected for an in-depth personal interview about the field experience component of their program. In selecting a primarily qualitative approach I hoped to contribute to the literature on school leadership by “shed[ing] light in dark corners”, and in doing so to uncover “meaning where no meaning has been clearly understood before” (Shank, 2002, p. 11). It is to this task of casting light that this research now turns.
CHAPTER IV

OVERVIEW COLORADO CHARTER LEADER PREPARATION PROGRAMS

This is the first of two chapters outlining my research findings. In it I present the main results from the charter school leader survey that constituted the first stage of my research. As highlighted in Chapter II, there is a quality gap between so-called exemplary preparation programs, and the majority of traditional university based preparation programs (Darling-Hammond et al, 2007; Levine, 2005; Hess & Kelly, 2005). Since most charter school leaders do traditional university based preparation programs, which research suggests generally do not cover important managerial aspects of the expanded charter leader role (Campbell & Gross, 2008; Campbell, 2012), they are unlikely to have all their charter specific needs met. This is likely to be true of the field experience component of their programs too, where research confirms many programs struggle to deliver in a meaningful and authentic way (Darling-Hammond et al, 2009; Levine, 2005; Fry, O’Neill, & Bottoms, 2005).

In this chapter, my findings provide a snapshot of pre-service preparation programs taken by practicing charter leaders in one state. Overall they provide support for previous research on charter school pre-service preparation programs (Campbell & Gross, 2008; Campbell & Grubb, 2008). I report here that a majority of charter school leaders were trained in traditional university-based programs, and that many did not feel very well prepared by their programs, particularly for their charter-amplified roles. Although a majority said that their field experiences contained exemplary features like mentoring and exposure to real world problems, many did not get a chance to actively participate in or lead activities in areas central to their school leader roles. Active participation opportunities were particularly lacking in charter-amplified areas of practice. I also describe the positive relationship that exists between field experience activity levels and overall program evaluation for my sample. Finally, I explain that participants had a high level of exposure to, and appreciation for, experiential forms of in-service professional development activities.
In what follows, I present these findings in more detail, highlight results that relate to improving our understanding of effective field experience for charter school leaders, and draw out the implications for the second qualitative phase of my research.

**A Shift Towards Alternative Provision**

Echoing existing research on charter leader preparation, the picture that emerges from this survey is that traditional university-based preparation programs prepare most charter principals. As Table 4.1 shows below, almost 60% of the sample took such programs, with just over 20% taking alternative preparation routes (the majority of which were charter-specific programs), and the remaining 20% having had no formal pre-service preparation at all.

**Table 4.1: Charter Leaders Preparation Program Type**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preparation Program Type</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional university-based</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative programs (total)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charter Leader specific</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charter Management Organization sponsored</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not do a formal program</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although a majority of charter principals reported being trained in traditional university programs, this percentage is significantly lower than the average of 75-80% reported in earlier surveys (Campbell & Grubb, 2008). Statistics on the numbers of charter principals taking alternative training routes are not available for comparison with this survey, but a recent report by the Center for American Progress (Cheney & Davis, 2011) highlights that alternative pathways are increasing. Based on this and other state-specific reports, it seems reasonable to conclude that provision of alternative routes has significantly increased since the last charter specific preparation survey in 2008. On the evidence of this survey at least, it is clear that the proportion of principals taking alternative preparation routes has grown as the overall number of charter schools has grown.

I was interested to see whether and what differences there were between the responses of the alternative and traditionally trained principals on their training. In particular, to see if they offered
support to previous qualitative findings that have suggested alternative programs offer higher levels of personalization, more substantial periods of field experience, a greater focus on charter specific skills, and are overall more effective in terms of their preparation of charter leaders (Campbell & Gross, 2008; Cheney et al., 2010). However, I found few statistically significant differences in these areas, perhaps because the alternative sample was fairly small. Chi-square analyses did reveal that the alternative sample were significantly younger, less experienced, and less likely to be certified than their traditionally trained counterparts.¹ This supports extant, more anecdotal evidence that more young leaders are going directly into charter school leadership, rather than working in traditional public schools first, and may be less concerned with gaining ‘official’ recognition of their training in terms of certification, which is not a state requirement for charter school leaders in many states, including Colorado.

The results thus far suggest that fewer than one in four charter school principals are trained in programs designed specifically with their needs in mind. What we cannot tell from this snapshot is whether those on alternative routes are actually getting training that is more targeted to their needs, and if they are, how customization works during the field experience part of it. Unanswered too, is the question of whether they actually feel better prepared as a result? It is hard to tell the implications of having younger and more inexperienced aspiring principals, particularly in terms of the field experience component of preparation programs. In consequence of these outstanding questions, I decided to focus in the next phase of my research on finding out whether and what kind of relationship there was between effective field experience and the type of preparation program principals did, the extent to which participants were or were not able to get customized development experiences, and whether this seemed to be linked to their experience levels or the type of program they were doing.

Charter Skill Gap

Turning to evidence of differences between program types in terms of their provision of charter-amplified content, the first part of the survey asked principals to evaluate their programs in terms of general content and pedagogical features. It was clear from this that, although on average, the programs

¹ Age: p=.001 chi square, phi value .426, indicating a moderate positive relationship; Experience: p=.053, phi=.301, also a moderate positive relationship; and Certification: p=.000 and phi=.433)
measured up quite well against the exemplary program features outlined by Darling-Hammond et al., in their landmark 2007 report on exemplary principal preparation programs, a significant gap existed in terms of charter specific skill preparation.

Looking first at the general features, the table shows the scores given by principals in my survey compared with the exemplary programs researched by Darling-Hammond et al., and the national program survey they also conducted (2007). The survey results suggest that on average, the programs taken by Colorado charter principals were perceived as weaker than the exemplary program sample, and comparable to the national programs sample, in the three broad areas relating to leadership focused program content, active, student-centered instruction, and reflection-rich program content.

**Table 4.2: Graduates’ Perceptions of Program Features & Pedagogy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extents were the following qualities/practices true of your leadership preparation program? 1=Not at All . . . 5=To a Great Extent</th>
<th>Survey Mean (n=86)</th>
<th>Wallace Exemplary Program Mean (n=242)</th>
<th>Wallace National Mean (n=629)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership focused program content (scale)</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>4.3***</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection rich program content (scale)</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>4.3***</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active student centered instruction (scale)</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practicing school/district administrators taught the program</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.9***</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was in a student cohort</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>4.5***</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faulty members were very knowledgeable about their subject</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>4.6***</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The program included lectures</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.7***</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*** = Statistically significant differences between exemplary and national program scores

While it is difficult to draw much from these results, in particular given that the previous research was conducted a number of years ago, they do at suggest that overall, most charter principals did not experience anything like an ‘exemplary’ program. Focusing on the content that was emphasized in the preparation programs, and in line with previous research, my survey results indicated that traditional programs do not prepare charter school leaders well for their expanded responsibilities (Campbell & Grubb, 2008). More surprisingly, the results also suggest that, on average, alternative programs are not

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2 These comparisons are aggregate means reflecting program graduates’ reports. All those in the Colorado survey were practicing principals, as were those in the national sample, while some of those in the exemplary program sample were not.
doing a much better job. The table below highlights program content areas described in existing research as being “amplified and extended” in a charter school context. It shows the percentage of survey respondents agreeing that their program emphasized these areas not at all or a little, as compared with those agreeing it emphasized them to a great or very great extent. It shows that 9 out of 10 principals completed programs that did not emphasize fund raising; just over 8 out of 10 experienced little emphasis in negotiating with districts and traditional public schools; and only just over a third felt that their program emphasized budgeting and human resources issues.

**Table 4.3: Preparation Program Content Emphasis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To what extent did your program emphasize the following content areas?</th>
<th>% 1&amp;2</th>
<th>% 4&amp;5</th>
<th>Mean score N=86</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1=Not at All ... 5=To a Very Great Extent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budgeting and Resource Management</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fund Raising</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiating with Districts &amp; Traditional Public Schools</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.6+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance &amp; Board Relations</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resources Policies &amp; Practices</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>36 *</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquiring &amp; Managing Facilities</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

+ n=85

These findings echo the National Charter School Research Project findings (Campbell & Grubb, 2008) that charter leaders do not get exposure to important areas of their role in their pre-service preparation programs. This is not that surprising given that many of them would have done the training with the intention of being traditional public school principals, and later switched to the charter sector, but nevertheless, the fact remains that charter leaders face a large skills gap when starting their charter school roles.

This lack of attention to charter-specific skills is echoed in the program evaluation findings of the survey. Table 4.4 below shows that there was significant variation in the extent to which current charter principals felt prepared by their programs, but leaders were still less likely to report feeling well prepared in areas of charter-amplified responsibility. Notably, only one in four principals reported feeling well or very well prepared by their programs for managing the budget, and less than one in ten felt well or very well prepared to manage facilities, fundraise, or negotiate with districts and traditional public schools.
Table 4.4: Principal Evaluations of Preparedness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How effectively did your formal leadership program prepare you to do the following? 1=Not at All ... 5 =Very Well</th>
<th>% 1+2</th>
<th>% 4+5</th>
<th>Mean Score (N=81)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ensuring Effective Teaching &amp; Learning</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurturing Student &amp; Staff Efficacy</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading Learning Organizations</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building School &amp; Community Culture</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Law &amp; Regulatory Compliance</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Leadership</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focusing on Data &amp; Outcomes</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resources Policies &amp; Practices *</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduling &amp; Procedures</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using Technology</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budgeting and Resource Management *</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance &amp; Board Relations *</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquiring &amp; Managing Facilities *</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiating with Districts &amp; Traditional Public Schools *</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fund Raising *</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Areas of amplified and extended charter leader responsibility

As with the previous table, the low scores in charter-amplified areas are not altogether surprising because it is likely that they would not be covered to the extent required by charter leaders in programs serving traditional public school leaders. However, the implication that many charter principals are to a large extent left to ‘sink or swim’ once they get into their leadership roles is important to note. Given that managing board relations and budgeting effectively make a huge difference between a school leader being successful at their role, or not - finding out how programs are able to expose their participants to these areas during field experience is of critical importance. Supporting the desirability of addressing this skills gap, at least one in three of the principals surveyed expressed a desire for more emphasis in their

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³ Scale created by combining indices: not / a little, and well / very well prepared.
training on all the areas of amplified responsibility, as Table 4.5 below shows.

Table 4.5: Desirable Program Extra Emphasis with Benefit of Hindsight

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hindsight Prep More Emphasis</th>
<th>% Yes (n=101)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Budgeting</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fund Raising</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiating with Districts</td>
<td>37**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance &amp; Board Relations</td>
<td>40**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resources</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

** Significant (p<0.05) difference between traditional and alternative program scores

In this table, some evidence of differences between traditional and alternative programs emerge, with principals trained in traditional programs being significantly more likely than those trained in alternative programs to want more emphasis on governance and negotiating with districts. It is not possible to infer whether this means that principals trained in alternative programs felt better prepared in these areas, or whether the desire for additional training stemmed from systematic differences in the kinds of schools these principals were running, but it is at least possible that the former is true. Taking board relations as an example, traditional principals have little to no contact with a board, since their district superintendent manages it, and so traditional programs are unlikely to focus on it. Therefore it would not be until they became a charter leader that they would have any exposure to the role, unless their field experience was in a charter school, or they explicitly sought out such exposure themselves.

Overall from this we can see that, on average, the programs taken by principals in the sample fell well short of the exemplary programs. Although they seemed to do a reasonable job of covering general leadership content, they did a much poorer job of covering areas of charter-amplified responsibility. It is not possible to tell from these scores the extent to which these charter-specific gaps matter, although Table 4.5 above suggests that for many practicing principals, they did matter enough for them to wish in retrospect that they had been covered better. It is also not possible to tell from this data how those that did feel better prepared in charter-amplified areas got their experience. In the subsequent phase of research therefore, I decided to focus on finding out: if principals had opportunities during their field experience to practice in areas of charter-amplified responsibility; how they worked in practice; how
important they felt these opportunities were; and why they did or did not feel they were important. In this way I hoped to get insights into the impact that lack of exposure to these areas had to principals once they were working in charter schools, as well as to find out how the gaps might best be addressed for future programs.

**Programs Echo Exemplary Characteristics**

The survey asked principals about the nature and quality of their preparatory field experiences. The vast majority (87%) of principals in the sample reported completing field experiences, which compares well with previous research. The Darling-Hammond et al survey (2007) found that 89% of those in exemplary programs had internships/field experiences, compared with just 72% in the national program sample. One significant difference arose between traditional and alternative program types here, with those doing a traditional program more likely to report having a field experience internship.\(^4\) This is somewhat surprising, given the purported focus of alternative programs on field experience (Campbell & Grubb, 2008). It could be explained by systematic differences in how participants interpreted the question, with those engaged in alternative program residency types of field experience consistently not viewing them as internships (the language used alongside field experience in the survey).

An alternative explanation might be that some alternative programs could have particularly limited budgets, and so are not able to afford for principals to engage in a field experience.

Just under half the sample reported having part-time field experiences that were completed while working full time, or during the summer vacations. A similar number reported being able to focus on their field experience full time. Specific figures are not available from the exemplary program research, but they did report that principals in exemplary programs were much more likely than those in the national sample to have completed full time field experiences (Darling-Hammond et al, 2007).

In Chapter II, the research on effective preparation programs pointed to the importance of a number of field experience features, including having an experienced mentor, a developmental continuum of practice, an opportunity to engage in substantive action-reflection cycles, and having

\(^4\) Chi square = .003, phi value = .398
authentic experiences anchored in real world problems. The charter principals in this research reported that their program field experiences measured up pretty well against these criteria. Their responses also had a positive relationship with overall program evaluation scores. As Table 4.6 below shows, a large majority of principals in the survey were mentored by existing principals (75%) and had field experiences anchored in real world problems (84%). A majority (54%) also reported having experienced a developmental continuum of practice, having assignments linked to principal standards (63%), substantive action-reflection cycles (54%), and a personalized learning experience (64%).

Table 4.6: Principal Perceptions of Field Experience Features

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience Description</th>
<th>% 1&amp;2</th>
<th>% 4&amp;5</th>
<th>Mean (n=72)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anchored in real world problems</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School-based assignments linked to standards</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity spectrum from observation to leadership</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear expectations / processes / schedule</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing, close supervision</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring by existing principal</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rigorous evaluations</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substantive action-reflection cycles</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalization</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most significant in this table, are the numbers of principals reporting low levels of support, reflective activity, and field experience personalization/customization. Half of the principals reported engaging in only moderate or less amounts of action-reflection. Just over one in three reported minimal amounts of field experience personalization, and one in four reported only moderate to no mentoring by an existing principal. It is clear therefore that there is substantial variation in the field experiences that charter school principals reported having, and that many principals did not complete field experiences that met with exemplary field experience criteria. Also highly significant is the fact that only 54% reported having an activity spectrum, since this element gets to the heart of the ‘authentic’ practical experience deemed essential in existing research for effective field experience.

A difficulty with interpreting these results is that the scores themselves do not reveal the extent

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5 Composite aggregate scores
to which these features reflect best practice in these areas. This is partly because these measures are perceptual rather than objective. For example, one principal may have rated their mentor-principal highly while another scored theirs lower, despite both mentors performing similarly. There are also likely to be significant implementation differences, for example, a substantive action-reflection cycle for one person may in reality be fairly superficial in comparison to another person’s, and yet they may have given the same scores in their survey. It is not possible to tell any of this from the survey data. Nor is there any way to objectively measure the effectiveness of their field experience, since there is no data measuring pre and post performance/knowledge/capacity etc. The only indicator to guide this research was the positive relationship between average field experience feature scores and overall average program evaluation scores, as outlined in the section below.

In summary, although most principals in the sample had field experiences as part of their programs, and these field experiences included exemplary features for many of the participants, significant questions remain with regard to the extent to which the features were ‘delivered’ effectively, and about what they looked like and how they worked when they were delivered effectively. Leaving aside the features to do with participant evaluation and assessment linked to standards, since both are vast areas with active research fields, and are not so intimately concerned with effective field experience from a participants point of view, I decided to focus during the second phase on finding out more about what effective mentoring, developmental continuums of practice, action-reflection cycles and field experience personalization actually looked like, and how they seemed to work in practice. Evidence in the next section illustrates how I identified principals within the sample to ask these questions in more detail in the second phase of research.

**Practice Gap in Field Experience**

As mentioned in Chapter II, a great emphasis has been placed on principals getting exposure to real world problems and having authentic practical opportunities to practice leadership roles and tasks during their field experiences. In this survey, my findings supported previous findings (Levine, 2005; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007) that many principals did not get these practical opportunities. As shown in
Table 4.7 below, it was clear that a substantial number of charter principals were not able to even observe, let alone participate in or lead, key areas of leadership responsibility. In this sense their continuums of practice were rather stunted, particularly in areas of charter-amplified responsibility. The table below highlights these areas, and includes a couple of more general leadership areas at the bottom for the purposes of comparison.

The table below shows that fewer than half (47%) of the principals in my sample got to participate in or lead activities to do with budgeting and resource management; just under half (40%) did not participate in or lead human resources related activities; and less than one in three got hands-on opportunities related to fund-raising (31%), negotiating with districts (27%), and governance (37%).

**Table 4.7: Field Experience Activity Level by Content Area**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field Experience Activity Level (1=did not observe ... 4=led)</th>
<th>Did not observe</th>
<th>Observed</th>
<th>Participated</th>
<th>Led</th>
<th>Mean N=72</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Budgeting</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fund Raising</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiating with Districts</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governance &amp; Board Relations</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resources</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Law</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduling &amp; Procedures</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading Learning</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building School Culture</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Again here, the low scores in charter-amplified responsibility are not that surprising, but given the importance of these tasks, especially with regard to budgeting and human resource management, they do point to a significant gap that principals would have had to fill once they were working in charter schools. A few of the scores were significantly correlated with the overall evaluation scores shown in Table 4.3, so for example, fundraising activity scores here, were correlated with overall preparation scores. This suggests that in some instances at least, getting practice in a real situation does help to prepare principals.
The figure below shows the relationship between the principals’ average field experience activity levels and their average program evaluation scores. Although not statistically significant, the scatterplot shows a positive relationship between the two sets of scores, where as the average field experience activity level increases, so does the average program evaluation score. This finding is supported by extant research into the importance of having practical leadership experience during field experience (Cheney et al., 2010; Davies & Darling-Hammond, 2012). As described in Chapter III, this was basis for the sampling in the second phase of research, and the black triangles on the figure represent the principals in my second phase interview sample.

![Relationship between FE Activity Level and Program Evaluation](image)

**Figure 4.1: Relationship between FE Activity Level and Program Evaluation**

Although it is possible to see exceptions to this general relationship, with some very high program evaluation scores associated with lower activity scores, and similarly high activity scores associated with low evaluation scores, the general trend is a positive one.

From the findings reported in this section, it is clear that substantial variation exists in the extent to which charter principals were able to get practical experience. It also appears that getting practical experience has a positive relationship with how well prepared principals feel overall. What this phase of
the research was not able to cast light on, was what the ‘active’ principals actually got to do in the substantive areas during their field experiences, or what factors might explain the exceptions to the general trend identified above. As a result, in the second phase of research I decided to focus on finding out more about what an ‘active’ field experience looked like in practice; how practical experience was achieved in areas of charter-amplified responsibility; and the extent to which practice was gained in a graduated manner, as suggested by the notion of a developmental continuum of practice.

**Importance of In-Service Experiential Professional Development**

The survey concluded with questions asking about in-service professional development activities, asking about the types of development they had, and their perceived utility of each type. Their responses revealed that almost all of them had taken part in intensive, experientially grounded, and social forms of professional development, and the vast majority of them found these experiences very helpful. Table 4.8 below shows the types of professional development done, and the percentage of those that did it that found it useful or very useful. Contextually situated development activities like peer observation and coaching, principal networks, and school visits, had the highest participation figures, with a substantial majority of charter principals taking part in them, and rating them as useful or very useful.

**Table 4.8: Participation and Helpfulness of In-service Professional Development**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Helpfulness of professional development (1=not useful ... 4=very useful)</th>
<th>% Participated</th>
<th>% Useful/ very useful</th>
<th>Mean (n)</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University courses</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>2.7 (47)</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School visits</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>3.7 (88)</td>
<td>0.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>3.5 (55)</td>
<td>0.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer observation &amp; coaching</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>3.6 (73)</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal network</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>3.6 (78)</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courses</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>3.0 (52)</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor / Coach</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>3.6 (58)</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMO training</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>3.6 (31)</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authorizer training</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>2.9 (34)</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is also interesting to note that there is more variation in the perceived helpfulness of university courses and authorizer training, as measured by standard deviation scores, suggesting perhaps that there
are some very good and relevant courses and trainings from these providers, and also some that are very poor. In comparison with findings on a similar question asked in the Darling-Hammond et al. research (2007), charter principals here report in line with the exemplary programs, that they engaged in experiential and contextually situated forms of professional development and found them very helpful.

In summary, these findings support the picture emerging from recent research that experiential and social forms of training are very valuable. They also complement findings about the importance of principal networks and peer learning opportunities for practicing principals. I did not ask directly about peer and network forms of support in the pre-service preparation questions in my survey because there was no precedent in previous surveys, and because there was little discussion of its importance in the pre-service literature in general. However, because it is clearly such a valuable way of supporting leader development once principals are working as leaders, and because there is support for network-based and peer learning in the general literature on leadership development, I decided to focus in the second phase on finding out whether it played a role in effective field experience; and if it did, how it worked in reality.

**Drawing It All Together**

The findings from this quantitative stage of the research echo the extant literature, showing that on average, preparation programs overall do not do a very good job of preparing charter school leaders, and in particular that they underperform on delivery of the charter-amplified content areas. It is also clear that considerable variation exists in terms of program content, and in terms of what kinds of field experiences participants had. In particular it highlighted that a significant number of charter principals were not able to get substantial practical experience during their field experience, particularly again in charter-amplified areas.

In highlighting these areas, the survey results gave support to issues raised in the literature review, and highlighted a number of the potential explanatory features presented in Table 2.1 in that chapter. In the list below I briefly discuss each of these features:

- The form of field experience: some of the most effective field experiences reported by my sample were from charter leaders who took traditional preparation programs, while...
in alternative programs. Individuals from both groups were in my purposive interview sample, and so I hoped to derive insights from them about similarities and differences in each type of program, particularly relating to areas of amplified charter responsibility, as well as more structural features of the field experiences, such as field experience duration and location.

- The impact of personal characteristics: since my purposive sample included individuals with a range of backgrounds and experiences, and they represented a range of types of charter school (including CMO-run and independent), I hoped to find out more about the developmental implications of some of these differences, and the extent to which they had an impact on the kinds of activities the participants’ did and found beneficial during their field experiences.

- Coverage of charter amplified issues: it was clear from the survey that most principals did not get the opportunity to practice many areas of amplified responsibility during their field experiences. Given that many in my interview sample did have these opportunities, I hoped to find out both what they did, and how it helped them prepare for their leadership roles.

- ‘Exemplary’ field experience characteristics: since most principals reported that their field experiences included mentoring, a developmental continuum of practice, and substantive action reflection cycles, and yet most did not have a highly effective field experience, I wanted to find out from those that did, more specific detail about what these characteristics looked like and how they worked.

- Customization: although a majority of principals in my sample reported personalization of their field experiences, this customization did not appear to have a direct link with their perceived program efficacy levels. For this reason I wanted to find out more about what customization could look like when it worked well, and the forms it took.

- Peer support and Networks: it was evident from the survey findings on professional development that peer and network forms of development were highly appreciated. I was therefore interested to explore the extent to which they emerged during the field experience period, and if they did, the form and characteristics that such support took.

* * *
In the interview results chapter that follows this one, findings relating to the structure and key characteristics of effective field experience will be presented. In it I hope to give a more in-depth and nuanced perspective of field experience, and to highlight commonalities and differences between individual principal cases. In so doing, I draw out shared characteristics, and provide reasons for differences.
CHAPTER V

INSIGHTS INTO THE FORMS AND FEATURES OF EFFECTIVE FIELD EXPERIENCE

In this chapter I present five findings that provide a deeper and richer form of understanding about what effective field experiences actually look like for charter school leaders, and how they work from a developmental perspective. The first finding relates to different forms of field experience, or pathways, that I identified through my research. In it I explain how the various affordances and constraints inherent in each pathway, related to for example, the number of field experience sites, or the types of support partner available, have implications for the developmental experiences of each participants. This finding serves as a macro level frame for the other four findings. Findings two to four focus on the micro level, and provide a deeper level of understanding about how the three key elements of field experience highlighted in Chapter II (support, authentic practice, and reflective practice) played out in the real practice contexts of my sample, and showing how these ‘universal’ elements are expressed in ‘particular’ instances. Though I treat each element separately, I show that at their most successful, they are highly interactive and of a piece. Finding five highlights the largely unexploited potential of network building during field experiences, and shows how relationships that principals make during their preparatory training, can help them transition into their subsequent leadership career, and provide an ongoing source of support beyond that.

Overall these findings paint a picture of effective field experiences with aspiring charter principals situated in real school leadership contexts, facing actual performance pressures, taking responsibility for their learning, and being supported by peers in two way relationships.

The Forms: Multiple Pathways

Chapter II described two main paths for aspiring charter principals: traditional university programs, and a growing number of alternative routes, including charter specific programs. It highlighted how charter specific programs, in particular those run by national nonprofits like KIPP and Building Excellent Schools, are currently regarded as the ‘gold standard’ for aspiring charter school leaders (Cheney et al., 2010). I mentioned that scholars have called for the extension of these kinds of field
experience opportunities to others, but the programs are expensive and in reality most aspiring charter school principals will not get to do them (Campbell & Gross, 2008). Given the limited capacity of these programs to meet growing market demand, I was interested to see whether or not the standard university traditional programs that most charter principals take, could deliver effective field experiences for them. In my research I have found that there are at least two traditional university pathways that could provide such experiences. These pathways share common features with charter specific program field experiences, but they are emphasized less explicitly due to structural aspects of each pathway.

**Traditional and Alternative Pathways**

In my research sample, I categorized principals as falling into one of four pathways or ‘routes’. These categories were in part based on their program type (traditional or alternative), and in part based on the experience level and role of the participant. The findings in this chapter focus on the two traditional university pathways (*Internship* and *Junior*), but I contrast them with a charter specific pathway (*National Charter*), and an alternative pathway serving experienced principals who want to get their principal license (*Experienced*). These two alternative pathways together provide useful sources of comparison for the two traditional programs. Table 5.1 below introduces the four pathways, highlighting structural differences between them in terms of the participants’ role and the field experience location, and indicating how the pathways align with extant theoretical field experience categories described in Chapter II.

**Table 5.1: Pathways for Principals in Sample**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pathway (Example)</th>
<th>Principal role during FE</th>
<th>FE school location</th>
<th>Theoretical best fit*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional: Internship</td>
<td>Aspiring principal</td>
<td>Traditional public</td>
<td>Interdependent / detached</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(University of Colorado Denver)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional: Junior Principal</td>
<td>Novice principal</td>
<td>Charter</td>
<td>Job embedded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(University of Colorado Denver)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative: National Charter (KIPP)</td>
<td>New school founder</td>
<td>Multi-site: charter &amp;</td>
<td>Course embedded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>traditional</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative: Experienced Principal (Principal Institute)</td>
<td>Practicing principal</td>
<td>Charter</td>
<td>Detached</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* From Carr, Chenowith & Ruhl (2003), and Barnett, Copland & Shoho (2009)
The *Internship* pathway represents the most common field experience structure: participants are aspiring principals, and carry out their internship in a single traditional public school, and so do not get exposed to charter specific issues. The *Junior Principal* pathway fits within the same overall program structure as the *Internship* path, but with two significant differences: the participant is already working as a principal (or principal in training), and they are based in a charter school. They therefore complete their field experience while doing a real charter school job, and as a consequence face significant and ongoing performance pressures while gaining exposure to areas of charter-amplified responsibility. These factors will be shown to have an impact on the intensity and scope of their developmental experiences.

The *National Charter* founder pathway regarded as the ‘gold standard’ provides a charter-specific context, and principals on this path are employed in a founding principal job. However, it adds two dimensions: multiple field experience sites, and an explicit programmatic focus on charter school issues. The exposure to different schools, leaders, and staff – within a network of similar schools - provides significant benefits in terms of helping participants build networks of support with a wide variety of partners, as well as exposing them to a broad range of developmental opportunities. The overall program focus on charter school issues enhances their developmental experiences, giving them both theoretical and practical exposure to their areas of amplified responsibilities. In addition, a very high level of intentionality characterizes every aspect of these field experiences, with structures put in place that greatly enhance the quality of the developmental experiences principals have. Although these principals are not running their schools yet, they are setting them up, and this serves as a proxy for being job-embedded. This kind of program serves as a helpful benchmark of current best practice for the traditional program paths.

The *Experienced* pathway shares the job-embedded characteristic with the *Junior* and *National Charter* pathways, but offers a very different perspective on effective principal field experiences. These principals were already experienced charter leaders prior to completing their field experiences. Their responses therefore provide insights into what a charter principal needs to be able to do in order to make a success of their role in the longer term, and what effective field experience might need to cover to help aspiring principals make the transition into a leadership role. As with the *National Charter* path, the
experiences of principals on this route provide a useful benchmark by offering a view of what a charter leader needs in order to develop and perform effectively in their role over time.

**Shared Characteristics and Differing Levels of Emphasis**

The four pathways share three characteristics that relate directly to the three key elements of field experiences highlighted in Chapter II: the first focuses on performance, and concerns the intensive action/reflection cycles where principals learn and apply that learning while in the ‘hot seat’, delivering results needed in a real job. The second concerns what principals do to exploit the everyday development opportunities arising from their work, particularly for those on less well-supported pathways. The third characteristic is supportive relationships – here called *developmental partnerships* – which principals create to access the knowhow and support they need to help them resolve immediate issues. In understanding how each characteristic manifested on different pathways, it is helpful to view each of them as operating on a spectrum, showing the extent to which each characteristic was emphasized and apparent in the feedback from principals on each pathway.

For clarity, each characteristic is broken down into two dimensions (though in reality they operate on more than this) in Table 5.2 below. It shows where each pathway fell on each of the dimensions. Scores range from: little emphasis/use (*); to very significant emphasis/use (****). On some pathways the emphasis varied based upon the proactivity of the individual participant, and the quality of their support partners. To indicate this, the potential range for each pathway is shown like this: * ... ****.

**Table 5.2: Relative Emphasis of Field Experience Characteristics by Pathway**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pathway (Principals in each pathway)</th>
<th>Relationships</th>
<th>Customization</th>
<th>Performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Range</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internship (2*, 7*, 9*, 11*)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td>... *</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior Principal (1, 2*, 4, 6, 7*, 8, 11*)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>**</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Charter (5, 9*, 12)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>****</td>
<td>****</td>
<td>****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced Principal (2*, 3, 10)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>***</td>
<td>**</td>
<td><em><strong>.</strong></em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Limited emphasis; ** moderate emphasis; *** significant emphasis; **** very significant emphasis
• Principal’s field experiences fitted more than one model category

The different levels of emphasis on each dimension and characteristic between pathways, and the developmental implications of these differences, will be explored in greater depth in the findings that follow. By way of brief illustration in one category, the National Charter pathway principals talked about placing significant emphasis on developing partnerships with a wide range of support partners during their field experiences, while those on the Internship and Junior pathways focused mainly on making use of their principal-mentor, and the Experienced principals reflected on how they had developed such relationships on their own. Before looking at each of the key elements in isolation, I introduce a framework to illustrate the kinds of interaction between them.

A Model of Effective Field Experience

This model is designed to show how in practice the characteristics are not separate as such but are key partial aspects of the overall core developmental experience that creates conditions for accelerated learning, more embodied forms of knowing, and leadership practices that have been created and tested in the heat of action. In doing this they transform the often ‘arms-length’ learning experience that principals have during field experience phase, from a traditional and intermittent kind of ‘teaching’-oriented relationship between principal and appointed mentor, to something closer to the kind of continuous ‘learning’ that takes place on-the-job when supported by peer networks and/or communities of practice.

In this ‘triangle’ the principal firstly focuses on identifying and responding to what is needed to deliver the required results. At the same time, they seek to improve their current capabilities and practice by exploiting the many developmental opportunities that arise in their work as part of doing the work. This happens on an everyday basis and more spontaneously than a more standard, pre-planned sequence of learning events. Both of these activities require and benefit from the support of others and so principals as part of seeking the support needed to resolve everyday immediate issues, identify and build two way relationships with suitable others in their environment who possess the experience and expertise that they feel they need at that time. In these ways, this learning/ development ‘triangle’, is
more principal-centered than program-centered, with the principal at the center of his/her own self-organizing development process as against a program that is more centrally planned and coordinated.

Figure 5.1: Interactions Between Key Field Experience Characteristics

In summary, in this first finding I identified four preparation pathways that are taken by aspiring charter leaders, and showed that in addition to the high profile National Charter pathway, effective preparatory field experiences can be achieved in at least two traditional program forms, as well as an Experienced form. As noted in Chapter III, participants in this research differed from the standard profile of aspiring principals, with the majority embedded in real jobs, and all were able to focus full time on their principal role. It is this different profile that appears to drive the development framework that emerged from the cases in my sample, and particularly findings 2, 3, and 4. This framework provides evidence of an accelerated form of development that can take place when principals are in real jobs during their field experiences. They build capability and improve their practice, and start to create a network of relationships (finding 5) that offers more long-term support that they need for effective performance and ongoing development. In the next section I focus on the first of these micro characteristics of effective
field experience, ‘learning while doing’, and show how being embedded in messy and everyday real practice generates intensive learning opportunities.

**Doing: Action-Reflection Cycles in the Hot Seat**

The theory on reflective practice, as outlined in Chapter II, suggests that it involves a cycle: *action in situ*, followed by immediate *feedback* ideally from others in the immediate context, leading to *self reflection* and discussion with others, before taking further action (Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993; Kolb, 1984). This kind of reflection was described by Schön (1983) as ‘reflection-on-action’, an activity carried out one step removed from the action, and is contrasted with ‘reflection-in-action’, a more in the moment activity associated with experienced practitioners (Rich & Jackson, 2006). It might be expected that the majority of principals in my sample would engage more in ‘reflection-on-action’ given their relative inexperience. However, my *second* finding is that the principals in my sample were able engage in particularly intense ‘action’ and ‘reflection’ cycles enabling them to learn and develop new knowhow and capabilities *while* they were responding to the immediate demands of their work to deliver results.

In what follows I explain how this was largely a consequence of them having to respond to the real pressures arising in their everyday work, and was facilitated by them having access to immediate feedback and advice, and opportunities for observing experienced practitioners in action, and using them as role models. I cast some light on what can be involved in intensive action reflection cycles, outline two methods of facilitating action-reflection cycles in real practice situations, and highlight areas of relative strength and weakness for the two traditional pathways, contrasting them with the two alternative paths.

**Levels of intensity**

As described in Chapter III, all but one of the principals in my sample were in real leadership jobs during their field experience. In this way, the authentic practice opportunities emphasized in the literature review in Chapter II, did not have to be sought out – they were impossible to avoid, and were in fact central to the effectiveness of their field experiences. Each of them faced real performance pressures, with the stress of dealing with challenges for the first time. One novice principal on the *Junior* pathway described how his mentor ‘watched [him] go up in flames a number of occasions’ [6], while another on
the Internship pathway described how her mentor would push her back into challenging situations, ‘She’s like, “Yes, sink or swim like you want to be a principal? Go do it!” She recalled the intensity of the pressure, saying that that every time she went into that situation she “would want to vomit” [9]. Despite the strong emotions involved in these experiences, both principals described the importance of such kinds of feedback in this process, showing how these were enabling them to learn in the moment (the reflection part) while resolving the immediate challenges facing them (the action part).

**Two variants of the Action-Reflection Cycle**

The first variant involved the principal carrying out a leadership task, and then getting immediate feedback on it. All the aspiring and novice principals in my sample emphasized the importance of immediate feedback during their field experiences, and commented on how it helped them deliver better results. Feedback was given to the participants by a variety of different people, including those in formal principal-mentor positions, but also coaches, other school leaders, teachers, or peers. The following excerpt from an aspiring principal on the Internship route makes the benefits of such feedback very clear:

> Being able to do something, even if you don’t know what you’re doing and then right afterwards get the immediate feedback and processing about what you just did. So [a] parent conversation is a perfect example, like you do a difficult parent conversation, you’re like, ‘I don’t know what I was saying’ ... I mean having someone afterwards be like, ‘well it seemed to me that the parent turned and sort of listened to you when you said X or I love the way that you asked them what they thought about ...’ [9]

The benefits from such conversations in the here and now when the participant was getting feedback on their performance, provides the basis of a second variant of the cycle, when they were able to ask questions of a more experienced person immediately following an observation of them in action.

A number of principals emphasized the power of ‘watching the wheels working’ when a more experienced leader was in action, when they were able, immediately afterwards, to pick ‘the principal’s brain’ about what they did. The questions they were able to ask enabled them to access the tacit knowledge of the practitioners on very specific issues. This following quote highlights the informal and lively nature of these kinds of conversations that took place in the ‘live’ situations that principals found themselves in during the field experience period while working with more experienced colleagues. As this founding principal on the National Charter pathway explained it:
So the fact there’s all these conversations...did that work, did that not work, why not, how do you think that teacher is feeling right now because of the tone you used, or how do you think - on email versus in person? Or what would the ramifications have been if we had done that tomorrow versus doing it like in the spot, in the heat of the moment? [5]

This principal placed a lot of emphasis on the value of observing excellent practitioners, and having them ‘show not tell, like don’t talk to me about it but show me what it looks like’. The conversations that principals had in both variants took place in the aftermath of ‘live’ situations, and as a result were of a more spontaneous and responsive nature than reflective activity that took place in more formal meetings. The ability to question practitioners about what they did immediately after they had done it served as an approximation of ‘reflection-in-action’, where the participant was able to access some of the tacit knowing-in-action that the experienced practitioner had just demonstrated. These conversations also took place around all aspects of the job. For example, one participant spoke of watching her mentor “managing her boss”, while another talked about how he watched a mentor managing an awkward human resources call “on speakerphone”. They also covered areas of amplified charter responsibility, like fundraising, board relations, and facilities management, as well as less tangible areas like developing staff culture.

These examples demonstrate the power of being, if not in the hot seat itself, at least very close to it, and, with the learning being focused on performance and the performer, how results are being delivered in a particular context, and with what effect. This kind of intimate situated knowing, whether as doer or co-participant, arises from taking real action with consequences within a specific context. This allows participants to absorb a wealth of tacit knowing about what works and how it works that enables more effective embodied action in future situations.

The Influence of Pathway Structure

Although all the aspiring and novice principals were able to benefit from the intense action-reflection cycles described above, there were marked differences between them stemming from structural aspects of their field experiences. The multi-site nature ‘gold standard’ National Charter pathway, facilitated a large number of opportunities to watch practitioners and experts in some of ‘the best schools in the country’ in action, and participants were able to question them in very specific areas
where they were known to particularly excel. This enabled them to focus very specifically on particular roles and skills, as illustrated by this National Charter principal who talked about the benefits of “being in the staff room and watching how staff interact in a school that has really high quality adult culture” [5].

By contrast, principals on the two traditional pathways (Internship and Junior) had generally to ‘make do’ with the more limited number of practitioners they had access to on their school site. This did not matter when the participant had a near-perfect relationship with their principal mentor, and intense learning experiences were common in this scenario. For example, one Internship participant recalled watching her mentor ‘lay down the law’ in a staff meeting:

It was incredibly powerful because she didn’t do it very often and … and I asked her about it afterwards and she’s like … ‘to be a distributive leader you need to know the things that you are going to be like that about’, and that’s been very powerful for me. [9]

However this kind of highly impactful kind of observation/questioning experience was very dependent on the personal characteristics and experiences of the mentor, and their match with the participant (as is developed in detail in finding 4) and so, with access to fewer practitioners on these pathways, many principals did not have so many powerful experiences. To illustrate this, one Junior principal spoke wistfully of wanting “more contact with people doing what you want to do” [1], and of spending time with successful charter school founders, to find out in depth how they did what they did.

Principals on the Experienced pathway, who were based in their own schools, lacked both practitioners to observe and on-site support, but had a longer ‘history’ of leadership action to reflect upon. Their action-reflection cycles therefore looked quite different: most of their questioning seemed more internally focused, and they talked of using the opportunity to question their own practice explicitly, and to reflect-on-action, sometimes with a program mentor. One of these principals reported ‘I would go back and question why I did some things if there was a better way. Or if I saw something that was totally ineffective I would ask [my mentor], “How would you do this? How would you do this differently or why didn’t this work?” [6]. In similar vein, another Experienced pathway principal talked about how her program made her:

Stop and think and really reflect constantly [my emphasis]. When I sit down and do work on the computer, and we have a lot of threaded discussions which again that is
collaborating but it’s a pain in the neck, straining at midnight, because you’re working. But it does force me to think. [10]

For these more experienced practitioners, their approach to work appeared to be much more in the style of what Dreyfus calls Stage 5 or the ‘Expertise’ level (Dreyfus, 2001), where they already work very much in an improvising mode. In this they seem to use their reflection-in-action skills to more intuitively and spontaneously select and express what their experience indicates is the relevant response. Their ‘performance’ in this viewpoint is more streamlined and their decision process less visible to them or others, being guided by an embodied body of knowing. And so much of the conscious learning seemed to take place after the fact in reflection-on-action work, as they challenged and refined what they already knew. The experience of this group of principals therefore provides an interesting contrast with that of the others, and stimulates thinking about the future development needs of principals as they mature in their roles.

Summary

Looking across the findings in this section, it is clear that the experience of being much more ‘in the hot seat’, whether as participant-observer or as ‘doer’ in these internships, places a much greater pressure on principals to actively learn from their experiences during the experiences – there is not time for a more planned and sequenced process. This more spontaneous and ‘organic’ approach to reflection in action, not only provided a host of opportunities for principals to explore the meaning and effectiveness of ideas they learned in the classroom, but also enabled them to start creating knowledge and develop practices which were more in touch with their own values, sense of identity, and beliefs about the purpose of their profession. Though the aspiring and novice principals lacked a lot of the knowledge in action that the more experienced practitioners had, they seemed to be able to use modeling of the action and reflection of these practitioners, combined with careful questioning and reflection immediately afterwards, to get closer to ‘reflection-in-action’ itself.

Developing: Customizing Authentic Practice Opportunities

The research on authentic practice opportunities reviewed in Chapter II suggests that
experienced mentors should direct the process, and it uses the notion of a developmental continuum of practice to characterize what happens (Fry et al., 2006; Mitgang & Gill, 2012). The picture that emerges from my research is that participants have opportunities to play an active role in helping to customize their own developmental experiences, more in line with the theory on self-directed and adult learning (Mezirow, 2000). It provides evidence that real developmental experiences are less neat and linear than implied in the continuum concept, and that a greater flexibility, variety, and dynamic sequencing of development experiences are possible and desirable.

It was clear that the principals themselves, particularly those on the more poorly supported non National Charter pathways, had to play a stronger role - both in creating the learning climate and in organizing the developmental activities themselves, in order to fully benefit from the full time roles they were carrying out. In working on this ‘how do I improve my practice?’ aspect of their roles, they had to create and bring into the present moment their own ‘developmental opportunities’, as well as the various resources and knowledge needed. This enabled them to benefit fully from the intense ‘reflection-in-action’ cycles their full time working roles demanded of them. Accordingly my third finding is that effective field experiences seem to require that participants customize their own development activities, through exploiting whatever opportunities and resources come their way in the course of doing their job. In seeking in this way to improve their own practices while practicing/doing a real job, they have been enabled by doing things when, where, and how they needed to, to create something very personal and cumulative.

In what follows I show how participants were able to customize their developmental experience through organizing and using varied forms of ‘reflection on action’, indicating what developmental ‘progressions’ can look like in real practice situations, and how these were influenced by the characteristics of each of the main pathways.

**Customizing on the National Charter Pathway**

The key aspects of the National Charter pathway structure that impacted upon customization were the multiple school sites and the intentional focus on customization. Participants and their mentors and advisors were able to tailor different field experience to match the developmental requirements of
the participant. As a result they were able to shadow, observe, and get practice in a range of areas. The exact nature of what they did depended on the particular expertise of the people in the school site where they were based. In addition, because the field experiences took place within a network of similar and/or sympathetic schools, the participants were able to get very meaningful and useful development experiences despite being in the role of temporary ‘visitors’. One participant, who took part in forty-seven different residencies during a two-year period of setting up his school, highlighted the diverse experiences he was exposed to like this:

One project was trying to figure out exactly where they were with their fundraising from individual donors and how to track that and monitor it, and look at trends over like a five year window and then report that data to their board of trustees... And then in [another residency] I really wanted to learn for example reading mastery... So for like a week I taught reading mastery and got feedback from the kindergarten teacher whose room I was in. [S]

This excerpt shows that participants were able to customize their experiences effectively in part because they had a clear understanding of the skills they needed to develop. It also highlights one reason why participants were able to get real practical experiences in the schools in such a short space of time – because often they were completing projects of real value to the host school. These factors combined to create a synergistic climate where both parties wanted to achieve better results, and were able to mutually benefit. An additional structural feature was that participants on this route were a step removed from a real job when they were in their host schools. This enabled them to focus on making the most of the many organized and supported opportunities to observe and practice their skills.

Customizing on the Internship Pathway

For participants on the Internship pathway, there was less structural flexibility, since they were based in one school for the duration of their field experience. For this reason the principals on this pathway described their field experiences as more closely matching with the theoretical continuum of practice concept. As this Internship participant explained:

Yes, it worked exactly like that. In August when I started all I did was shadow [the principal-mentor]. She also arranged for me to shadow a few of the other admin in the building and one of the other admin in the building – she’s a wonderful person -- also took me on as a mentee and so I spent a lot of time with her... and then [I came] back in January [and was] ... doing the things they told me to do. [9]
A significant limitation on this pathway stemmed from the fact that the field experience site was a traditional public school. For this reason, participants were not able to customize their developmental experiences to cover areas of charter-amplified responsibility. One principal who interned in a traditional school described how his internship lacked “operational experience”, and gave this example: “… so you’ve got 7 years of deferred maintenance on two boilers and five different roof top units and the previous administration left you $250,000 in the hole and you have prairie dog infestation, figure that out” [11]. These kind of gaps meant that participants on this path had to pick up important areas of their role after completing their preparation, on-the-job, and often without much support. Additionally, because on this path the participant was not a leader in the school, they were more reliant on their mentor being willing to give them opportunities, in contrast to those on the Junior pathway below.

**Customizing on the Junior Pathway**

The participants on the Junior pathway had two interlinked structural advantages over the Internship pathway: they were doing an actual leadership job and were in a charter school. Participants described a gradual and controlled exposure to full responsibilities in the real world and were able to move back and forth between observation and practice, depending on the task/subject and their own development needs, and often in response to the immediate pressures arising from their embedded operating situation. Being in a charter context enabled them to focus on charter-amplified areas once they felt comfortable in their central instructional leadership role. One principal described how towards the end of his first year he was actively trying to “take over the budget”, and was going to finance meetings and focusing on understanding technical details like “what the budget line items numbers are” and “if it says ‘special services’ what does that really mean?” [1]. This example shows how these principals gained some of the benefits claimed for a more gradual and controlled form of exposure to full responsibilities in the real world. What is more, because they were actually embedded in real jobs at the time, the quality of their learning in terms of gaining immediate and ongoing feedback from people in the situation itself, was felt to be particularly useful.
A potential disadvantage of this pathway in relation to the Charter and Internship paths is that because they were embedded in their own schools, with less distance from the messy reality of running their school, they had less opportunity to concentrate so explicitly on their own development. However as they mainly had on-site support in the form of a senior principal-mentor, they were able to customize their experiences to a certain extent. One novice principal on the Junior path explained it like this; “For me it had nothing to do with the program it had to do with me knowing the school, me knowing my needs, knowing what I could do best and what he [the mentor] could do best” [1]. Another participant who was new to school leadership, but not to leadership and management in general, described how he was able to build gradually in his area of greatest inexperience:

The gradual build up mostly came on the evaluation side of things ... by doing several of the [teacher evaluations] with him instead of completely on my own that first year ... Most of the other roles however it was just like the floodgate was opened and it became my responsibility right away, ranging from behavior management to data support, becoming the school assessment coordinator, those types of things. [8]

What comes across in this excerpt is that he was able to get support where he needed it most.

For this principal the flexibility came largely because there was capacity in the school to absorb the leadership tasks he was not immediately taking a leadership role in. This was a significant factor for almost all of the participants on this pathway. An added benefit for these principals was that often they could tailor what they were doing to immediate needs of their program. As one principal who did his preparation program whilst completing a principal-in-training year in the school he would become principal in once he had qualified, explains, “I had the professor come in and say, "Here's the goals that you're going to work on." And then my executive principal could say, "Okay, well let's wind this up so the work that you're doing is really targeting these areas." In this way, he was able to learn on the job with significant administrative support where they needed it, were also able to introduce some personal tailoring to both the ‘what’ and ‘when’ of the development work they felt they needed.

Customizing on the Experienced Pathway

Many of the practicing principals on the Experienced pathway were engaged in getting their certification rather than doing a conventional principal preparation program. These principals were much
freer to make the most of their extensive experience and reflection-in-action capabilities to ensure that they too were able to take specific steps to improve their own practices. Their ‘field experience’ phase was essentially a time to reflect on, tailor, and refine their existing body of knowledge and the practices they used to express this, to suit the new requirements. As such there was less need for them to bring into the present moment and plan special development opportunities as part of their everyday work, as they were for the most part already using streamlined reflection-in-action approaches to deal with issues as they arose. Instead these principals often made use of conversations with experienced others to question the efficacy of their existing practices. As mentioned earlier, this group accordingly offers a useful boundary or benchmarking function in this analysis, as their experience points towards the kinds of development support that principals can benefit from as they become more experienced and expert in their role.

Summary

This section has illustrated how all the principals were able to exercise some influence over the timing and pace of their development activities, as they were being exposed to the full responsibilities of their real world role. In building these more customized development programs ‘in the midst of action’, these principals had to respond creatively to the opportunities for development thrown up by the everyday work in their roles, and make the most of what was to hand to frame and resource these for maximum impact.

In the next section, I move from what we have learned from principals exploiting in more spontaneous and creative ways, the opportunities for development and improvement offered by the high pressure and messy performance environment of a real job, to the sources of advice, knowing, and support that they discovered they needed, to resolve the myriad of immediate issues involved in doing their immediate job effectively.

Relating: Creating ‘Developmental Partnerships’

In Chapter II I described the widespread view that the most effective form of development support for aspiring and novice principals was that of having an experienced principal-mentor (Gray et al.,
2007; Mitgang & Gill, 2012). I also highlighted research that pointed to the benefits of more informal peer support, as well as work suggesting the importance of supportive relationships offering benefits to both parties (Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Hansen & Matthews, 2002). My fourth finding follows in the wake of these alternative lines of research, and is that the principals in my sample formed and benefited from a wide variety of more informal relationships in addition to the formal principal-mentor type. Given that mentoring is a ‘catch all’ term, and means different things to different people, I have termed these broader relationships “developmental partnerships” to try and capture a sense of their important and the different dynamics involved. In what follows I highlight the main features of these partnerships, and then show how structural elements of different pathways influenced the nature and number of partnerships formed.

**Qualities of Developmental Partnerships**

The developmental partnerships described by my sample shared three inter-related qualities: fit; openness; and reciprocity. The concept of ‘fit’ essentially relates to the level of empathy between the participant and their partner. This was based on more than one factor usually, but the most commonly referenced were personal/professional skills, experience level, educational philosophy, and charter school experience. The second quality, ‘openness’, related to the willingness of the partner to share their personal knowledge and experiences, in particular explaining their thinking, and why they did something in a particular way. It also operated on a school level, when school leaders gave participants “uninterrupted access” to whatever was going on in the school that interested them. The third quality of many of these developmental partnerships was that they were more informal than the standard principal-mentor relationship, formed with people closer to being peers. This final quality, which stemmed from the two preceding it, was to do with reciprocal benefits, meaning that both parties in the partnership gained something from it.

While most developmental partnerships described by principals in my sample did not fully exemplify all of these qualities, every support relationship of value embodied more than one of these, at least to some extent. By way of example, the excerpt below, from a participant on the National Charter pathway, who was setting up his own school during his training year, highlights the hard-to-pin-down
general benefit gained from the empathy principals experienced when paired with a close peer, or as he put it, someone “doing what I am doing, a little bit later”. He recalled his reaction to arriving at a recently established school:

I will never forget ... I walked in and I was like, “Aahh this feels different.” ... I’m like, “Why do you have a mop in your head? Why are your shoes filthy? Why are there holes in your shoes? What’s going on?” And then I’m like, “Oh, first year, I’m going to do this in a year. I get it, okay this is good.” [12]

In addition to empathy, this excerpt points to the value of more peer-level support, with the participant benefiting from working with someone less experienced than the usual principal-mentor. It also hints at the importance of a developmental partner being open to sharing their experience. Although reciprocity is not apparent in this particular excerpt, the same principal also talked at length about getting involved in real projects in the school that were of benefit to the principal, and of having conversations with them where they benefitted from reflecting on their experiences.

The Influence of Pathway Structure

As with findings 2 and 3, the structure of different pathways had a significant impact on the number as well as the types of developmental partnerships formed.

Internship: starting with the Internship pathway, participants described having fewer developmental relationships than with other paths. However, at their best, their one-on-one relationships with formal principal-mentors provided almost everything that the aspiring principals felt they needed during their field experiences. Exactly as described in the bulk of the field experience literature (e.g. Gray et al., 2007) the principal-mentor was the fulcrum of an effective developmental experience on this pathway, facilitating access to authentic leadership opportunities, and providing support for reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action. On this pathway, relationships were characterized by a high level of ‘fit’ in terms of personal/professional skills and educational philosophy, a high degree of personal and school-wide openness, and significant reciprocity. As one principal on this pathway explained of her mentor:

It was the perfect match ... I heard she is the queen of distributive leadership go hang out with her ... And every week we’d get together, I shadowed her a lot... and watched her do her job. And then once or twice a week we’d sit down and I would just ask her questions. And she was an amazing mentor because she’d be willing to answer anything and really share her thought process. ... [it] was like anything that goes out of my brain is
grabbed for you to know about. And I learned a lot just from shadowing and watching her work if that makes sense. [9]

However, even with a match as good as this, participants on this pathway did not get a good ‘fit’ in terms of charter specific roles, because their partners were traditional school principals, which compounded the lack of exposure that they got in this area because they were placed in traditional public schools. They also had fewer informal partnerships, in part because their programs placed so much emphasis on the one formal relationship. For people on this pathway with less than perfect mentoring matches, it is likely more variety would have been helpful. The openness and fit that characterized the relationship above was not regarded as common. Many talked of mentors that “didn’t share with them [and] didn’t open their doors” [9], and suggested that such powerful relationships were pretty rare.

Junior: Participants on the Junior pathway described similar developmental partnerships to the aspiring principals above. The main advantages of this traditional path over the Internship route stemmed from the fact that the principal was embedded in a job in a charter school. This meant that that the principal’s primary mentor was generally a good fit in terms of having charter school experience, and was able to help them get experience during the course of their day-to-day work. As with the Internship principals, there were problems when the primary mentor did not have a good fit personally or philosophically, but issues with openness were rare because the participant was already employed by the school, and tended to have an established relationship with their mentor prior to the program.

National Charter: The National Charter principals described developmental partnerships that varied significantly from the traditional expert mentor model outlined above. This variation stemmed from the multi-site nature of their field experiences, but also from the explicit focus that the programs placed on peer mentoring and support. Principals on this path described far fewer problems with fit, openness and reciprocity than those on other routes. Part of the reason for this is that placements were done largely within a school network, and so there was shared values and thinking about the purpose of these schools and how they should be managed. It was also because the participants were able to make a lot of different relationships during their field experience, and could take different things from each one. As one principal on this pathway explained it:
I think it’s huge too to see a variety of folks say, “I get that about Morgan that that’s like me.” Or why I really want to do what Sean does at school every day with his team and how much leadership that takes to do on a daily basis and have the energy he does it with. How do I steal those pieces from different people and say, “These all fit me now let me create my own leadership persona” [5].

Although the participants on this path were not directly in job-embedded roles in the field experience sites, unlike the Junior principals above, they managed to get fully involved, and to establish reciprocal partnerships very quickly, because they often had specific leadership projects to complete in their host schools. One principal described being able to get “saturated” in the work while he was on placements, and commented that central to this was that the leadership [were] incredibly gracious in opening their doors and just letting [him] engage” [5].

Experienced: Principals on the Experienced pathway cast light on the importance of fit, openness, and reciprocity, in developmental partnerships, by highlighting insufficiencies with the mentors they were paired with in their programs. This feedback centered on the fact that they were paired with retired traditional school principals who lacked in-depth understanding of the charter school context. They also talked about the support relationships they had formed while working as charter principals prior to their training, and how these relationships more closely exemplified the qualities of developmental partnership. One principal, who trained in a traditional university program, and worked for years as a traditional public school principal and district superintendent, before becoming a charter school leader, recalled a relationship he had had with a principal that he had unofficially mentored prior to becoming a charter school principal. He explained:

When [a colleague] was figuring out things I was on his speed dial, he would call me in the middle of the night about something that was going on. And -- still to this day we’re dear friends, we’ve got a great relationship, but now if I’ve got a charter school leadership issue, I call [him] because he’s been there a lot longer than me and he might know what to ask and what to say. [2]

Summary

In this section I have shown that in addition to the conventional expert mentor-student relationship, the principals in my sample were able to develop a much broader and more varied range of helpful relationships. Typically these offered a wider and often more expert source of guidance on
particular issues and facets of the role, as well as a wider range of helping behaviors than those experienced with expert mentors. Because these were described by principals in terms of ‘fit’, ‘openness’, and reciprocity, I have chosen to term them ‘developmental partnerships’ in order to capture the effects these more varied, sharing, and creative relationships had on how principals were able to develop while doing. Like in the example above, some of them also talked about the potential for these partnerships to evolve, and to offer support in the longer term, and it is to the characteristics and formation of these personal support networks that I now turn.

**Building Personal Support Networks**

In Chapter II I highlighted the increasing recognition of the importance of ongoing support systems for principals after their initial training (Peterson, 2002), based in large part on the influence of work on communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Despite the lack of research on network building in principal preparation programs, it is clear that innovative programs like that run by KIPP are placing heavy emphasis on it, and supporting aspiring principals to develop their own networks. My fifth and final finding provides evidence as to the importance of such network building starting during field experience, and shows that many of the short-term developmental relationships changed and developed over time, from isolated and often intermittent pairings into forms more closely resembling networks. These developmental relationships created initially to resolve immediate problems therefore also have the potential to change over time into personal support networks. In doing this, they offer a valuable form of support to charter school leaders.

I use the experiences of principals on the two benchmark pathways, *National Charter* and *Experienced*, to cast light on how networks can be formed during field experience, and their utility, in both the short and long term. The *National Charter* principals exemplify the research-based ‘gold standard’ in this instance, while the *Experienced* principals offer a helpful contrasting perspective on developing them outside a formal program, as well as highlighting their importance as a source of long-term support. This aspect of field experience was largely undeveloped on the two traditional pathways, and so I make reference to them only briefly here.
Forming Networks

The two ‘benchmark’ pathways provide contrasting perspective on how networks can be formed at the start of a principal’s career. For National Charter principals, networking was an explicit focus of their field experiences, and less personal effort was required to initiate links. For the Experienced principals, however, who built their networks prior to their training and without program support, a high level of personal skill was required.

Principals on the National Charter pathway began their programs with a clear idea of how to build a network. As one explained; “What [the program] taught us was you build many relationships, not one”, and the multiple residency opportunities were about “building relationships more that [they were] about learning experiences” [12]. One way that his network provided a structure for such network building was through regular meetings, called Leadership Summits with peers within the school network. At this meetings novice principals had the opportunity to get personal support as well as professional advice. As one principal described it:

It [was] all about just decompression of the year or the two years you haven’t seen each other. And learning from other people is like, “Wow that didn’t happen to me but when it does I know what to do now.” And that’s huge. And it wasn’t just the internship, it was the internships and then the Leaderships Summits annually that followed. And that was big because you got a chance to be with colleagues. [12]

In contrast to this explicit networking strategy, principals on the Experienced pathway described having to build networks without support, prior to their taking their preparation program. This process took significant time and effort, and principals usually sought support as a survival strategy, rather than with an eye to the future. One principal explained how he had to target different people for different things when he first started in his role:

What I ended up doing is I identified people in the charter world in Jefferson county where we are, that were really good at different areas... And so for instance if I needed a question answered about the business side of it I’d call X who is over at Y Academy because he’d been doing that for 10, 11 years ... so I developed this network of people so that I wasn’t always bothering the same person, but I wasn’t spending all the time finding the answers on my own because that just takes too long. [6]

Like this principal, most of those (outside the National Charter path) who talked about building
large networks had come into their school leader role with some prior leadership experience, and often had developed specific networking skills in a business role. Most of them seemed aware that this was not a standard skill set for school leaders, thereby emphasizing the importance of aspiring principals getting a chance to develop such skills during their training. One independent charter school leader who had done his formal preparation program a number of years before establishing himself as a charter school leader talked about the importance of using networks he had already established:

I had other contacts because when I was with the district I got to know the CFO and I got to know the HR director, and so I really got tuned into those things... Networking is another big part of this. It's like the last thing a charter school principal wants to do is make themselves such an island they don't have a network of people they can contact. [2]

For others on the traditional Junior and Internship pathways, where the number of developmental relationships described were fewer and there was no explicit attention to networking, it was clear that some substantial relationships had developed over time constituting something approximating a community of practice in the functions that they performed. For example, one principal mentioned working with 3 colleagues in her school in a miniature community of practice, and leveraging principal support cohorts she was associated with, including the National Council of La Rasa and Expeditionary Learning schools. However, for the most part these relationships seemed to be generated organically as they were needed, and they seemed to fill specific short-term support needs that the principals’ had.

Benefits of Networking

In highlighting how he formed his networks, the Experienced principal quoted above illustrated a common issue facing leaders of stand-alone charter schools in particular: isolation. This section on network benefits starts by illustrating the need for networks from the perspective of Experienced pathway principals, before showing some potential benefits using the National Charter principals’ experiences.

The more experienced principals in the sample explicitly talked about how isolated they felt as charter school leaders. As one principal explained it: “[we] are getting barraged from all sides... from the teachers, the parents, the board and the districts” and there are no formal support systems to help
“address the pressure” [6]. More than one principal talked about having to sit away from traditional school principals colleagues at district meetings, while others spoke of there being “a high level of burnout” [3]. All of them felt that existing support structures were insufficient. As an example, an Experienced pathway principal said of a conference organized by the Colorado League of Charter Schools; “It’s networking pressing the flesh”, rather than “my colleagues teach[ing] me about stuff I’m working on and vice versa’ [6].

In sharp contrast to these isolation challenges, principals on the National Charter pathway talked about the huge support they derived from colleagues in their school networks. Many of these relationships had been formed during their field experiences and continued beyond. One principal spoke passionately about the value he gleaned from the small cohort he had trained with as a “support systems for when you’ve fallen down”. The difference between National Charter principals’ sense of community, and the feelings of isolation shared by principals on the other pathways is perhaps most clearly expressed by in this excerpt from a National Charter principal who had recently left the network he trained with, and worked with for eight years, to work at an independent charter school:

And so that’s the toughest – it’s been [a] great isolating sense. Like I knew how good it was, I knew how nice the network was, to say I could pick up the phone and call anybody in any state that has school that I know and say, “Dude I’m having this issue, how are you dealing with it?” And that doesn’t exist in a single site school. [12]

He mentioned having retained some of his connections, but it was clear that he no longer felt like he had a huge resource of people to draw upon. In addition, while he has been able to use his network building skills with other charter school colleagues in the state, it had been hard to generate the sense of shared purpose and empathy that he had with his former network colleagues.

Summary

As explored briefly in Chapter II, communities of practice have an important and acknowledged theoretical role in principal professional development (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). However, there is less empirical evidence of networks at principal level, and almost nothing on developing them during periods of field experience. What this section has highlighted is the largely un-met need for
support networks amongst the principals in the sample, and shown that explicitly focusing on network building during field experience can be a helpful way for principals to develop the support that they need, both during the field experience itself, and well beyond it too. Although these support networks can emerge more organically, as shown by the example of the more experienced principals, this process seemed to depend primarily on the networking abilities of the principal themselves.

**Initial Lessons**

In this chapter I have highlighted the kinds of developmental activities and supports identified by my sample of twelve practicing charter school principals seen as integral to their effective preparatory field experiences. I have also described the impact that the structures of different field experience pathways have on how these characteristics play out in reality, and on the relative importance of each characteristic **within** each pathway.

Though there are clear differences between the constraints, affordances, and challenges posed on each of the four alternative pathways that I have identified, common to effective development experience were three characteristics that interact in a dynamic way to constitute a process that seems to have accelerated development and contributed towards embodied knowing. By engaging in these three activities in an integrated way, charter principals on each pathway, were able to use their period of field experience to initiate, organize, and exploit a wide range of unplanned and unstructured learning opportunities arising from the everyday pressures of their jobs. In tackling these urgent and/or important pieces of work they were able to generate highly productive action-reflection cycles, as well as to customize their learning and turn what initially were intermittent short term requests for advice into what I term ‘developmental partnerships’, which they used to both deal with immediate challenges in the work they were doing, as well as provide support over the longer term. These embryonic networks were able to provide a wide range of timely and situated support in a dynamic and fluid range of styles, that stand in contrast to standard formal mentor relationships, being much closer to the ‘peer relationship’ form that is seen to be of increasing value in the leadership development literature.

* * *
How these five findings work together to constitute what principals have experienced as effective and significant development activity during their periods of field experience, and their implications for future practice, is what I turn to next in the final chapter.
CHAPTER VI

TOWARDS A NEW UNDERSTANDING OF EFFECTIVE FIELD EXPERIENCE

In the last chapter, I outlined the findings from my qualitative research, and put forward the working hypothesis that effective field experience are constituted by three closely linked and interactive activities: intense action-reflection cycles performed while ‘sitting in the hot seat’; customized, personally-centered development processes, where principals identify and resource development opportunities that arise naturally as part of their everyday work; and a range of developmental partnerships, largely initiated by the principals themselves, that provide immediate and longer term support. In this chapter I synthesize the findings put forward in Chapter V and clarify their contributions to the existing knowledge base. I then present a model for understanding how the findings interrelate, and make recommendations for practice and future research.

This research study was premised on the fact that, although there is an abundance of guidance about the likely important features of effective field experience, research suggests that many programs fail to deliver on these features, and so do not provide aspiring principals with the authentic leadership opportunities and developmental support that they need during this critical period. In addition, although there is a great deal of research on each of the important features, including mentoring and reflective practice, there is very little research that provides a contextually situated understanding about what happens during effective field experiences. This is particularly the case for charter school principals who train in traditional university based programs. I therefore designed my study to provide some insight into the nature and characteristics of effective preparatory field experiences for aspiring and novice charter school leaders. My research was designed to answer three general questions:

1. **What kinds of impact does the overall structure and infrastructure of the field experience element of preparation programs have on the effectiveness of the learning process during field experiences for aspiring charter school leaders?**

2. **How are commonly upheld characteristics and features of effective field experiences e.g. real opportunities to lead, mentoring, reflection, and so on, experienced by aspiring charter school leaders?**
3. **In what ways do these characteristics and features enhance learning and help to develop leadership capabilities of aspiring charter school leaders?**

In answering these questions, I was interested to see if there were significant differences in the nature and quality of field experience provision between traditional and charter-specific preparation programs. In particular, I wanted to see if existing field experiences provided by traditional university programs had the capacity to deliver effective charter leader field experiences, given that these preparation options are more widely available than charter leader specific routes.

The first phase of my research involved a survey of over one hundred Colorado based charter principals. The main findings, as reported in Chapter IV, showed that many charter principals did not feel their initial preparation programs had prepared them effectively, and that in particular they were unprepared for the areas of their role that were amplified in a charter school context. However, there did seem to be a positive relationship between the extent to which *principals engaged in authentic leadership activities during their field experiences*, and *their overall evaluation of their program*. I used this as a proxy for ‘effective field experience’ to select principals for the in-depth interview phase of my inquiry.

In Chapter V I presented my overall findings about the significant features of the field experiences described by the twelve practicing charter principals in my sample, that led to them expressing satisfaction with their learning and development. I believe these findings contribute towards and constitute an original perspective about what can work and why and how it can work in traditional university-based programs. For this reason, they provide insights that may be useful to those involved in designing, running and participating in principal preparation programs, as well as for policy makers. In what follows I re-present these key ideas and introduce an overall framework to facilitate effective use of these ideas, before discussing their implications for practice and future research.

**Multiple Field Experience Pathways**

*My first* conclusion is that traditional programs can provide effective field experiences for aspiring and novice charter leaders. Helped by the contrasts provided by principals on the *National Charter and Experienced* pathways I identified two such pathways based on traditional university-based
preparation programs and which covered eight principals in my sample. These traditional pathways shared key characteristics with ‘gold standard’ national charter programs, and with an alternative licensure pathway taken by experienced principals, and provide convincing evidence that it is possible for such traditional preparation pathways to be structured, coordinated, facilitated, and monitored in a range of context-sensitive ways, to provide aspiring and novice charter leaders with what they need. Analysis of these two pathways in Chapter V revealed how participants got opportunities to engage in real school leadership roles and activities that helped them to transform their classroom based knowledge into situated knowing and practice. This happened through a variety of customized developmental activities, combined with intense action-reflection cycles, and supported by a range of developmental partnerships. I developed a model (Figure 5.1) that highlighted the interaction between these features, and I expand on the implications on this model following the synthesis of my five findings.

My research highlighted that there were structural features inherent in each pathway that had a significant impact on the extent to which principals on that path became actively involved in each of the key activities. They also depended on prior skills and influenced the level of proactivity and prior skill required from the participant for them to make a success of their field experience on that pathway. These structural features included the number and type of field experience sites, the duration and specific format of the internship (e.g. job embedded or detached) and the nature of development support provided. I also explored how characteristics related to the individual participant, including the level and type of prior experience they had, their leadership role during and after the field experience period, and the support structure of the schools they worked in once employed full time, influenced the particular requirements they had for effective field experience.

**Key Contributions**

Finding 1 provides support for, and extends what is known about, different routes for preparing charter school principals. In revealing that there can be a charter specific route within traditional programs, and casting useful light on how it can work, and where they could be improved, this research makes an original contribution to knowledge about principal preparation programs. As described in Chapter II, alternative preparation programs are currently regarded as the best way to develop charter
school principals. However, these programs are few in number, and limited in capacity. In revealing the potential for charter specific preparation within traditional programs, particularly via the Junior route described in Chapter V, where the participant is job-embedded in a charter school during their preparation, I have highlighted a pathway that no previous research has discussed.

This finding also extends the existing knowledge base by providing detailed contextually situated case studies showing how different pathways share core developmental elements, despite differing field experience structures. This kind of explicit comparison is not common in the field, which predominantly compares an ‘exemplary’ route against a ‘sub-par’ route, serving to shine a positive light on the former while not trying to get to grips with the dynamics of the latter. It also extends it by identifying multiple pathways within the traditional route (i.e. Internship’ and Junior). In particular it shows how the ‘standard’ internship can be effective for aspiring charter leaders if it works exactly as the best practice literature describes it (see e.g. O’Neill et al., 2005; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004), with authentic leadership opportunities, a ‘perfect’ mentoring match, and highly effective action-reflection cycles.

It is clear from the literature on ‘exemplary’ preparation program field experiences, that many effective field experiences are full time, allowing participants to really concentrate on developing their leadership skills and knowledge (Wilmore, 2002; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). My research confirmed this unambiguously, since the participants were not selected for the in-person interviews on the basis of this criterion. Yet by selecting them based on having reported a high level of field experience activity – which was at odds with most of the respondents in my more extensive survey – it emerged that all of them had completed full time field experiences. Given that the majority of principals I surveyed did not, the link between having a full time role and perceived efficacy is likely to be more than coincidental.

It is also clear from existing research that there are a variety of different formats for these pathways, including detached, and job-embedded (Barnett, Copland, and Shoho, 2009). This finding provides contextually situated examples of what some of these ‘categories’ can look like in real practice. In the same way, this finding provides evidence that supports the importance of contextual factors like participant experience level, and the type of school they are working, in influencing the quality of leadership development (Davies & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Cheney et al, 2010).
To sum up this discussion briefly, my research showed that there are viable, alternative pathways within existing traditional university-based programs that can provide field experiences of a comparable quality to the ‘gold standard’ charter specific programs, and are more generally available. In doing this it has confirmed and extended the current knowledge base on field experience pathways within preparation programs taken by charter school leaders.

**Intense Action-Reflection Cycles**

My second conclusion is that in responding to the immediate demands of a real job, principals in my sample were able to engage in particularly intense ‘action’ and ‘reflection’ cycles that accelerated their learning and development. I showed how the performance demands of being job-embedded enhanced the intensity of their ‘action-reflection’ cycles, as participants sought out immediate feedback and advice to solve problems. These cycles had two variants – ‘doing’ followed by immediate feedback from experienced others, and observation of modeling by experienced practitioners followed by detailed questioning. I showed that in both these ways they benefitted from an approximation of the ‘reflection-in-action’ process usually associated with more experienced practitioners.

**Key Contributions**

As with Finding 1 above, this finding supports and extends what is known about how effective field experiences work. But it also provides a challenge to standard field experience practice: is it possible to create ‘real’ performance pressure in an internship? Clearly this presents a significant challenge requiring considerable levels of commitment from both mentor and mentee and a willingness to explore and experiment with different approaches in real time in the face of immediate feedback from others in the local context. The richness of the learning that was achieved by principals in my sample, in line with theory on situated learning (Putnam & Borko, 2000) stemmed from the fact that they were doing real jobs, and had to find ways of responding effectively and from the heart, to immediate pressures arising in their everyday work.

It is this intensity that from time to time ‘nudged’ principals out of their comfort zone (i.e. Stage 3 development, according to Dreyfus, 2005) towards the deeper and more embodied learning that can
take place in Stage 4 and beyond, with the potential for principals to start taking advantage of the benefits of ‘double-loop learning’ (Argyris & Schön, 1978). In contrast to the literature outlining struggles for authentic leadership activities, (Fry et al., 2006; Mitgang & Gill, 2012), the principals in my sample did have many practical opportunities to lead during their field experience: given they were mainly job-embedded during their field experience, such practical experience was in a real sense unavoidable.

In highlighting the way that novice and aspiring principals were able to ‘approximate’ the reflection-in-action of more experienced practitioners through modeling followed by questioning, this research cast new light on the importance of having the opportunity to observe experienced practitioners in action. In doing this it builds on the modeling and apprenticeship work of Dreyfus, research on ‘cognitive apprenticeships’ (Collins, Brown, & Newman, 1989) and ‘cognitive coaching’ (Barnett, 1995; Costa & Garmston, 2002) – all of which seek to expose principals to the tacit knowledge of experts in action - by making experts’ thinking visible - as a key part of the learning process. Following Lave (1988) there clearly are benefits from offering these ‘apprentice’ principals a conceptual model — a picture of the whole — which can help them take useful steps to develop complex ontological skills, without having first to practice requisite sub-skills in an isolated and repetitive fashion.

In summary, these many developments show that these more experiential and embodied forms of learning do work and so ought to be included in the panoply of educational tools that can improve the effectiveness of the field experience component of principal preparation programs. The examples in my own sample illustrate how the ‘both/and’ nature that simultaneous problem framing and problem solving activities in the field under the relentless pressure of meeting new but real everyday challenges during that first year of performance - can deliver powerful learning outcomes that are uncommon in principal preparation programs, at least historically. In doing this, Finding 2 provides confirmation of and extends thinking about the learning process, and challenges important assumptions in current knowledge base.

**Customized Practice Opportunities**

My third conclusion is that in effective field experiences participants create a highly personal and cumulative set of developmental experiences through exploiting opportunities and resources that come
their way in the course of doing their job. In seeking to improve their own practice, the majority of principals in my sample were able to move flexibly back and forth between observation, participation, and leadership of real principal roles, enabling them to move from being someone who knows the theory and cases, to someone who can convincingly perform the practice in a variety of local situations. To achieve this, the particular positioning and sequencing of these different development activities needed to be responsive to the immediate pressures arising from their embedded operating situations, and also needed to relate to both the task/subject and their own development needs. In this way, principals were able to adapt and customize their developmental experiences, in part through a process of supported reflecting-on-action, and building more gradually on areas where they had least experience, and getting immediate practice in areas where they felt more confident.

**Key Contributions**

Finding 3 confirms, extends, and qualifies what is known about how principals develop in real practice situations, and also makes a new contribution regarding traditional programs. Charter specific preparation has been heralded in part for its ability to deliver customized training for charter school leaders, in both the classroom and in the field (Campbell & Grubb, 2008; Cheney et al., 2010). This finding provides new evidence of how participants on the traditional university *Junior* pathway were also able to get practice in charter-amplified areas during their preparation, something that is usually lacking in traditional programs where the dominant model is the ‘internship’ path. My detailed contextual exploration however suggested that the extent to which this happened was contingent on a principal’s prior experiences, and their consequent level of comfort with the instructional leadership role that provides the primary focus of these programs (see e.g. Cravens, Goldring, & Peñaloza, 2012; Silver et al., 2009).

In showing how participants benefited from a broad spectrum of developmental activities, Finding 3 qualifies current usage of the ‘developmental continuum of practice’ model, showing that the standard development model based on the ‘continuum’ concept might inadvertently be placing a needless restriction on more flexible and creative thinking about the development process. My research suggests that it is important to allow and encourage personal variation, with this concept needing to be
understood in a more dynamic, varied, and nuanced way, that pays careful attention to the various contextual variables inherent in program and personal characteristics. There is plenty of support from extant literature on exemplary principal field experiences for this finding, where the emphasis is on spending substantial time in real school settings, and getting “genuine” practical experiences, with mounting evidence that developmental activities vary by site, supervising principal, and participant (Cheney et al., 2010; Davies & Darling-Hammond, 2012).

In revealing the actuality of this customizing work, this finding confirms extant research on innovative and charter specific programs, which pay attention to this feature (Cheney et al., 2010; Davies & Darling-Hammond, 2012), as well as the importance of having time to reflect on action as part of this process (Schön, 1983). It extends this existing research by showing the extent that this customization can and should be personalized as well as self directed, a view that is well supported by ideas from adult learning theory (e.g. Mezirow, 2000; Taylor, 2000). In this way it also challenges the complete dominance in much of the literature of the view that it is the principal-mentor who needs to be doing the customizing (Gray et al., 2007).

In summary, Finding 3 has shown that effective field experiences when embedded in performing a real role, are customized to a greater extent by participants than is expected, resulting in a wide variety of flexible developmental activities that embrace the value of reflection on action. In so doing, it has contributed to the knowledge base by supporting, extending, qualifying and making a new contribution to what is known about customizing, developmental continua, and reflection on action in authentic practice contexts for charter leaders.

**Developmental Partnerships**

My fourth conclusion is that these principals formed and benefitted from of a wider variety of helping relationships than the standard principal-mentor relationship. In Chapter V I used the term “developmental partnerships” to emphasize the key dynamics in these relationships, which include fit, openness, and level of reciprocity. I described how these relationships often had a more spontaneous and informal quality than the standard formal principal-mentor relationships, and were very often *initiated*
and driven by the principals, and not the expert coach or senior mentor working with them. In this way, they emerged as part of unique and fleeting responses to resolving urgent problems, but in some instances developed into more enduring relationships, which shared common concerns and offered longer term support through building shared expertise. In addition to being very open, there was also often a high level of reciprocity to the interchanges, especially when talking with fellow principals closer to their own experience level, and where both parties could get something of value from the conversations.

Key Contributions

This finding confirms and extends claims of existing theory, and challenges beliefs about existing practices. More importantly, in creating the term ‘developmental partnerships’, this finding makes a new contribution to the terminology used to describe the nature of support relationships that can be found in principal field experiences. Mentoring is such a ‘catch all’ term meaning different things to different people, that I wanted to capture a sense of the different and special dynamics involved in the support relationships described by principals I spoke to. The fact that these relationships were usually more informal and peer based, as well as more varied and spontaneous in style, and potentially longer term, provides a challenge to the widely held view in the school leadership development literature that the most effective form of development support for aspiring and novice principals is that offered by experienced principal-mentors. In particular there seemed to be evidence of greater empathy being shown when principals were able to work more informally with someone less experienced and influential than the usual principal-mentor, and where there was a real possibility of such ‘partners’ sharing their experiences.

In this way this finding extends, and is supported by, work done on “collegial reflective practice” (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 154; York-Barr, 2001; Day, 2000; Bengtson et al., 2012), with school leaders reflecting and learning together in more informal and self-directed ways. This moreover applies to the term ‘peer mentoring’, which eliminates the traditional notion of “superior and subordinate” (Hansen & Matthews, 2002, p. 31; Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004) found in many mentoring relationships. It also highlights that partners (in a coaching role) need to possess ‘context/capability responsiveness’ – i.e. to be
able to adjust their coaching style in responding to what the principal requires in the moment, in relation to their current capabilities and level of confidence (Lochmiller, 2013).

It also provides empirical confirmation of the value of the innovative work being tried out in ‘exemplary’ programs, with programs placing heavy emphasis in their programs on participants learning by actually engaging in the work, on being allowed to make mistakes, and by building on successes (Cheney et al., 2010; Davies & Darling-Hammond, 2012?). In this they stress the role of ongoing feedback (from mentors, coaches, cohort peers, and others) in accelerating participant learning and emphasize the importance of feedback and conversation between people, suggesting we should be focusing more on understanding the kinds of relationship that encourage and support these kinds of interactions.

In summary, Finding 4 has provided further evidence of the importance of taking account of the power of relationship in creating and supporting learning and knowledge, and has coined a new term – developmental partnerships – to capture the special quality of support offered in peer relationships formed initially to resolve immediate challenges thrown up when first tackling a real role as principal. In so doing, it has contributed to the knowledge base by providing context sensitive case evidence of how such relationships are formed and used when linked to principals doing a real job during their period of field experience.

**Personal Support Networks**

My fifth and final conclusion is that many of the developmental relationships formed during field experiences have the potential to change over time into personal support networks which offer a valuable and ongoing form of emotional support and expertise to charter school leaders as they begin to forge their careers after initial training. In Chapter V I described both how novice principals on the National Charter path were able to start forming these relationships during their field experiences, and also highlighted how the experienced principals in my sample had needed to create similar supports, without programmatic help, during their first years on the job. From this perspective, such relationships were shown to be critical to mitigating the isolation and charter specific challenges experienced by stand-alone charter school principals, and which they described as inherent in their job.
**Key Contributions**

This finding confirms and extends knowledge base on the positive role that networks play in offering positive emotional and learning support in principal preparation field experiences. It also challenges the status quo and the current lack of attention being shown to it by scholars and practitioners. It does this by highlighting the benefits of starting to build such support during field experience, and showing how it is and could be initiated *during* principal preparation programs. In the education leadership literature there is an increasing recognition of the importance of creating arrangements, or pipelines, which provide ongoing support for all principals, charter leaders included (Peterson, 2002). But the reality is that in most instances, charter leaders have a strong and almost endemic sense of isolation from the outset of their leadership roles, and practical steps to realize this vision of a leadership ‘pipeline’ are still in their infancy in many states. Mounting research, both within and outside the educational leadership field, has focused on the need for, and role of, network-like systems to mitigate this kind of isolation, so contribution of this research has been to show both how it can work and why it is so important.

This finding further confirms the importance of work describing exemplary preparation programs highlighted by the Rainbow Leadership Alliance (Cheney et al., 2010), which “draw on not only the expertise of their networks of practitioners, expert faculty, and program staff, but also the power of the cohort of peers within the program to help fellows stay on a steep learning curve” (p.71), and the collaborative learning structure and sense of community that leaders benefit from in their programs. As mentioned in Chapter V, there is support for this in the influential work on ‘communities of practice’ (Lave & Wenger, 1991) that emphasize the importance of *social relationships* where individuals self-organize around some particular area of knowledge and activity, giving them a sense of joint enterprise and identity. This is not a linear but an *emergent* process as people gradually learn the local ‘rules of the game’, to move from what Lave and Wenger term ‘legitimate peripheral participation’, to more central or ‘full’ involvement in the main processes of that community. Support can also be found in the increasingly influential work being done on job-embedded professional development in schools (Putnam &Borko, 2000).
Extending these ideas to a charter context, my research is supported by Kegan’s views on the value of a good ‘holding environment’ (1982, 1994), which speaks directly to the issue of the ‘isolation’ experienced by charter principals. Without the flexible containment and emotional support provided by social networks of the kind Lave and Wenger describe, individuals are bound to feel vulnerable as they begin to experience the pressures in their first full time role. This in turn suggests that starting to create such a holding environment early on the development process e.g. during field experiences, would be a constructive thing to do.

In summary, Finding 5 has shown that despite the recognition that networking has a critical role to play in principal development, there is a real need to look at practical ways forward to improve current network building practices in traditional preparation program field experiences. And in tackling this, educators, designers and administrators of preparation programs need to pay much closer attention to how they can encourage principals to become participants in various communities of practice, both those associated with their preparation and those that will be associated with their future charter school work.

**Developmental Model**

In seeking to pull together the findings and conclusions across all five areas that I have covered in this chapter, I now offer an outline framework designed to enhance understanding of them, and to facilitate thinking about how to make best use of these findings in practice. For the purposes of explanation in Chapter V and above, I discussed my findings across five main headings, and treated each component identified e.g. ‘pathways’, ‘developmental partners’, as a separate part/activity/object that could be examined independently of its context. A I pointed out in Chapter V, although this was a useful explanatory device, it was in a sense a quite arbitrary set of distinctions, as the phenomena the principals talked about during the interviews were all of a piece, embedded in a living system, dynamically interacting with each other. In model 6.1 below I adapt model 5.1 to show how the elements highlighted in the findings can be seen to be part of a loose, simplified ecology of practice (Bateson, 1972) associated with the field experience part of charter principal preparation.

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6 Bateson, G. (1972). *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: a Revolutionary Approach to Man’s Understanding of*
Figure 6.1: Charter Principal Field Experiences as an ‘Ecology of Practice’

In this diagram, the three main parts circulate the principal, who is seen to be at the heart of this accelerated development system. This is to show that field experiences, and the preparation systems they are part of should be *principal-centered* (Cheney et al., 2010; Davies & Darling-Hammond, 2012) rather than program-centered as they tend to be seen at the moment (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). Further, I view these systems as primarily *self-organizing* rather than as planned and coordinated by a central authority. For this reason, the metaphor for the principal, in the ‘customizing’ or ‘how do I improve my practice’ aspect of the role, is that of the *bricoleur*, who creatively uses what he/she has before him/her, rather than as administrator who passively follows a laid out routine. At the same time, when in the *performer* aspect of the role, the principal approaches his/her charter leader related tasks in a style more closely approaching the activity of ‘improvisation’, by making the best creative use in the moment of

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*Himself*. New York: Chandler

whatever resources and support are to hand - something that seems to fit well with the more entrepreneurial and innovative nature of their primary role as charter leaders. Finally, when in the relationship builder aspect of the role, the principal assumes/believes that learning and knowhow is in the relationships between people, and seeks to expand his/her network in order to embody and be able to access the technical expertise, learning, and social support that the charter principal’s role requires.

It is also important to note that the experience of each individual participant represents a unique pathway through the development territory that exists between pre-service and in-service. In this respect each person in my sample provided a practical example of how the overall principal preparation field experience system can play out, being brought into the present moment through the particular dynamically interfacing ‘parts’ that constitute each such pathway. It is this kind of inter-connectivity, over time and in relation to local conditions, that has produced the very effective levels of field experience enjoyed by principals in my sample. With this foremost in mind I now develop the implications of these findings for practice, and make recommendations for practitioners and policy makers on this basis.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

This model, and the findings which constitute it, highlights the importance of taking both the program pathway and the participant’s personal characteristics seriously. To illustrate what I mean by this: for an aspiring principal based in traditional public school for their field experience (Internship) particular attention should be paid to getting the primary developmental partner (principal mentor) relationship right, since it is so critical to the success of the field experience. In addition, efficacy could be enhanced by finding ways to remedy the gaps in areas of charter-amplified experience e.g. by pairing them with additional developmental partners that have charter experience (following Campbell & Grubb, 2008), and by helping them start to build relationships that they can take with them beyond their training period. By contrast, for a novice principal embedded in a charter school (Junior) the emphasis would be on taking steps to ensure they are able to have sufficient space to ‘step back’ from the messy reality of their roles. The efficacy of this pathway could also be enhanced by finding ways to help them develop a

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broader network (as suggested by Bartol & Zhang, 2007), and thinking about ways to give them opportunities to observe practitioners in other schools and contexts.

In reflecting on the different pathways described in this research, it becomes apparent that there are significant tensions between the characteristics, and that each pathway makes trade-offs when they emphasize one or another of them. For example, in considering the ‘performing’ and ‘customizing’ roles that participants can play: the National Charter pathway places emphasis on relationship building and exposing candidates to a wide variety of school and leader contexts, but in doing this, it has adapted the ‘job-embedded’ characteristics, so the participant is in a real school founder role during their preparation, but is not actually running their school yet. In having field experiences in other schools, they are able to create some space/distance from their practice for reflection. By contrast, on the Junior pathway, the emphasis is the other way round: these participants gain real job-embedded intensity but in consequence have less space to step back, and gain limited exposure to other school sites and ways of leading. The tensions or dynamics here then relate primarily to intensity and space, or the performing versus customizing roles. The ‘resolution’ of this tension in each pathway can be seen to reside in the third side of the triangle, developmental partnerships. These partnerships provide an appropriate level of school-based support for those on the Junior path so they can step back, and provide access to real performance activities for the National Charter participants.

Highlighting these implicit trade-offs in these pathways should mean that policy makers, practitioners, and course designers can make decisions in a more deliberate way, and that they can attempt to mitigate the consequences of their choice. In this way, for example, novice principals on the Junior path, can be encouraged and helped to gain experiences in other school contexts, and care can be taken to ensure that they have enough in-school support so they can step back and reflect when they need to.

In terms of recommendations for practice, there are some opportunities for ‘easy wins’ relating to making pathways more principal centered, customization, peer support, and network building. With regard to principal centered and customized field experiences, principals should be allowed and encouraged to take a much stronger role as ‘bricoleurs’ in fashioning and organizing aspects of their field-
based preparation. In supporting this, careful attention needs to be paid to principals’ prior experience, their future roles, and the school/support structures they will be working within, but the customization process should be seen as dynamic and living – not as a list of boxes to check off.

To enhance the support principals having in doing this, I recommend that programs utilize the broader notion of developmental partnerships, and emphasize with candidates and potential partners the importance of reciprocal relationships, and of participants’ active involvement in successful developmental partnerships. I also recommend that programs explicitly focus on helping participants to develop additional, more informal, peer relationships like those on the National Charter pathway. This seems to be particularly important for novice principals on the Junior pathway – a pathway that is currently least understood and studied – and which, on the basis of this research, seems to offer huge potential for more effective charter principal field experiences.

Further to this last recommendation, and in order to help reduce the isolation felt by charter principals, I recommend that policy makers and program directors think of ways to increase participant involvement levels in the ‘communities of practice’ that surround them, helping principals build wider networks during their training period and beyond; and also building on existing teaching networks and in-service principal networks where they exist, following the model of national charter leadership development organizations like Building Excellent Schools and KIPP.

To enhance the field experiences of aspiring principals on the Internship route – which is likely still the majority of aspiring charter principals - I recommend that they should be placed in charter schools for their field experience wherever possible. If it is not possible, they should be supported in developing a strategy to help them get access to this exposure, for example online, or via working with additional developmental partners that are in a charter school. Given the ongoing work on principal pipelines and developing internal leadership capacity (see e.g. Campbell, 2012), this seems to be an area again where ‘easy wins’ could be made.

Turning finally to a critical lever of accelerated development highlighted in this research i.e. job-embedded performance pressure: here I showed how the quality of enhanced learning was derived from the fact that principals in my sample were able to focus on their principal role full time, and were in a job-
**embedded role.** I therefore recommend that programs investigate ways to get the Internship path closer to the *Junior* path, and suggest that the timing of the field experience period be adjusted to coincide with a principal’s appointment to a full time post, rather prior to this. This recommendation may seem to represent a huge move from where the field currently is, where most aspiring principals complete part time internships prior to getting a leadership post. However, ten of the cases in my sample show that it is certainly possible, and states that offer tiered certification effectively do this (Bottoms & Egelson, 2012; Darling-Hammond, 2012), thereby pointing to one known way of doing it, in addition to the *Junior* pathway shown in this research.

**Future Research**

Reflecting on the limitations of my own research efforts, I offer some suggestions for important areas for future research, on the basis of what I have learned here. In this research I identified four pathways that delivered effective field experiences for charter school leaders. There are likely to be a number of other pathways that it would be useful to explicitly identify and explore in order to clarify the range of developmental options available for aspiring charter school leaders. For example, it would be helpful to replicate this research with principals on preparatory pathways run by local charter management organizations, and by different university/non-profit/ district partnerships. There remains a significant gap in understanding whether and how the features identified in this research play out in these contexts, and this research would go some way to addressing it.

Given the likely selection bias in my sample, it would be helpful to conduct similar research with principals who did not participate in any formal pre-service preparation at all. They would provide a contrasting perspective (perhaps similar to the experienced principals in my sample) of how principals develop ‘on the job’. It would also be helpful to talk to charter principals who did not rate their programs highly, or have active field experiences, particularly if they could be selected on the basis of being unsuccessful (or failed) charter principals. These principals could potentially provide valuable confirming evidence of the importance the characteristics identified in my developmental model. Other research, which focused explicitly on successful practicing principals who had received poor initial training, would
provide another perspective on how charter principals learned ‘on the job’ effectively.

Following this last line of thinking, research that used a different proxy for effectiveness would be useful. A sample could be selected based on, for example, principal attributes post-training (following Darling-Hammond et al., 2007), or based on measures of student performance. Given that work linking principal preparation programs in general to principal and student outcomes is still at an early stage, this could be challenging to do, but it would provide a very valuable comparison to the picture of effective field experience described here.

To take the idea of principal centered preparation seriously, it would be helpful to conduct action research that followed principals going though their field experiences, and which checked in with them regularly and studied what was happening to them as they progressed through their field experience. In this way one could see how much flexibility/customization could be built into field experiences, and what changes made the biggest impact. This work should also pay attention to the impact of experience level, future role, and support systems. This would also serve to highlight how much focus should be placed on charter-amplified areas for different ‘types’ of participant, and where this focus could best be placed.

Finally, research on the role and impact of network building during field experience and beyond would be very valuable. A longitudinal study that followed principals and their networks from before their initial preparation training into their practicing careers, and included principals in programs that had an explicit focus on networking as well as principals in programs that did not. Here it would be important to take into account personal aptitudes and prior experiences with network building. It would also be interesting to compared network sizes and types of relationships within the network, as well as differences in principal performance.
REFERENCES


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leadership/effectiveness/Leadership-Training.pdf


NCPEA. (2007, May 3). The School Leader as Bricoleur: Developing Scholarly Practitioners for Our Schools. Retrieved from the Connexions Web site: http://cnx.org/content/m14494/1.1/


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1. CONSENT

This is a standard consent page for social research from the University of Colorado Institutional Review Board. Please read through it and indicate your consent by checking the AGREE box at the end.

1. You are being asked to be in this research study because you are currently serving as a charter school principal in the state of Colorado. If you join the study, you will be asked to spend approximately ten to fifteen minutes completing an online survey.

This survey is part of a study designed to learn more about the role of field experience in the development of charter school principals.

There are only minimal risks anticipated with this research, since information being collected is not of a sensitive nature, but relates to your experiences during any field experience elements of your principal preparation training. There may be risks the researchers have not thought of.

Every effort will be made to protect your privacy and confidentiality by storing data in a password protected electronic format, and keeping personal identifiers separately from the survey and interview responses.

You have a choice about being in this study. You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to be. If you have questions, you can call Lucy Mermagen at 303-829-7326. You can call and ask questions at any time. You may have questions about your rights as someone in this study. If you have questions, you can call the COMIRB (the responsible Institutional Review Board). Their number is (303) 724-1055.

**ELECTRONIC CONSENT:** Please select your choice below.

- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Disagree
2. PRINCIPAL'S BACKGROUND

This section asks for general information about your background.

2. What is your formal title in your school?
   - Head of School
   - Director
   - Principal
   - Other (please specify)

3. PRIOR to this school year, how many years have you served as the director of THIS school? Count part of a year as one year, if this is your first year mark “0”.
   - 0
   - 1
   - 2-6
   - 5+

4. PRIOR to this school year (2012-2013), how many years have you served as the director of THIS OR ANY OTHER school? Count part of a year as one year.
   - 0
   - 1
   - 2-5
   - 5+

5. Since your current school opened, how many directors has it had, including you?
   - 1
   - 2-4
   - 5+
   - Don’t know
6. Please indicate the last professional position prior to becoming a charter school leader.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>□</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal of traditional public school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Director of another charter school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant principal or other administrator in traditional public school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant principal/director or other administrator in THIS charter school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant principal/director or other administrator in another charter school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher in a traditional public school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher in THIS charter school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher in another charter school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Worked in or led a community-based non profit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Worked in or led a business</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-employed</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
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</table>

7. Which best describes your principal certification status?

- □ I've never been a certified principal.
- □ I'm currently a certified principal in this state.
- □ My license is currently expired.
- □ My license is from another state.
3. PRINCIPAL PREPARATION

The purpose of this section is to find out about any leadership preparation programs that you completed prior to becoming a charter school principal.

8. What kind of formal leader/principal preparation program did you complete? (select one or more)

- [ ] A traditional university-based program
- [ ] A charter leader specific program (e.g. New Leaders, Building Excellent Schools, Get Smart)
- [ ] An internal CMO/EMO sponsored program (e.g. DSST, KIPP, Strive)
- [ ] I did not attend a formal principal preparation program

Other (please specify)
9. When did you finish your preparation program (month/year). Approximately how many months did the program last?

10. To what extent did your preparation program coursework focus on these technical areas of school leadership?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Moderately</th>
<th>To a great extent</th>
<th>To a very great extent</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Budgeting and Resource Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>School Law and Regulatory Compliance</td>
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<td>Fund Raising</td>
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<td>Negotiating with districts and traditional public schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scheduling and Procedures</td>
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<td>Governance and Board Relations</td>
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<td>Human Resources Policies and Practices</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acquiring and Managing Facilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Using Technology to Support Learning and School Management</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

11. To what extent did your preparation program coursework focus on the following more general areas of school leadership?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Moderately</th>
<th>To a great extent</th>
<th>To a very great extent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal Leadership e.g. modeling/inspiring/leading</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ensuring Effective Teaching and Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focusing on Data &amp; Outcomes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nurturing Student &amp; Staff Efficacy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leading Learning Organizations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Building School Community &amp; Culture</td>
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<tr>
<td>Managing Effectively</td>
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</table>
### 12. To what extent did your leadership preparation program include the following features?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>To an extent</th>
<th>To a great extent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faculty members that were very knowledgeable about subject matter</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content emphasis on instructional leadership</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Course work that was comprehensive and provided a coherent learning experience</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Content emphasis on efficient school operations management</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Integration of theory and practice</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☒</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Content emphasis on leadership for school improvement</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☒</td>
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<tr>
<td>Content emphasis on working with the school community and stakeholders</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<td>☒</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opportunities provided by faculty to evaluate the program</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opportunities for self-assessment and reflection on practice</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regular assessments of skill development and leadership competencies</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching by practicing school or district administrators</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>A student cohort</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
13. How often were the following learning approaches used in your coursework?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Approach</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Very often</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Use of problem-based learning approaches</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Action research or inquiry projects</td>
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<tr>
<td>Journal writing of your experiences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Analysis and discussion of case studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lectures</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation in small group work</td>
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<tr>
<td>A portfolio demonstrating learning and accomplishments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Field-based projects where ideas were applied</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

14. Did your program include a supervised internship / field experience working directly with a principal on administrative tasks?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
15. How helpful would it have been to you to have had specific training in following areas of school leadership PRIOR to becoming a charter school principal?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Moderately helpful</th>
<th>Helpful</th>
<th>Very helpful</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Budgeting and resource management</td>
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6. FIELD EXPERIENCE

Questions in this section relate to the internship / field experience component of the formal principal preparation program you completed.

16. How long was your internship / field experience? (Specify unit e.g. hours, weeks)

17. How actively did you participate in leadership tasks in the following areas during your internship?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Lead the activity</th>
<th>Participated in the activity</th>
<th>Observed the activity</th>
<th>Did not observe the activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Budgeting and resource management</td>
<td>○</td>
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</table>

18. How did you manage the time needed for your internship / field experience?

○ My full time position was my internship. I did not teach or hold another position at the same time.
○ I had some release time from my teaching to carry out my internship
○ I carried a full teaching load and did my internship work during non-teaching time during the school year
○ I did my internship work during the summer and was not teaching at the time

Other (please specify)
19. To what extent did your internship experience reflect the following attributes?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>To a very great extent</th>
<th>To a great extent</th>
<th>Moderately</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My internship activities were anchored in real-world problems</td>
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<tr>
<td>I had school-based assignments linked to principal standards</td>
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<tr>
<td>I moved from observing to participating in and then leading school-based activities related to the core responsibilities of school leaders</td>
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<tr>
<td>There were clearly defined expectations, processes and schedule for the internship</td>
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<tr>
<td>I had ongoing and close supervision by program faculty</td>
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<tr>
<td>I was mentored/coached by an existing principal</td>
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<tr>
<td>There were rigorous evaluations of my performance of core school leader responsibilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>I was required to engage in substantive action-reflection cycles</td>
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<td>There was personalization of this internship based on my needs and the needs of the school</td>
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20. Did your program offer any of the following on-the-job learning supports once you were working as a principal?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coaching/Mentoring</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peer Group Cohorts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional Development personalized to your needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
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</table>
7. PROGRAM EVALUATION

Questions in this section ask for you to evaluate the formal principal preparation program you completed and to consider in hindsight the areas of preparation that you wish you had covered in more depth.

21. How well did your preparation program prepare you to deal with the following areas of school leadership?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Moderately well</th>
<th>Well</th>
<th>Very well</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Budgeting and resource management</td>
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</table>
22. With the benefit of hindsight, which areas do you wish your leadership preparation program had placed more emphasis on? Check all that apply.

- Budgeting and resource management
- School law and regulatory compliance
- Fund raising
- Negotiating with districts and traditional public schools
- Scheduling and procedures
- Governance and board relations
- Human resources policies and practices
- Acquiring and managing facilities
- Using technology to support learning, school management and culture
- Personal leadership e.g. modeling / inspiring / enabling
- Ensuring effective teaching and learning
- Focusing on data & outcomes
- Nurturing student & staff efficacy
- Leading learning organizations
- Building school community & culture

Other (please specify)
8. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Questions in this section focus on professional development opportunities that you have had since becoming a charter school principal.

23. Which of the following types of professional development have you taken part in? Check all that apply.

- University courses related to your role as principal
- Visits to other schools designed to improve your own work as principal
- Individual or collaborative research on a topic of interest to you professionally
- Peer observation / coaching where you visit with other principal(s) for sharing practice
- A principal network (e.g. a group of principals organized by your district, an outside agency, or online)
- Courses / workshops run by resource centers / technical assistance providers in your state
- Working with a personal mentor or coach
- Training from a Charter Management Organization or Educational Management Organization
- Training from a charter school authorizer

Other (please specify)
24. How useful have you found the following kinds of professional leadership development experiences?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Not useful</th>
<th>Somewhat useful</th>
<th>Useful</th>
<th>Very Useful</th>
<th>N/A</th>
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<td>Other (please specify)</td>
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25. If money and time were no object, what kind of personal professional development training would you most like to have?
9. DEMOGRAPHICS

The following section asks for general demographic information about you and your school.

26. What is your gender?
   - Male
   - Female

27. How do you identify yourself in terms of ethnicity?
   - American Indian or Alaska Native
   - Asian
   - Black or African American
   - Hispanic or Latino
   - Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
   - White
   - Other

28. Which category below includes your age?
   - 21-29
   - 30-39
   - 40-49
   - 50-59
   - 60 or older

29. Which of the following best describes the leadership structure of your school?
   - One principal with one or more assistant principals
   - One principal with subordinate specialists who attend to particular responsibilities, such as finances, external development, etc.
   - Principal role divided between an instructional leader and a managerial leader
   - School leadership shared among teachers, with a designated lead teacher
   - One or more designated leaders who work closely with committees, families, task forces, or teams
   - Other (please specify):

30. What best describes the location of your school?
   - Urban
   - Suburban
   - Rural
31. What grades does your school serve?

- K-8
- K-12
- Elementary
- Middle
- High

Other (please specify) __________________________

32. Please indicate which arrangement best describes your school’s organizational status:

- An independent school-level non-profit corporation with 501(c)(3) status
- Managed by an umbrella non-profit organization
- Managed by an umbrella for-profit organization
- Managed by a school district

Other (please specify) __________________________

33. How many more years do you hope to be principal at this school?

- 1
- 2-5 years
- 5+ years

34. If/when you leave, what do you expect to do?

- Work as a principal in another charter school
- Work as a principal in a traditional public school
- Work as a teacher in this or another school
- Work in education administration
- Continue to work, but leave the field of education
- Retire

Other (please specify) __________________________
10. FUTURE RESEARCH

This page asks whether you would be interested in taking part in future research looking in more detail at your preparation and professional development experiences.

35. May we contact you about taking part in a short in-person interview? This research seeks to help practitioners improve upon existing preparation programs and professional development opportunities. To make it as helpful as possible we would like to interview a select number of charter school principals to find out more about their experiences.

☐ Yes
☐ No

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this survey. The results of the survey and later research will be available via the Colorado League of Charter Schools website.
APPENDIX B: PHASE TWO INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
• Consent form and permission to record
• Focus on role your internship played in your leadership development as a charter school principal. Reflect on what you feel was most effective about your internship, where it was weaker, and why.
• Bit of chat about background / program / dates etc.

Good internships tend to move from observing to participating to leading – we call this a developmental continuum of practice. How did this happen for you?
• How much time did you spend LEADING vs. PARTICIPATING vs. OBSERVING?
  • Was that the right balance?
  • Tell me about a time when you most felt out of your comfort zone? Why?
  • It sounds/looks/feels like you’re saying ...
• Give me a couple of examples of when you felt you “hit the ball out of the park”?
  o How do you know?
  o Did anything in the internship help build that skill?
  o Link with evaluation from survey e.g.
  o Is there a link with areas where you were most active?
• What about areas where you felt LEAST well prepared? HRM/DATA/ T&L?
  • Why do you think that was? For example?
  • Can you think how it could have been done differently?
  • How did you build that skill?
  • Not necessarily areas where least active?
  • How could they have given you more/better opportunities in these areas?
  • Why was that helpful when (x) wasn’t?

Tell me about your MENTORING experiences
• Can you give an example of a particularly helpful session?
• How did it shape your learning?
• How might it have been more helpful?
• How do you know?
• It sounds/looks/feels like you’re saying
• You had continued mentoring in role – how did that work? How helpful?

What opportunities did you have for reflection/personalization/self-evaluation?
• How did this work?
• What has been your “lowest” point? And the highest?
• How could it be structured differently?
• How did you feel?
• How did it help you?
• Can you give an example of when it made a difference to your learning?

Can you talk about emphasis placed during internship on areas more significant or “specific” to charter leaders?
• Do you think that matters?
• Why? Why not?
• Can you give some examples of how you did this? What worked well?

Thinking about content areas where you were most active ...
• Which activities were most valuable? Why?
• Can you tell me more about? For example?
• You were very active in (insert areas) yet didn’t feel that well prepared after finishing the program – why was this?
• “It sounds/looks/feels like you’re saying …

Now looking at content areas where you were less active ...
• Did it matter that you hadn’t led X?
• How did it work once you were in role?
• You mentioned that you wished you’d had more attention paid to … What did you do about it? How did you learn to do it

Were there other areas your internship covered that you think were especially important?
Can you tell me a little about how your cohort worked after you completed your training? How was this initiated? How often? What you covered? How useful was it? Why? Why do you think that it worked versus … ?

On reflection what were the most effective aspects of your internship experience?
• Which parts made the biggest impression on your practice? Why? What did you learn?
• What part of the internship do you feel are most important to you becoming an effective school leader?
• How do you know?
• Can you tell me about a time when you realized you needed more development?
• “You mentioned … tell me more about that … It sounds like you’re saying …

Other
• Is there anything else about how the internship experience influenced your development that you’d like to share?
• 5 years down the road - if you were setting up a training program internship, what would you do differently?
• Where else did your program fall short? How do you know?
• How could it be improved upon? What exactly would you include?
• You mentioned … can you relate that back to this?
• Having reflected on your development experiences … what effect has this had on your views of the development support that the internship and more informal follow up processes provide?