Leadership in the Early Childhood Years: Opportunities for Young Leadership Development in Rural Communities

Debra Jo Hailey, *Southeastern Louisiana University*
Michelle Fazio-Brunson, *Northwestern State University of Louisiana*

Research into young children's leadership skills is sparse and focuses on leadership in early childhood classroom contexts. Understanding of leadership development in young children can be expanded by studying parents' perceptions of children's leadership development as it is enacted in contexts outside of the school. This qualitative study examined beliefs, practices, and contextual relationships of families with young children who were identified by teachers within their schools as having strong leadership skills. Student leaders were identified according to the Leadership subscale of the *Scales for Rating the Behavioral Characteristics of Superior Students*, 3rd ed. Four mothers and three fathers of identified first graders who met gender and ethnic selection criteria participated. Interviews were conducted with structured and unstructured open-ended questions, and parent journals were collected from participants. Using Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of human development as a guide, parental perceptions of contextual influences on young children's leadership development were investigated. Findings indicate that parents were intentional in trying to develop characteristics and dispositions in their children to help them become good citizens but did not necessarily consider their actions as also building early leadership skills. Information concerning contextual situations, relationships, tools, and characteristics of early leadership development is shared. As parents discussed opportunities for their first graders to develop leadership skills, an unexpected theme emerged regarding benefits of rural living for young leadership development.

Keywords: early childhood, extracurricular activities, human development, leadership, parenting, rural education, social networks

In a democratic society such as the United States, leadership skills are relevant in many ways to daily life. Books abound on the topic of developing leadership skills in business, athletics, religion, and education. Organized groups that cater to youth, such as 4-H, Boy Scouts, and Girls and Boys Clubs of America, seek to help youth develop leadership skills (Karnes & Bean, 1995). Although discussions on potential leadership abilities of people ranging from preadolescents to adults abound in professional literature, few focus on young children and their emerging leadership skills (Trawick-Smith, 1988). Early childhood is recognized by researchers, educators, and parents as formative years of cognitive development, and it is likewise recognized that a stimulating environment early in life will positively affect overall development. Therefore, as a society that values leadership skills, it seems only natural to be interested in the development of those skills from a young age.

This study investigated some of the contextual factors that influence young leaders' behaviors.

Parent interviews and journals were used to explore parents' perceptions about young children's emerging leadership development.

Literature Review

Early Childhood Leadership Defined

A review of research identified many definitions of leadership, but one seemed most applicable to the early childhood years: Foster (1981) defines several categories of leadership, including action leadership, characterized by behaviors that preserve the functioning of group social processes or by actions that cause changes that either improve problem-solving efficiency or advance the level of thinking in the group. This description most accurately describes leadership as it is enacted in the early years of development.

Characteristics of Young Leaders

It may be difficult for some to think of very young children as being leaders, but a review of typical leadership behaviors observed in early childhood classrooms illustrates how leadership is enacted.

Linguistic Competence. Topping the list in the execution of leadership in almost every study reviewed was the ability to listen and respond effactually. Linguistic competence, evidenced as both advanced verbal skills, such as broad vocabulary and the use of compound and complex sentences, and the ability to communicate effectively with age-mates and adults by modulating words to fit the circumstances and intended audience, was frequently noted (Karnes & Chauvin, 2000; Kemple, Speranza, & Hazen, 1992; Kitano & Tafoya, 1983; Milligan, 2004; Perez, Chassin, Ellington, & Smith, 1982; Trawick-Smith, 1988; Wolfle, 1989). Young leaders were more likely than their same-age cohorts to promote continuation of play and interaction by listening, on-topic responding (Woolfson, 2016), making alternative suggestions, and rejecting suggestions diplomatically (Green, Cillessen, Rechis, Patterson, & Hughes, 2008; Kemple et al., 1992; Trawick-Smith, 1988; Williams & Schaller, 1990). In addition, skilled communication was observed as a primary reason for leaders effectively entering into an existing play group and recognizing body language and facial expressions as part of the communication schema (Kemple et al., 1992; Trawick-Smith, 1988).

Problem Solving. Many young leaders seem not only to express themselves well but also to have the ability to listen to their followers and make good decisions based on that input. Young leaders are curious and creative thinkers who are willing to take risks (Woolfson, 2016). This is evidenced by their willingness to offer suggestions for new play episodes and problem-solving strategies (Adcock & Segal, 1983; Hatch, 1990; Segal, Peck, Vega-Lahr, & Field, 1987) and to explore innovative methods for accomplishing a task or team effort (Sternberg, 2004; Woolfson, 2016).

Intelligence. It may not be necessary to be a gifted academic learner to possess extraordinary leadership skills, but there seems to be a general tendency for leaders to be of above-average intelligence (Sternberg, 2005). This is evidenced by the ability to quickly analyze a situation, analyze possible outcomes and consequences of decisions, reach a logical conclusion, and organize a plan of action (Karnes & Chauvin, 2000; Kitano & Tafoya, 1983; Landau & Milich, 1990; Ramey, 1991; Sternberg, 2005). Above-average intelligence is also apparent as exceptional leaders express creativity while enhancing the make-believe quality of play and act as the generator of new or innovative ideas (Feldhusen & Pleiss, 1994; Kitano & Tafoya, 1983; Sternberg, 2005; Trawick-Smith, 1988).

Social and Emotional Skills. Positive outcomes of leadership are the result of a give-and-take communication scheme that includes negotiation, persuasion, compromise, and often taking the group needs into consideration as opposed to acting in a self-serving capacity (Sankar-DeLeeuw, 2007; Sternberg, 2005; Trawick-Smith, 1988; Wolfle, 1989). A proclivity for dealing effactually with social and emotional issues is another attribute frequently seen when observing young leaders. Examples of high functioning in the social and emotional development domain include sharing resources, maintaining personal emotional control (Landau & Milich, 1990; Ostrov & Guzzo, 2015), helping regulate the social interactions of players within a group, and enjoying group interactions (Mawson, 2011; Scharf & Mayseless,

2009; Willis & Schiller, 2011). Even when resource acquirement is for personal gain, young children who use prosocial behaviors are more likely to get the desired resource (Hawley, 2015). Socially and emotionally astute young leaders are more likely to attend to the feelings of playmates, expressing empathy with both actions and words (Feldhusen & Pleiss, 1994; Rivizzigno & Brendgen, 2014; Trawick-Smith, 1988).

Social Responsibility. Not only do young leaders tend to think about group needs as opposed to being self-serving, but they also have an altruistic nature, seeing the needs of the less fortunate and seeking solutions to the problem causing the misfortune (Karnes & Bean, 1995; Scharf & Mayseless, 2009). Furthermore, leaders in group situations have an affinity for generating and applying conflict-resolution strategies quickly and effectively without using coercive measures (Mawson, 2011; Sankar-DeLeeuw, 2007; Trawick-Smith, 1988; Wolfle, 1989).

Although young leaders are likely to bring unique leadership characteristics and strengths to a given situation, these are typical behaviors that many exhibiting leadership share. Table 1 synthesizes typical leadership behaviors exhibited by young children as observed and published by teachers and researchers.

Theoretical Framework: The Bioecological Systems Theory of Human Development

Bronfenbrenner organized the many contexts of human development into a set of five interrelated levels, called the bioecological systems theory of human development. The first level is the microsystem, the immediate context containing the developing person, and consequently his or her biology, along with the relations between the developing person and the immediate active environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For example, children exist within a home where they have relationships with their parents and siblings. The second level is the mesosystem, the interrelationship between the contexts the child exists within, such as home and school (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The third system in this theory, the exosystem, involves little or no contact with individuals but is influenced by events that

occur within it, such as decisions made by the local school board (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). A fourth level, the macrosystem, is the overarching level of society the child exists within and includes social, cultural, political, and historical influences (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Lerner, 2002). This dynamic theory also incorporates time as a functioning component on human development, called the chronoystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1995). An example of time as an influential factor in development is a child's age when parents go through a divorce.

Each level of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory of human development is connected to the others: changes, events, and disturbances at one level have a trickle-up or trickle-down effect on other levels (Lerner, 2002). Specifically for this study, childhood leadership development was examined by looking at the children in their immediate environment and within the interactions of the larger environment by using the bioecological systems theory as a guide.

Methods

Setting and Participants

To investigate young children's leadership skills outside the school context, parents were interviewed in 2013 to gain insight into their perceptions. Unless otherwise noted, the demographics reported here are for the year 2013.

The Community. Riverdale (pseudonym), a rural town in Louisiana, has a rich history of agriculture, southern hospitality, and battlefields. At the time of this study, the U.S. Census Bureau ranked Louisiana as one of the poorest states in the nation, with 19.8% of the population living below the poverty line (Bishaw & Fontenot, 2014). The median household income for the area was approximately $27,400 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013a), compared to median household incomes represented by the state and nation of approximately $45,000 and $52,000, respectively (Noss, 2014). Demographic data for the parish indicate that 54% were Caucasian, 41% African American, and 5% other.

(Continued following Table 1)

Table 1.

Characteristics and Behaviors of Young Leaders

Characteristic	Behaviors
Linguistic competence	▪ Has advanced verbal skills ▪ Modulates words to intended audience ▪ Promotes continuation of play through diplomacy ▪ Enters existing play groups successfully ▪ Has multiple exchanges in conversations ▪ Listens to followers ▪ Recognizes and uses body language as communication
Problem solving	▪ Listens and makes decisions based on available information ▪ Exhibits curiosity ▪ Exhibits creativity ▪ Takes calculated risks ▪ Works to accomplish task or team effort
Intelligence	▪ Analyzes a situation and organizes a plan of action ▪ Develops creative solutions ▪ Generates new ideas and innovative solutions ▪ Expresses empathy
Social and emotional skills	▪ Negotiates and compromises ▪ Is persuasive ▪ Takes group needs into consideration, collaborates ▪ Uses prosocial skills to acquire desired resources ▪ Exhibits emotional self-control ▪ Expresses empathy ▪ Helps regulate emotions in group processes
Social responsibility	▪ Is altruistic ▪ Sees injustice and considers solutions ▪ Uses noncoercive measures to resolve conflicts

As might be expected of a college town, the educational attainment levels were relatively high compared to the rest of the state and nation: high school degree or GED, 33%, and college degree, 21%, compared to the national average of 30% and 14.4%, respectively (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013b).

To some extent, individuals create their own definitions of *rural* and *urban* (Coladarci, 2007). In this state, the classification system is based on population. Communities of more than 5,000 inhabitants are labeled a *city*. By that definition, Riverdale is a city. However, some government entities define geographic areas using other measures, such as income, poverty, access to health care, and geographic proximity to metropolitan areas. Considering these demographics, Riverdale has low income levels in addition to high poverty rates, which classify it as rural. Furthermore, according to the Rural Health Information Hub (2018), Riverdale is classified as a rural community based on health care accessibility and level of services available. In addition, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (2018) considers Riverdale to be rural based on population density and distance from a metropolitan area. Although the local government classifies it as a city, Riverdale meets many criteria for being defined as rural.

The School. Riverdale Elementary School (pseudonym) served 320 students from first to eighth grade, with two classrooms per grade level. The Louisiana State Department of Education publishes a School Report Card for Parents annually, ranking schools with letter grade ratings ranging from F (failure) to A (above average) based on academic performance, goal achievement, and school climate. The overall grade for the parish was a C, but the specific school in this study was consistently scored A and had higher academic growth than targeted (Louisiana Believes, 2014).

The Children. As the lowest grade level of students, first graders were chosen so the children were less likely to have prior relationships with their classmates than other grade levels, thus eliminating many presupposed relationships or reputations. The first grade students closely reflected the ethnic population of the community, with 19 Caucasian students, 20 African American students, and 1 Asian student.

Riverdale first-grade teachers were trained to administer the Leadership portion of the *Scales for Rating the Behavioral Characteristics of Superior Students* (Renzulli et al., 2010) and then administered the test. Results were given to the researcher using only student numbers for identification. High scores were determined and sorted by gender and then by ethnicity. Ethnicities represented in the study were African-American and Caucasian, by far the most represented ethnic groups of both the school and the community. The school principal identified the students with the highest scores and provided contact information for their parents.

The Parents. Parents of the highest scorers in each gender and ethnicity category were contacted for permission to be interviewed. Both parents of each of the highest scorers agreed to participate, with the exception of one father. This resulted in interviews with the parent(s) of four children (all pseudonyms): (a) Mr. and Mrs. Sawyer, parents of a Caucasian male; (b) Ms. Bigsby, parent of an African American male; (c) Dr. and Mrs. Pillsbury, parents of a Caucasian female; and (d) Mr. and Mrs. Flowers, parents of an African American female.

Data Collection

In addition to the initial data collected at the school used to identify young leaders, data also included parent interviews and parent journals. Each of these is clarified below.

Interviews. The central question that guided this study was whether there are certain practices, beliefs, or contextual relationships within the family of a young child who has been identified as a leader in the academic setting that will contribute to an in-depth understanding of how parenting performance influences the development of a young leader. To understand the beliefs, practices, and contextual influences of four families, one-on-one interviews were conducted.

Each parent was given a consent form that explained the study. The parents were informed that pseudonyms would be used in all written documentation so that their names and the name of the school would remain confidential. Confidentiality practices were discussed and agreed on, with signatures obtained as evidence.

After gaining consent, one-on-one interviews were conducted at times and locations convenient for the parents (e.g., workplaces, coffee shops, homes, church classrooms, and civic organization meeting spaces). Interviews were audio-recorded, and the time span between the first and last interview was 83 days.

Although mothers and fathers were given equal opportunities to choose how to participate, mothers chose to participate in three different 45-minute interviews, whereas fathers chose to participate in one in-depth interview that lasted 1–2 hours. Mothers chose to read over their typed transcripts, but fathers turned down that option. All of the mothers took the opportunity to read, correct, and make comments on transcribed interviews, but no changes were requested.

Journals. During the first interview, the journal was introduced and explained. Participants were responsible for preserving confidentiality of their journals until returning them to the researcher; the researcher then maintained confidentiality. For each entry, parents described a specific situation relating to a childhood leadership question in order to create

personal stories. Journals were retrieved one week after the last interview.

Thus, several methods of data collection were employed: three rounds of one-on-one structured and unstructured interviews (for mothers), one in-depth interview (for fathers), content analysis of parent journals (mothers and fathers), and transcript checking of reports (mothers).

Data Analysis

For this project, the researcher utilized constant comparative data analysis as a guide for organizing, connecting, and understanding the collected and triangulated data. The constant comparative method is characterized by immersion in the data to identify patterns and themes (Charmaz, 2000). Glaser and Strauss (1967) first proposed the constant comparative method for use in grounded theory research, but the method has since been adopted for a variety of qualitative methodologies, including within-case and cross-case analyses (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) contends that the constant comparative analysis technique allows the researcher to construct and revise categories by continuously comparing patterns and themes within each case and between cases, thus allowing for a deeper understanding of concepts and perceptions. Data obtained in the interviews were initially organized into categories of beliefs, practices, context factors, limitations, and supports with subsets determined and labeled as categories evolved.

In qualitative research, data collection and analysis are typically processes that occur in tandem (Merriam, 2009); thus, the researcher analyzed data as they were collected, allowing for the analysis to impact the subsequent stage of data collection. As described previously, an important component of qualitative inquiry and, correspondingly, reliability is triangulation previously substantiated through the variety of data sources and data collection methods. Reliability was further enhanced by intercoder reliability during interview analysis (Creswell, 2012).

The researcher began by coding and analyzing approximately 70 pages of interview transcripts using qualitative inquiry procedures outlined by experts in the field (Creswell, 2012; Glesne, 2005; Patton, 2002; Seidman, 2019). Initially, the researcher utilized eight codes drawn from the interview protocols and review of the literature: parent beliefs about leadership in general and beliefs about leadership in regard to their focus child, parenting practices and child practices that were perceived to build leadership skills, contextual elements that directly and indirectly influenced their child's leadership enactment, perceived limitations in developing early childhood leadership skills, and perceived supports for developing early childhood leadership skills. Following completion of the initial round of coding, an external researcher independently used the same codes to label two parent transcripts, and coded data were compared and discussed. As a result, five new codes emerged: parenting strategies, parent roles, family values, leadership influences, and child personality characteristics. Both researchers then used the 14-code scheme to recode one interview with each father and the first interview with mothers. A comparison of the transcribed interviews showed an overall reliability rate of 85% using a formula described by Miles and Huberman (1994): Reliability = number of agreements ÷ number of agreements and disagreements

The primary researcher then conducted the last two face-to-face interviews with mothers, transcribed the interviews, and gathered parent journals. Next, both researchers coded the second transcribed interview with mothers and determined that intercoder reliability continued to be at least 85% for each. The primary researcher coded the last remaining interview of the mothers and all of the parent journals. Through spot-checking, the researchers conducted two additional reliability checks on the last round of interviews and parent journals, again showing an agreement rate of at least 85%. At the end of the interviewing process, parent interview transcriptions totaled 140 pages.

Visuals were used to further organize data. For example, a domain analysis was used to organize recurring concepts and how they were connected to people or places. Additional visuals included a metamatrix analysis across cases that provided an easy-to-review comparison among the families of each child. By assembling the data from each case

in this form, the researcher was able to visualize how the variables compared to one another. In constructing the variable-oriented analysis, we used the variables specified in the central question: Do certain beliefs, practices, and contextual relationships within a family of a young child who has been identified as a leader in the academic setting contribute to an in-depth understanding of how parenting performance influences the development of a young leader? Looking across columns and blocks of data, common components across families as well as interesting contradictions and inconsistencies were identified.

During the within-case analysis of each family, data were coded separately, considering each family as a bound system. There was a continuous search for emerging, unexpected themes and collections of instances that could be grouped together because they had a similar meaning for participants. The constant comparative method helped identify categories that were continuously compared within and across cases, which were then further refined, expanded, or in some cases deleted (Charmaz, 2000). Although rural living was not intended to be a focus of this research, the concept of rurality continually emerged as important to the parents. As the quotes used throughout this article indicate, parents believe that the rural context and small town lifeways have distinct advantages for young leadership development.

Trustworthiness and Reliability

Triangulation methods of oral interviews and personal journals along with participant transcript checking were used to provide a greater understanding of the beliefs, context factors, and practices of parents whose first-grade child was identified by a teacher as a leader. Additionally, each family was first considered as a bound case, and then commonalities and differences between families guided a cross-case analysis between families. Using both within-case and cross-case analysis added an additional degree of robustness and trustworthiness to the study (Creswell, 2012). Lastly, an intercoder reliability rate of more than 80% was established, which is the standard for sufficiency (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Results

Many concepts emerged that showed similarities between the study families' ideas about leadership development. The leadership characteristics of children observed in early childhood classrooms were also seen by parents in other contexts. Most parents were not purposeful in teaching their child leadership skills but were intentional in teaching life skills deemed important for being productive citizens. Some other examples of similarities include the importance of having close relationships with family and extended family (especially aunts and grandmothers), relationships and a social network between the family and others outside of the family, learning opportunities in a variety of social contexts, a strong work ethic, a quality education, a family legacy built on personal stories, involvement in extracurricular activities, an understanding of church history and being considerate of others, critical thinking skills, and a sense of place. The sense of place, as they described their rural community, is evidenced by the participants' voices and is the primary focus of this article.

Building Relationships

In general, parents felt that the relationships children had in their nuclear and extended family, along with relationships with adults and children in their schools, extracurricular activities, churches, and neighborhoods, aided them in building social skills, problem-solving skills, social networks, and bonds with mentors or role models. For example, Mrs. Flowers commended rural community life for being an asset to her daughter's leadership skills, believing that it was easier to develop relationships with neighbors and others in the community in a rural environment. Those relationships, in turn, could be a catalyst for learning skills and making connections with people who can teach a child "new things, different things than what they might learn from their parents."

Benefits of a Small Rural Town

More specific to the theme of place and rural living, parents related their first graders' opportunities for leadership development in a rural community to opportunities for leadership

development in urban communities, indicating they believed each context had benefits and drawbacks, but especially celebrated the unique aspects of rurality. All parents had worked in and parented in an urban community. At the time of this study, each lived and was parenting a first grader in a small town within a rural county. Thus, each had experiential knowledge of both the rural and the urban context for leadership development.

According to the parents, some of the major benefits of living in a small, rural community are made available by government bodies. They named concerts, literacy events, festivals, and many family-friendly events that take place at a local town park or at the local college as cultural events that gave children exposure to things that they might not otherwise encounter. Parents acknowledged that urban communities have many more cultural or community events than rural towns and a greater variety of choices, yet they felt a rural town with many events had more opportunities for leadership because there was a greater likelihood that parents and children alike could find a leadership role to play. Mr. Flowers noted that by "getting involved in the behind-the-scenes business" of the event, either as an adult role model or as a child, one not only can enjoy and learn from some of the activities presented but also "can help bring the event to fruition."

Mr. Flowers said that he loved his rural community and the lifestyle it represents because it is "a school environment, whereas cities, bigger or smaller, are not a school environment." He went on to list organizations available for leadership development, such as "Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts" and then elaborated on the things he loved about living "near a college town" such as "the performing arts," "all different kinds of athletics," and "tutors and academic help when children need it." He said that the children in the community are "exposed to a ton of culture." He also liked that so many things were free, such as college lectures and nature preserves. He explained, "You can go to the city and have a lot of fun. If you want to focus just on education there is plenty to do here." He believed that local opportunities "help kids develop a lot of stuff mentally. By being exposed to this wide range of opportunities, they can be challenged." He also

appreciated that rural small town life has "limited distractions." He believed there was plenty to keep young minds engaged but that children are "not always on the city bus trying to go downtown to the mall."

Small Rural Town Size and Support

Despite the fact that smaller communities may not be able to offer as many activities or resources, parents felt that small towns had ample opportunities for leadership development and celebrated the aspects of rural community life that support it.

Mrs. Sawyer had this to say about opportunities for leadership development in the rural community where she and her husband chose to move:

> I think [this community] has a lot of things, little things. Oh, it would be great if we had our own zoo, you know, things like that. But in reality, it is not that far away to go to those types of things. There are enough programs between what the churches offer, the athletic type things that are offered here, and the programs and things that the local college sometimes do that I think you can get a lot of growth and leadership opportunities for your kids.

Although she thought that lack of transportation could be a hindrance for young leadership development, making it more difficult to responsibly show up for extracurricular activities, Mrs. Sawyer thought that short distances coupled with a rural community mentality of helping others would allow a determined person to overcome the lack of transportation. She explained:

> If you were really low income and you didn't have a car . . . now that could be an issue, but that . . . it's just not that far . . . it just depends on where you live. But just a little bit because the town is just not that big. You could! You could do it. Or ride a bike to go places . . . to the library and stuff like that. You could get a bike cheaply if you really wanted to do that. Heck, if you even told your church that your kids didn't have bikes and you couldn't afford it and they needed them to accomplish this or that, somebody would come through with a bike, new or used.

Community Involvement

Mr. Flowers talked about opportunities for community involvement, such as working behind the scenes at a local event. Likewise, Mr. Sawyer believed that being civic minded and active in the community as an adult is important in building social networks and is a way to model leadership for the children. He is more active currently than he was in Baltimore or Houston and said that it is "just kind of expected when you live in a rural community." He added:

> I think you need to lead by example. . . . You have to set an example. "Guys, this is part of what you do. When you live in a community, you've got to participate in the community." They see us. They always see [their mother] doing her Junior League stuff and me doing soccer stuff and Knights of Columbus. . . . So they see how much time both of us take. So, you know, you are participating in the community. You have to.

Benefits of Rural Small Town Schools

Mrs. Pillsbury felt that rural small town life offered ample opportunities for her youngest child to develop leadership skills and compared the experiences her youngest daughter had in a rural small town to the experiences her older daughter had in Dallas. She said, "Well, I think it is better in [this rural community] than in other places that we have lived. You are probably going to think that I am crazy for saying this," and and she went on to describe why she likes the local schools better than the urban schools she had experienced. She appreciated that there is a "broader range of socioeconomic levels in the schools here." She continued the comparison of her local experience to her experience in a high-income Dallas suburb:

> Anything that went on in the schools [in Dallas], the parents were just all over it and they did it. They did a good job, but the kids were just shuffled around and told what to do. The kids weren't doing any of the creating or planning. . . . The kids are just like "tell me what to do and I'll do it." Then they are just like these fine porcelain dolls that we stand around and look at.

In her youngest daughter's rural school there was a very different experience where the children produced their own play, and the mother said that the latter was definitely a greater "opportunity of leadership building." She described the school play as being supported and facilitated by the teachers, but said that the children were given a lot of opportunities to create. As a result, the play might have been considered "really cute," "well planned," and possibly "not polished," but at the same time, the parents appreciated it, and the children took complete "ownership," which amplified the pride factor exponentially.

In a different discussion about his daughter's opportunities for leadership development, Dr. Pillsbury also talked about the local schools. He readily admitted that as he and his wife contemplated moving from Dallas to Riverdale, he saw the schools and their relative lack of facilities in comparison to what they were accustomed to in the Dallas area and was hesitant to make the move. After speaking with the school principal and touring the school, however, his confidence grew because he saw the small class sizes, the passion that the teachers exhibited, and "the potential."

Benefits of Rural Small Town Sports

Dr. Pillsbury went on to discuss other attributes of the rural small town life he and his wife considered prior to moving to Riverdale. He thought sports were good for a variety of reasons, including developing good health habits, building self-discipline, and making friends. He saw a wider variety of sports available in Dallas. However, he felt that there was a limitation to what sports can to do to develop leadership skills. He commented,

> You know all of that stuff, people talk about how it taught them to work with a team and be a team member. I do think it is important. I think a lot of people put way more emphasis on that than they should though.

In addition, Mrs. Pillsbury believed that there were greater opportunities to get involved in several high school sports in a rural community, whereas in cities "they start in the middle school kind of narrowing you down so that you are only on track to play one sport per semester."

Individually, each set of parents talked about participation in sports as being an opportunity for leadership development, but each also commented that academics took precedence over sports in their family's life.

Church Influences

Families frequently mentioned church as an influence on their young leader. Church-based influences that have a positive impact on leadership development included building interpersonal relationships within the church, learning church teachings, being organized and showing respect for others by being punctual to church, extending a helping hand to the less fortunate, and expressing care and empathy for others. Parents who took leadership roles in their respective churches thought that their children seeing them enact leadership roles as public speakers, educators, persuaders, or event organizers were influential experiences. Although parent leadership roles were discussed at home, rarely did the children see their parents in leadership roles at work.

Neighborhood Influences

Every parent mentioned neighborhood influences on leadership development. They talked about neighborhoods being zoned for different schools, mention that this was a deciding factor on where to purchase their home. In addition, most of them talked about ensuring their children had opportunities to play outside in the neighborhood, with siblings, friends, neighbors, and cousins, and their belief that these opportunities helped children develop skills in compromising, negotiating, and decision making.

Mrs. Bigsby talked about changes that have occurred over time in neighborhood play for children. Having grown up in New Orleans and having parented her older daughter in Dallas, she had a basis for comparing urban and rural opportunities for leadership development. She noted how living in an urban environment influenced her opinion of best parenting practices, which in turn affected her son's opportunities for leadership development. She noted that when she was young her mother allowed her to go visit at homes in her New Orleans neighborhood. She recognized that

other people in the community were trusting of their neighbors and allowed their children to visit other people's homes independently. However, she had safety concerns about allowing that kind of behavior for her son. She recognized this concern stemmed from her experience of high crime rates in urban environments where she had lived as an adult, coupled with her experiences as an adult educator in a men's correctional facility. She affirmed the importance of her son interacting with neighborhood children in order to build his leadership skills, but she placed parameters on that interaction. She admitted,

> I am one of those kind of moms who . . . I am not old school, but when they are outside I am going to be there or I am going to be watching out of a window. . . . You know, you may think that you are safe, but you never really know. . . . Groups get together at my house and play by our rules. So it is still . . . he is still in his own world. I don't give him the chance to explore too much . . . well, I am just really protective on that aspect.

She went on to say that most the boys her son played with in the neighborhood were older than him, and even though she supervised those neighborhood interactions, her son showed leadership skills when interacting with the neighborhood kids. Examples of his leadership in that context included having "strong character" and letting others know when they had broken the rules. She explained:

> If something goes wrong, [my son] is going to speak up. . . . He makes mistakes, like the best of us, but he knows to do the right thing even if no one is looking. That is what strong character is, doing the right thing even if no one is watching.

Other parents also pointed out that time and place made a difference regarding outside play in the neighborhood. Mrs. Pillsbury, in particular, expounded on that in her journal. In her time in Dallas she saw this:

> A young child's time was too regimented; parents were too involved and controlled every aspect of everything from play dates to activities

in the school during school hours. This affected the children's confidence and their ability to make decisions and adequately handle social situations. As a result, leadership development was lagging.

She then made a comparison to outdoor neighborhood play during her childhood:

> This was different from my childhood where parents did not get involved in our play activities (unless someone got hurt). . . . We roamed the neighborhood and woods and had lots of unregimented playtime. We planned our own activities and games and most of the time handled our own disputes and problems. It wasn't always done with thoughtfulness or kindness, but we learned along the way how to deal with each other. We developed self-confidence and other leadership skills by being allowed to experience the good and bad of interacting with others and by being allowed to make a lot of our own decisions and to suffer the consequences of them.

Benefits of Technology

Parents were interviewed individually, but often similar topics arose. Interestingly, having internet access was mentioned by many parents as a resource for leadership development. Mrs. Sawyer said, "I definitely think that technology has opened whole new worlds for kids."

Mrs. Bigsby looks for opportunities to get her boys involved in structured activities. She stated:

> My mother always has her ear to the ground about things, especially things for the kids. A lot of things the school will send home. . . . I am always looking for stuff to put them in to keep them structured and to keep their time used well. . . . I love researching, so I'll turn to the internet in a heartbeat.

Mr. Flowers was excited about the community's recent upgrade that allowed for faster and more reliable internet service, thus making his rural community better connected with the world. He made this comment while talking about the need for leaders to be informed and able to make good decisions:

> Education is a resource to help you to be able to be informed. When all that stuff splashes on the news and stuff . . . there a lot of people that just be watching the news and have no idea what those people are talking about. But if you have enough education, you can research it for yourself. With a click [of a mouse] you can find out exactly, yeah, you can research that for yourself.

Extracurricular Activities

All of the parents felt that extracurricular activities were an important mechanism for building leadership skills. All of the first graders involved in the study have older siblings, and the parents said the younger children were often "dragged" to the events of the older children and therefore saw extracurricular activity participation as "normal." Although the first graders are young, they too are involved in extracurricular activities at a limited level. People and activities associated with church, sports, Cub Scouts, after-school programs, and special events or camps were named as leadership resources by parents.

The mothers, in particular, mentioned the importance of the "mommy network" that existed. E-mails and texts were exchanged that helped the mothers make sure their children had the materials and schedules needed to help them in being prepared and successful for school and extracurricular events.

Summary of Parent Voices

One or more parents from each family noted that rural community opportunities for young leadership development were ample if parents were willing to look for them. Though they recognized that larger metropolitan areas offered a wider variety of choices for extracurricular activities and cultural experiences, they did not feel that they had given up anything of importance or deprived their children of any opportunities by choosing to raise their families in a rural context. In contrast, Mrs. Pillsbury sang the praises of rural small town life as having better opportunities for her daughter to develop her leadership skills, and this quote summarizes her view nicely:

Everybody seems to think, "Oh, big city, you are more sophisticated, you are more whatever," but I don't necessarily find that. I think people tend to get lost in cities. So, when you are in a smaller community, you have an identity and all that, some of the chances of getting lost in the shuffle and mix is less. I think in a small town you have more opportunity to get involved, to shine, and therefore more opportunities to develop those leadership skills and become a leader.

Discussion

This study was a qualitative examination of beliefs, contextual factors, and practices within the families of four children identified by their classroom teachers as strong leaders. The teachers perceived the children to have skill sets that allowed them to maintain social relationships within groups and make changes that either improved problem solving or advanced the level of thinking in the group. Conducting in-depth interviews with seven parents, although a relatively small number, made possible an examination of individual parent and family components in contexts in and out of school. Like following a single thread through a woven rug, the theme of "place" was followed and investigated because even though it was not a topic originally planned, several parents mentioned a comparison between their current rural community and urban places they had resided in the past. Though the theme of place is the focus of this article, it cannot stand alone because of the interconnectedness of people, contexts, and experiences. This interconnected system was viewed through a theoretical lens based on the bioecological model of human development that grew from Bronfenbrenner's (1979) research.

Parents in this study believed that early childhood leadership was strongly influenced by interactions with other humans and influences from the family, community, and world. The contextual factors parents believed were influential on their child's leadership development demonstrate each of the five interrelated spheres of development outlined in Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of human development. Figure 1 organizes the influential factors on early childhood leadership discussed by the parents in this study into each layer of Bronfenbrenner's model.

The developing leader exists in the microsystem where individual development occurs. The microsystem also includes all of the people with whom the child has face-to-face interactions and with whom the child develops a personal relationship, including people in the home, such as parents and siblings. People the child interacts with in the school environment, teachers and schoolmates, also have an impact on the child's leadership skills. Those who were influential in extracurricular activities included teammates or peer club members, coaches, and other adult leaders. Church members who influenced young children's emerging leadership included peers, teachers, and church leaders who acted as role models, especially parent role models for public speaking and helping others. Neighborhood children also influenced the young leaders in this study.

The mesosystem is the part of the bioecological model of human development that connects different factions of the microsystem. Connections between home and organized community activities such as church, sports organizations, and the child's school were well represented in the mesosystem by the families interviewed. Parents thought that building their children's social network of people who know and care about them was important and thus gave their children many opportunities to interact with and develop relationships with people outside of the family. Important communication tools that parents mentioned as connectors of home to other contexts included notes sent home, internet, mobile phone, e-mails, and texts.

The exosystem is defined as the layer of the bioecological model of human development that is a part of society that developing leaders have no direct contact with; however, the events that occur within it are influential to their development. Family legacy, church history, parent workplace, small town/rural context, local college, school board, government bodies, internet access, and neighborhoods were all cited by parents in this study as having some kind of influence on

Figure 1

Parental perceptions of influences on young leadership development as viewed through Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of human development (Hailey, 2013).
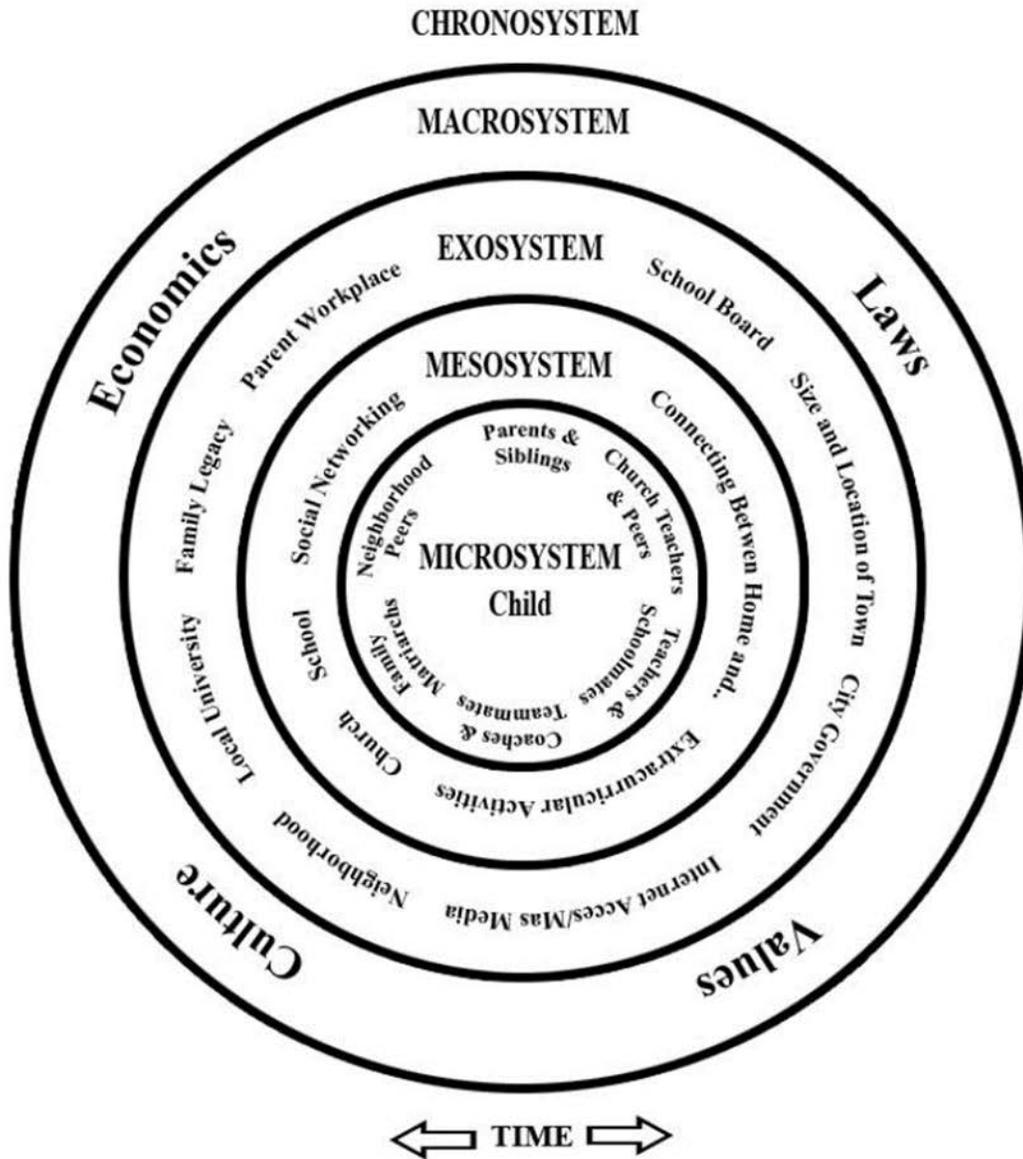
leadership development, yet the regulations, expectations, or influences of each of the aforementioned aspects of the exosystem had an indirect impact on their young children.

The macrosystem is the broad, overarching societal influences that surround and influence each of the smaller systems of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) bioecological model of human development

discussed thus far. This is an overarching level of the society the child exists within, including social, cultural, political, and historical influences. Values, economics, laws, and culture were influential elements on the young children's leadership skills according to the parents. The social milieu and values of a rural small town where people hear about others in need and reach out to help were part of this discourse. Values included a quality

education, a strong work ethic, a sense of treating others with consideration, the importance of making good decisions, and a sense of history about family and church. Economic influences on leadership were also discussed. Parents in this study believed that economics played a role in leadership development, as middle income gave children more opportunities for leadership development and lower income could be a hindrance due to lack of funds for participating in extracurricular activities or having transportation to fully participate in extracurricular activities. Laws that influenced political decisions played a role, as the local school board determined boundary lines of schools' districts, thus determining which neighborhoods were zoned for specific schools. This in turn was a deciding factor in location of each family's home purchase and, consequently, their child's neighborhood, neighbors, schools, teachers, and classmates. The culture of rural small town life was distinctly apparent, with such characteristics as small schools with limited resources, small class sizes, helpful acts from community members, opportunities to get involved, opportunities to get to know people, ability to get from one place to another easily, and occasions to play with siblings, neighbors, and cousins. Culture/history played a role as children were taught about morality and approved behaviors through church stories and family stories. In addition, culture and values played a role in family lifestyle changes that, in turn, affected the expectations associated with outside play time.

Lastly, the chronoystem affects every level of the system, but its influence is particularly evident as time affects culture and values. More specifically, time allowed advances in technology that brought about the extensive ownership and use of home computers and mobile phones, making internet/mass media and electronic communication and social networking more accessible. In addition, the chronosystem is reflected in differences in typical play opportunities for children, from outdoor free play and roaming the neighborhood to more supervised play opportunities.

Because every individual exists within a family unit within a community within society at large, it is important to realize that none of the contextual levels discussed can be considered as separate bodies; all are connected and influence one another. An individual develops within the child-parent relationship, which in turn is embedded within the family context. The family shapes and is shaped by the quality of the relationships it has outside of the family and within the community at large. The larger society and history in which the family is embedded indirectly influence the world that an individual lives and develops within (Bronfenbrenner, 1999).

Conclusion

Identifying leadership characteristics as exhibited by young children is elucidated through this research. More to the point, though, we present some parenting practices and contextual situations that aid in young leadership development. Specific to context, parents in this rural community do not focus on a deficit mind-set of rural living, as is often the case of rural dwellers (Griffin & Galassi, 2010), but instead applaud the many opportunities that rural small town life offers for young leadership development. Through this research, rural parents and educators are acquainted with the many opportunities their communities offer to young children through the schools, extracurricular clubs and events, churches, athletic events, community involvement opportunities, and relationships with neighbors and community members that have the potential to help them develop leadership skills and dispositions.

The interconnected contexts a child lives and interacts in are certainly influential in overall development and, specific to this study, early leadership development. In this limited study, interviews with parents of young leaders indicate that rural communities allow fewer opportunities for leadership development than urban communities but that there were ample opportunities in rural communities if parents take advantage of available resources. The parents in this study have lived in larger areas with a larger number of resources but made a conscious choice to raise their family in a small rural town where people know and support one another. The quality of those relationships and their associated leadership development opportunities took precedence over the quantity of the opportunities in a larger community. Though

leadership development was not specifically on their mind at the time they made their residence choice, they recognize that many of the citizenship characteristics they wanted their children to develop in a rural context are also a part of their own personal construct of what leadership looks like in action. For teachers, coaches, extracurricular activity leaders, church leaders, and caring neighbors, the view from the opposite side indicates the importance of taking an extra step to develop meaningful relationships with parents and children in group dynamics in order to help young children in rural contexts meet their potential. In summary, this collection of parent voices offers thoughts from both the maternal and paternal perspective regarding rural opportunities for early leadership development and shares insights into parenting practices that support early leadership development.

Limitations

This study had a small number of participants, all of whom resided in a small geographical area at a particular point in time. To enhance the possibility that this study may be informative to other contexts of similar makeup, an attempt was made to provide a rich description of families' beliefs and practices. To avoid any threat to the trustworthiness of this research, triangulation of data was used to support the results. However, by limiting the sample to only children who exhibited leadership in the academic setting, leadership and academic achievement may have been confounded. Another point to consider is that in small rural towns teachers often have double duty as teachers and as coaches or club advisers. As such, there is a likelihood that closer relationships are developed between teachers and young leaders who frequently participate in extracurricular activities, so the young leaders are more likely to perform better academically in order not to disappoint the coach, advisor, mentor, and/or teacher (Barley & Beesley, 2007).

Future Research and Implications

Future research should consider initially determining young leaders from contexts other than the school setting. By seeking out adults from other contexts such as church or extracurricular activities to act as informants of young leadership demonstration, there is less likelihood of confusing leadership with other constructs such as academic achievement. Griffin and Wood (2015) posit that teachers and school administrators who recognize children with potential leadership skills should offer learning opportunities for the parents of identified children on topics such as relationship building, open communication, and community asset mapping. Future research could consider training rural parents in community asset mapping to help them determine the potential for their children's leadership growth in the rural setting. In addition, children could benefit from reading stories about other children who acted as leaders in a rural environment in literature selections, thus providing a springboard for discussion about sense of place and an empowering tool for enactment of leadership (Waller & Barrentine, 2015).

References

Adcock, D., & Segal, M. (1983). *Making friends.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Barley, Z. A., & Beesley, A. D. (2007, January 10). Rural school success: What can we learn? *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 22*(1). Retrieved from http://jrre.psu.edu/articles/22-1.pdf

Bishaw, A. & Fontenot, K. (2014). *Poverty: 2012 and 2013.* American Community Survey Briefs, Report 13-01. U.S. Census Bureau. https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/2014/acs/acsbr13-01.pdf

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1995). The bioecological model from a life course perspective: Reflections of a participant observer. In P. Moen, G. H. Elder, Jr., & K. Lüscher (Eds.), *Examining lives in context: Perspectives on the ecology of human development* (pp. 599–618). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/10176-017

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1999). Environments in developmental perspective: Theoretical and operational models. In S. L. Friedman & T. D. Wachs (Eds.), *Measuring environment across the life span: Emerging methods and concepts* (pp. 3–28). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/10317-001

Bronfenbrenner, U., & Ceci, S. J. (1994). Nature-nurture reconceptualized in developmental perspective: A bioecological model. *Psychological Review, 101*, 568–586. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.101.4.568

Charmaz, K. (2000). Constructivist and objectivist grounded theory. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 509–535). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Coladarci, T. (2007). Improving the yield of rural education research: An editor's swan song. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 22*(3), 1–9. Retrieved from https://jrre.psu.edu/sites/default/files/2019-08/22-3.pdf

Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Feldhusen, J. F., & Pleiss, M. K. (1994). Leadership: A synthesis of social skills, creativity, and histrionic ability? *Roeper Review, 16*(4), 293–294. https://doi.org/10.1080/02783199409553602

Foster, W. (1981). Leadership: A conceptual framework for recognizing and educating. *Gifted Child Quarterly, 25*(1), 17–25. https://doi.org/10.1177/001698628102500104

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago, IL: Aldine. https://doi.org/10.1097/00006199-196807000-00014

Glesne, C. (2005). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction* (3rd ed.). Boston. MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Green, V. A., Cillessen, A. H. N., Rechis, R., Patterson, M. M., & Hughes, J. M. (2008). Social problem solving and strategy use in young children. *Journal of Genetic Psychology, 169*(1), 92–112.

Griffin, D., & Galassi, J. P. (2010). Parent perceptions of barriers to academic success in a rural middle school. *Professional School Counseling, 14*(1), 87–100. https://doi.org/10.5330/prsc.14.1.9301852175552845

Griffin, D., & Wood, S. (2015). "Mommy, I'm bored": School-family-community approaches to working with gifted, rural black males. In T.

Stambaugh, & S. Wood (Eds.), *Serving gifted students in rural settings* (pp. 289–316). Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.

Hailey, D. J. (2013). *Parental perceptions of supportive and non-supportive influences on the development of leadership* [Doctoral dissertation, Louisiana State University]. LSU Doctoral Dissertations, 3371. http://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations/3371/

Hatch, T. C. (1990). Looking at Hank, looking at Ira: Looking at individual 4-year-olds especially their leadership styles. *Young Children, 45*(5), 11–17.

Hawley, P. H. (2015). Social dominance in childhood and its evolutionary underpinnings: Why it matters and what we can do. *Pediatrics, 135*(Supplement 2), S31–S38. https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2014-3549D

Karnes, F. A., & Bean, S. M. (1995). *Leadership for students: A practical guide for ages 8–18.* Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.

Karnes, F. A., & Chauvin, J. (2000). *Leadership development program.* Scottsdale, AZ: Gifted Psychology Press.

Kemple, K., Speranza, H., & Hazen, N. (1992). Cohesive discourse and peer acceptance: Longitudinal relations in the preschool years. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 38*(3), 364–381.

Kitano M., & Tafoya, N. (1983). Preschool leadership: A review and critique. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted, 5*(2), 78–89. https://doi.org/10.1177/016235328300500202

Landau, S., & Milich, R. (1990). Assessment of children's social status and peer relations. In A. M. LaGreca (Ed.), *Through the eyes of a child* (pp. 259–291). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Lerner, R. M. (2002). *Concepts and theories of human development* (3rd ed., pp. 1–17). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Louisiana Believes. (2014). *State releases comprehensive report cards on student/school achievement*. http://LouisianaBelieves.com/newsroom/news-releases/2014/10/21/state-releases-comprehensive-report-cards-on-student-school-achievement

Mawson, B. (2011). Children's leadership strategies in early childhood. *Journal of*

Research in Childhood Education, 25(4), 327– 338. https://doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2011.605207

Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Wiley.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Milligan, J. (2004). Leadership skills of gifted students in a rural setting: Promising programs for leadership development. *Rural Special Education Quarterly, 23,* 16–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2011.605207

Noss, A. (2014). *Household Income: 2013.* American Community Survey Briefs, Report 13-02. U.S. Census Bureau. https://www.nj.gov/labor/lpa/acs/2013/acsbr13-02.pdf

Ostrov, J. M., & Guzzo, J. L. (2015). Prospective associations between prosocial behavior and social dominance in early childhood: Are sharers the best leaders? *Journal of Genetic Psychology, 176*(2), 130–138. https://doi.org/10.1080/00221325.2015.1018860

Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Perez, G. S., Chassin, D., Ellington, C., & Smith, J. (1982). Leadership giftedness in preschool children. *Roeper Review, 4,* 26–28. https://doi.org/10.1080/02783198209552603

Ramey, D. A. (1991). Gifted leadership. *Roeper Review, 14*, 16–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/02783199109553374

Renzulli, J. S., Smith, L. H., White, A. J., Callahan, C. M., Hartman, R. K., Westburg, K. L., & Reed, R. E. S. (2010). *Scales for Rating the Behavioral Characteristics of Superior Students: Technical and administration manual* (3rd ed.). Mansfield Center, CT: Creative Learning Press.

Rivizzigno, A. S., & Brendgen, M. (2014). Gene-environment interplay between number of friends and prosocial leadership behavior in children. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 60*(2), 110–141. https://doi.org/10.13110/merrpalmquar1982.60.2.0110

Rural Health Information Hub. (2018). Louisiana. Retrieved from https://www.ruralhealthinfo.org/states/louisiana

Sankar-DeLeeuw, N. (2007). Case studies of gifted kindergarten children, part II: The parents and teachers. *Roeper Review, 29*(2), 93–99. https://doi.org/10.1080/02783190709554392

Scharf, M., & Mayseless, O. (2009). Socioemotional characteristics of elementary school children identified as exhibiting social leadership qualities. *Journal of Genetic Psychology, 170*(1), 73–94. https://doi.org/10.3200/GNTP.170.1.73-96

Segal, M., Peck, J., Vega-Lahr, N., & Field, T. (1987). A medieval kingdom: Leader-follower styles of preschool play. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology, 8*(1), 79–95. https://doi.org/10.1016/0193-3973(87)90022-0

Seidman, I. E. (2019). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* (5th ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Sternberg, R. J. (Ed.). (2004). *Definitions and conceptions of giftedness*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Sternberg, R. J. (2005). WICS: A model of giftedness in leadership. *Roeper Review, 28*(1), 37–44. https://doi.org/10.1080/02783190509554335

Trawick-Smith, J. (1988). "Let's say you're the baby, OK?" Play leadership and following behavior of young children. *Young Children, 43*(5), 51–59.

U.S. Census Bureau. (2013a). *American Community Surveys 5-year estimates.* https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/?#

U.S. Census Bureau. (2013b). *Quick Facts: Louisiana.* Retrieved from https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/la

U.S. Department of Agriculture (2018). *U.S.D.A. Single Family Housing Rural Development Eligibility.* https://eligibility.sc.egov.usda.gov/eligibility/welcomeAction.do?pageAction=sfpd

Waller, R., & Barrentine, S. J. (2015). Rural elementary teachers and place-based connections to text during reading instruction. *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 30*(7), 1–13.

Williams, D. E., & Schaller, K. A. (1990, November). *Peer persuasion in the classroom: A naturalistic study of children's dominance.* Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association, Chicago, IL.

Willis, C., & Schiller, P. (2011). Preschoolers' social skills steer life success. *Young Children, 66*(1), 42–49.

Wolfle, J. (1989). The gifted preschooler: Developmentally different but still 3 or 4 years old. *Young Children, 44*(3), 41–48.

Woolfson, R. C. (2016, June). Take the lead. *My Reading Room* (blog). https://myreadingroom.online/en/live/parenting/young-parents/OoEQzyL7Rx

About the Authors

Debra Jo Hailey, PhD, is associate professor of early childhood education in the Department of Teaching and Learning at Southeastern Louisiana University. Dr. Hailey's research interests include early childhood curriculum integration, social and emotional development, authentic assessment strategies, parent education, and preservice teacher development.

Michelle Fazio-Brunson, EdD, is the director of Graduate Programs in Early Childhood Education in the Gallaspy Family College of Education and Human Development at Northwestern State University of Louisiana in Natchitoches. Dr. Fazio-Brunson's research interests include use of the project approach in early childhood classrooms, the benefits of service-learning opportunities in the development of preservice teachers' knowledge and dispositions, and interrupting the cradle-to-prison pipeline through literacy opportunities for children who are at risk.