

LEADING WORK-BASED LEARNING PROGRAMS: HOW ADMINISTRATORS  
AND TEACHERS SUPPORT LEARNING FOR EXCEPTIONAL FEMALE  
IMMIGRANT HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS- A CASE STUDY

by

Ahmed A. Atef  
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Committee:

\_\_\_\_\_ Chair

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Program Director

\_\_\_\_\_ Dean, College of Education  
and Human Development

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Fairfax, VA

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A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy at George Mason University

by

Ahmed A. Atef  
Master of Arts  
George Mason University- CEHD, 2008  
Bachelor of Science  
Punjab University, Engineering College, 1984

Director: Dr. Supriya Baily  
Associate Professor  
College of Education and Human Development

Spring Semester 2021  
George Mason University  
Fairfax, VA

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## **DEDICATION**

This is dedicated to my loving wife Gamila, my four wonderful children Dalal, Khaled, Nema and Marem, my loving mother Marem M. Salem and Atef family.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank my wife Gamila and my family who provided me with the support I needed to complete this journey. I would like also to thank my colleagues Mr. Lonnie Bickel, Mr. Chad Clayton, and Dr. Abdulwahab Zakari for their valuable support. Finally, my sincere thanks and high appreciation go out to Drs. Baily, Mattix-Foster, and Shahrokhi who provided me with the academic guidance and support since the beginning of my program.

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**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

Career & Technology Education ..... CTE  
Exceptional Female Immigrant Students ..... EFI  
Leader-Member Exchange Theory..... LMX  
Virginia Department of Education..... VDOE  
Work-Based Learning ..... WBL  
United States of America ..... USA

## **ABSTRACT**

### **LEADING WORK-BASED LEARNING PROGRAMS: HOW ADMINISTRATORS AND TEACHERS SUPPORT LEARNING FOR EXCEPTIONAL FEMALE IMMIGRANT HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS- A CASE STUDY**

Ahmed A. Atef, Ph.D.

George Mason University, 2021

Dissertation Director: Dr. Supriya Baily

In this research study, I investigated the leading roles of work-based learning (WBL) administrators and teachers in a high school setting to support the participation and learning of their exceptional female immigrant (EFI) students within the program. Specifically, this study focused on exploring the ways, methods, and processes which high school teachers and administrators adopted to help their exceptional immigrant female students who participate in work-based learning programs. The study used interpretative research methodology and case study design to investigate current practices in work-based learning leadership as related to responding to the learning needs of a special group of learners, immigrant female students, at a time when the national debate on immigration and rights of immigrants intensifies. The main finding of this study was of two-fold: It provided a better understanding of the perceptions of work-based learning teachers and administrators, and suggested a new hybrid leadership model that combines

Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) and Team Leadership styles that can be applied within a work-based learning context to guide practitioners in their efforts to respond to specific needs of a special group of learners.

*Keywords:* work-based learning (WBL), career and technical education (CTE), leader-member exchange theory (LMX), team leadership, exceptional female immigrant students (EFI)

## **CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the leading roles of teachers and administrators in supporting the participation of their high school exceptional female immigrant (EFI) students in work-based learning (WBL) programs. In this study I (a) explored ways, methods, and processes which WBL teachers and administrators adopted to support the learning of their EFI students; (b) contributed to the body knowledge of social justice in education by highlighting the current practices in WBL as related to responding to the learning needs of EFI students, and (c) explored the application of experiential learning and leadership theories within the context of WBL environments.

In this first chapter, I begin by providing the problem statement followed by a discussion on the WBL and its significance to better understand the concept of learning in workplaces. I then discuss some theoretical frameworks for WBL and describe the WBL environment as being a critical learning space for a special group of learners (i.e. EFI students) where they shape their identities through interacting with others, and the challenges they face as participants in WBL programs. Additionally, I explore the educational leadership of WBL programs as practiced by WBL teachers and administrators. I also provide a contextual rationale behind studying the topic, and the research questions which guided this study. I conclude this chapter by providing an

overview of the methodology used in this study and definition of the terms used in this dissertation.

### **Problem Statement**

From my 16-year experience as a WBL teacher, I realize that the EFI students enrolled in the WBL learning programs are faced with challenges in accessing the learning opportunities provided by this type of learning. These learning challenges are related to EFI students' academic, social-emotional, and communicative abilities which negatively impact the participation of these students in the WBL learning environment. The role of teachers and administrators of WBL programs is critical in supporting the successful participation of the EFI students by providing the extra help these special group of students may need. Therefore, the exploration of the perceptions and beliefs of WBL teachers and administrators towards the learning of their EFI students and their collaborative leading roles will help in knowing how to best support EFI students and will add to the body knowledge of WBL leadership in our schools.

### **Work-Based Learning**

The Work-Based Learning (WBL) is a community-based learning experience provided to students in high schools and beyond through job shadowing, mentorship, service learning, internship, apprenticeship, and cooperative learning (VDOE, 2020). WBL is a form of workplace learning where students learn working skills in a variety of manufacturing and service industries and businesses, such as hospitality, computer repair, auto-mechanics, and health services. The WBL curriculum, known as Career and Technical Education (CTE), was implemented in the two research sites where this study

was conducted. The mission of CTE is to help high school students gain the work skills they need to become career- ready students.

In the Commonwealth of Virginia several CTE programs were offered to high school students in career centers, career academies, and school-business partnerships (ACTE, 2020). In the school district where this study was conducted the CTE programs were provided in eight career academies that are geographically distributed to serve high school students who want to pursue a career in health, auto-mechanics, cosmetics, and information technologies.

During the 2016-2017 school year, there were 296,444 students enrolled in WBL programs in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The programs consisted of 16 career clusters in areas such as health, business, agriculture, and tourism among others (CTE, 2018). Literature on WBL indicates a growing number of scholars who are interested in this type of learning (see Mumford & Roodhouse, 2010; Mikkonen et al., 2017; Pautler & Buffamanti, 1997). Scholars' interest in WBL learning stems from the fact that unique learning environments provided by WBL programs enable students to engage in their "career exploration, pre-professional development, and career preparation" activities (VDOE, 2014, p. 7). The importance of WBL programs has increased after 2009 financial crisis (Schmalzbauer, 2011) at a time when many households, including immigrant families, were impacted by the ramifications of the 2009 financial crisis which forced many low-income immigrant families, and their students, to choose alternative career pathways to college education. The post-2009 economic reality influenced the



dynamics between workplaces and schools and provided WBL with additional power as a driver for educational reform.

### ***Theoretical Framework for Work-Based Learning***

The WBL is grounded in the experiential and social learning theories which provided several concepts and models for workplace learning. Some of these theoretical models are Dewey's Experiential Model, Itin's Diamond Model, and Epstein's Cognitive Experiential Self Theory (CEST) (Chishlom et al., 2009). In the following paragraphs, I provide a summarized account of these three frameworks as explained by Chisholm et al. (2009).

In Dewey's experiential learning model, learners interact with their external environments. Such interactions make learners reflect on what they learned before they can conceptualize their learning experience and generalize what they learned through the knowledge application process. According to Chishlom et al. (2009), Itin expanded Dewey's model to focus on each of the entities or factors (educators, learners, learning environments, and the taught subject) in more detail. The learning cycles in each of these entities take the shape of diamonds, and hence the model's name. The knowledge circulates among these four entities during the experiential learning processes. Epstein's CEST Model is centered on the assumption that information is processed through two cognitive processes within the work-based learning experiences: rational and experiential. The first is being controlled by logic whereas the second process is influenced by emotions. These learning models place the learner's experience in the forefront of the learning process where they will need to respond to the stimuli provided by the learning

environment. With such stimuli, learners build their knowledge as they engage in the learning processes.

### ***Immigrant Students in Work-Based Learning Programs***

The U.S. Census Bureau (2010) reported that 25% of all K-12 students in the U.S. schools were born to immigrant families, and this number will reach 33% by the year 2040. According to National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), the number of students who are part of racial or ethnic groups in U.S. schools has increased by at least 5% between the years 2007 and 2014 (NCES, 2016).

Immigrants arriving in the U.S. face the challenges of living in a new society, which requires them to adjust to the social and cultural norms, in addition to learning a new language (English) to communicate daily. The challenges which the immigrant students face in U.S. schools may lead to their possible marginalization and deprivation of learning opportunities. As a result, many of these students struggle with their education and, therefore, need extra help and support. The literature shows that many of the immigrant students are undocumented and face economic hardship, poverty, and language difficulties (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011); and that many of these students experience academic and emotional difficulties in their learning and need academic, linguistic, and emotional support to succeed in their learning (Enriquez, 2011; Boden et al., 2009; Telzer et al., 2009). Moreover, these students are characterized by their struggle to fit in and be accepted by their peers, in addition to their efforts to prove their competency and value (Peguero & Bondy, 2015).

Immigrant learners who participate in WBL environments are involved in workplace social interactions with other employees, despite the barriers of language, culture, and the possibility of being viewed as ‘others’ by some co-workers in such interactive environments. Effective WBL teachers and administrators are aware of the learner-environment interactions of their students and other full-time employees in the workplaces where students attend to learn work skills. WBL environments can be challenging for many immigrant learners, including EFI students, where they are required to interact with other people socially, culturally, and linguistically, in addition to their effort to gain practical knowledge and work experiences as provided by WBL programs. As a result, many immigrant students, including EFI students, may become disengaged in their learning. Students’ engagement in their learning is critical because learners’ engagement in education positively impacts their overall academic performances (Lee, 2014)

WBL educators support their students through attending to their needs in the process of learning which requires effective supervision and leadership to support students, and specifically immigrant learners. Such support helps these learners increase their engagement and active involvement with other employees in the social interactions that occur in the workplaces, despite the barriers of language, culture, and the possibility of being viewed differently by others.

### ***Exceptional Female Immigrant Students in Work-Based Learning***

For this study, the exceptional female immigrant (EFI) students were identified as a special group of learners who receive instruction in English for Speakers of Other

Languages (ESOL) classes as they primarily speak languages different than English in their homes. Some of these students may identify themselves as immigrant by their expression of identity and their culturally visible practices. In the two centers where this study was conducted, 37% of students received ESOL services during the school year 2019-2020.

The literature shows that many of these immigrant and refugee students are experiencing academic and emotional difficulties in their learning (Enriquez, 2011; Boden et al., 2009; Telzer et al., 2009). These students are pressured with several needs, including the need to be accepted, the need to prove their competency and value, and the need to overcome racial differentiation and deal with self-identity (Shaklee & Baily, 2012; Peguero & Bondy, 2015). The emotional and academic challenges which immigrant students, including EFI students, face in WBL programs, and in schools as well, should be addressed by the school staff, mainly the administrators and teachers, so that these students are provided with the learning opportunities and support to help them become successful learners. Students of diverse cultural and racial backgrounds who are also identified with disabilities, need special care and support from their teachers and administrators to help these special group of students participate equally and benefit from WBL experiences. I consider the participation of this special group of learners as an issue of equity and social justice in education. The term equitable education used here means the provision of fair treatments to all students and the attainment of appropriate learning experiences and opportunities in schools (UNESCO, 2015).

## **Study Rationale**

From my 16-year experience as a WBL teacher and as an immigrant father of three female immigrant students, I found that minority female students who attend WBL programs in my school, including EFI students, require academic and career-related support to overcome specific challenges to their learning. Such challenges include those related to language, culture, individual abilities, and career readiness. I also found that EFI students, needed more academic support than others in WBL environments, due to their specific learning needs related to their linguist and cultural backgrounds. In a longitudinal study, Burgstahler (2001) found that students with disabilities who enrolled in WBL programs had benefited from these programs. Griffin-Jenner and Hausman (2009) emphasized the positive impact of WBL programs on students of minorities and other students who are eligible for special education services.

Children of immigrants and refugees experience difficulties in adjusting to new life in adoptive countries. From my review of the literature, I found a need in examining teachers' leadership, guidance, and mentoring roles in WBL as being important factors in the success of students, including female immigrant students, who participate in WBL programs. According to Baily (2012), teachers need to be prepared to address the psychological, familial and educational needs of the children of immigrants and refugees in their classrooms; and that “ it becomes imperative for teacher educators to address the political, economic, social, and cultural reasons leading to refugee movements around the world” (p.149). Immigrant high school students, especially exceptional female students, are faced with challenges that hinder their full participation in the work-based learning.

Many of such challenges are related to language, learners' abilities, and culture and socio-political factors. As female students "enter their young adolescent years, educational paths become complex, problematic, and sometimes treacherous" (Stacki & Baily, 2015, p.1).

Studies have indicated that children of immigrants are vulnerable to psychological and social changes that may complicate their adjustments in the new destination societies and schools (Aronowitz, 1984; Shaklee & Baily, 2012; Casas & Cabrera, 2011). The school age children of these immigrants and refugees face the same challenges of language and culture in their schools (Baily, 2012); and these students face challenges related to "language, safety, parent involvement, and developing relationships with peers" (p.148). Immigrant students in the U.S. high schools are further challenged by a variety of contextualized factors, including race, language, and poverty (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2011).

Female adolescents, who make their transitions from middle to high schools, experience physical, emotional, and psychological changes. According to Stacki and Baily (2015) "Young adolescents experience tremendous developmental change, more so than any other time in life" (p.4). Such reality warrants closer attention to these students' educational engagement and outcomes. Immigrant students of diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds are faced with challenges in schools which impact their behavioral and emotional well-being (Baily, 2012; Georgiades et al., 2013), and have been historically subjected to marginalization (Gutiérrez, 2014). Olsen (1997) discussed questions related to Latina/o immigrant students, their identities, and their assimilations in society.

In addition to the challenges facing immigrants and refugees in the U.S., the immigrant families and students from Islamic countries have to deal with the atmosphere of Islamophobia, or fear of Islam (Ramarajan & Runell, 2007; Taylor et al., 2014), which may impact these students' access to equitable schooling. Since the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the image of Muslim communities in the U.S. and Europe has been smeared by media, and by statements made by some U.S. political leaders. The post-9/11 atmosphere of anti-Islam in the U.S. has categorized Muslims as the *other*, and "Muslim immigrant youth are increasingly constructed as national outsiders and enemies to the nation" (Ghaffar-Kucher, 2009, p.163). Immigrant Muslim students who participate in WBL programs can be affected by such negative anti-Muslim environment that may exist in many workplaces.

Despite all the challenges many immigrant female students face while they participate in WBL programs, one can count on the effective leadership of teachers and administrators to support these students and ensure that WBL experiences are meaningful and responsive to these students' needs. This premise places emphasis on the WBL leadership as a critical requirement for WBL success.

### **Leading Work-Based Learning Programs**

Teachers and administrators, in collaboration with workplace supervisors, provide mentorship to WBL students and help the students become successful within WBL programs. Mentoring students in WBL environments is a four-stage process (Minton, 2010). The first stage in the mentoring process requires leaders to focus on team building and set goals and rules to learning organization. Mentors should understand their

students' prior knowledge and experiences and create relationships of trust with each one of them. The second stage involves the role of mentors in encouraging learners to access the curriculum and self-manage their learning. The third stage focuses on providing the support each individual learner may need while they are engaged in WBL learning. The final stage of mentoring describes the role of mentors in evaluating the success of their students. These four stages are iterative and cyclic in nature.

Instructing students, including EFI students, in WBL environments can be a challenging task because of the involvement of many variables that may intervene in the process of learning in such environments. For example, when teachers escort their students to work sites for WBL instruction they effectively interact with people who run the site, deal with emergencies, and be ready to change plans and prior arrangements and scheduling whenever it becomes necessary to do so. Teachers in WBL environments are required to display a great deal of tolerance, patience, and flexibility. In addition, these teachers need effective collaboration and communication with other WBL stakeholders to achieve the learning objectives for their students. Scholl and Mooney (2004) pointed to the insufficient collaboration and communication among WBL stakeholders as being “one of the main weaknesses of the program” (p.9).

Strengthening collaboration and communication among WBL's stakeholders provides opportunities for students to increase their participation in the WBL programs and enhance their abilities to face the challenges of learning in work-place environments. From my experience as a WBL educator, I observed many students trying to do their best to benefit from the offered WBL opportunities. However, many of these students,



including EFI students, had difficulties in learning not only because of their cognitive disabilities or academic skills deficits, but also because of the impact of the wider contextual socio-political environments in the communities where they learn and work. I worked with some of these students and helped them overcome some of these difficulties and deal with challenges related to their WBL learning experiences. Such challenges include managing relationships in the workplace environment and dealing with attitudes towards immigrants and disabilities. Therefore, empowering students, including EFI students, by teaching them how to self-advocate and express their needs, is a major task for WBL educators to do.

The focus of this study was to understand the perceptions of WBL educators and learn about their experiences in teaching these students, and to investigate the influence of contextual factors on these students' learning and engagement in WBL programs. The contextual factors may include the leading role of teachers, the style of leadership and mentoring, the involvement of immigrant families in the education of their children, and the impact of the national debate on immigration on the various stakeholders; WBL educators, EFI students and their families.

Considering the above discussion regarding the importance of teachers' understanding of the needs of their students, this study was designed to contribute to the knowledge on WBL leadership and provide WBL administrators and teachers with additional insights about how to better serve their immigrant female students. The data which was obtained and analyzed from this study will contribute in clarifying the leadership practices and perceptions of the WBL teachers and administrators as they

foster their collaborative leadership to adequately respond to the diverse learning needs of their students in general and, specifically, EFI students.

### **Research Questions**

The two research questions that guided this study were:

- How administrators and teachers in high school work-based learning programs (WBL) perceive their roles to support the learning of their exceptional female immigrant students (EFI)?
- How administrators and teachers of WBL programs collaborate to lead their programs?

### **Overview of Methodology**

The focus of this study was to gain an understanding of how WBL administrators and teachers support the learning of their EFI students. The interpretive inquiry methodology was used to find answers to the research questions described in the previous section. The case study research design (Yin, 2014) was used for this study which suits the research questions, because “the more that your questions seek to explain some present circumstance... the more that case study research will be relevant” (Yin, 2014, p.4). According to Patton (2015), “a case study is an exploration of a ‘bounded system’ or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (p.259).

In this study, 12 teachers and administrators from two vocational training centers (Center-A & Center-B) in one of Northern Virginia’s school districts, in which immigrant female students were enrolled, were selected using the purposeful selection method

(Patton, 2015). Among the criteria of selecting these participants were the longevity of their services (at least three years of service to ensure data quality) and their past and/or present experience of teaching EFI students. The administrators of these two vocational centers and the selected teachers were interviewed in-person. Additionally, documents related to WBL in this school district was reviewed to provide additional data for the study.

In this chapter, I provided an introduction of work-based learning, leadership, and participation of exceptional immigrant female students in WBL. In the following chapter, I will provide a review of the literature on the history of WBL legislations, WBL learning and leadership theories; the main characteristics of WBL and its diverse learners; and collaboration in WBL. Through synthesizing the literature on these four themes, I developed a better understanding of the historical, and theoretical background of WBL, and acquired knowledge on how female immigrant students, including EFI students, learn in the WBL environments.

### **Definition of Terms**

1. WBL (Work-Based Learning): is a type of learning comprised of school-coordinated workplace experiences that are related to students' career goals and/or interests, are integrated with instruction, and are performed in partnership with local businesses and organizations" (VDOE, 2020).
2. CTE (Career and Technical Education): a type of WBL that integrates academic knowledge with the hands-on practice and experience in the workplace (CTE, 2018).

3. Exceptional Female Immigrant (EFI) students: Female immigrant students in WBL programs who are found eligible for special education services; these are non-citizen students who live in the United States of America (U.S.), either temporarily or permanently.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

In this review, I present four main areas of work-based learning (WBL) literature: (a) brief history of legislations, (b) conceptualizing WBL learning, (c) characteristics of WBL and its diverse learners, and (d) leadership theories and collaboration in WBL. Reviewing the literature on these four specific areas was driven by the need to have a review that was as relevant to the subject study and the research questions as possible.

The two research questions that guided this study were:

- How administrators and teachers in high school work-based learning programs (WBL) perceive their roles to support the learning of their exceptional female immigrant students (EFI)?
- How administrators and teachers of WBL programs collaborate to lead their programs?

Maxwell (2006) pointed to the relevance of the literature reviews of the subject of study and argued that literature reviews should focus on “relevance rather than comprehensiveness” (p. 31). Synthesizing the literature on the four areas mentioned above helps readers understand the historical and theoretical background of WBL, build knowledge on how immigrant students, including EFI students, learn in the WBL environments, and understand the leading role of WBL teachers and supervisors in the workplace.

Since the theme of WBL leadership is the focus of this dissertation, a substantial part of this review is focused on learning about the significance of leadership and

supervision in WBL environments, and investigating the challenges which WBL teachers and administrators face while teaching their diverse students, especially EFI students.

### **Brief History of Legislations**

In the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Horace Mann (1796-1859), the first secretary of education, established the public-school system in the U.S. (Hazlett, 2011). The creation of public schooling allowed children of diverse social backgrounds and economic status to access education and other learning opportunities provided by schools despite the growing challenges which included increased demographic diversity, decreased funding, and anti-public schooling perceptions (Driscoll & Salmon, 2013). However, despite the challenges, many public high schools offered, and continue to offer, work-based learning experiences to students irrespective of their cultural or socio-economic backgrounds.

In 1862, the U.S. House Representative Justin J. Morrill introduced a bill to help farmers' children study agriculture in educational institutions (Duemer, 2007). The Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 provided incentives for schools to incorporate agriculture education so that farmers' children could learn farming in these schools (Allen-Diaz, 2012; Duemer, 2007). In later years, with the increasing application of technology in education, researchers examined the linking of agricultural education with practical vocational skills as being a form of workplace learning (Lacharite, 2016; Reeve et al., 2014).

The idea of introducing vocational education in schools gained momentum during the First World War (WWI). The Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 was a milestone piece of legislation that encouraged states, for the first time, to provide vocational training

programs for students in public schools (Smith-Hughes Act, 1917). After the Second World War (WWII), the United States focused on security, citizens' loyalty, and the need to train future generations with vocational skills. Such focus paved the way to the National Defense Education Act of 1958 which provided over one billion U.S. dollars over four years in forms of students' loans in areas of technology, math and science studies (Jolly, 2009). This emphasis on integrating technical education with the academic curricula in schools has led to yet another important legislative development; the Perkins' Vocational Education Act of 1963, which was reauthorized by the U.S. Congress several times since its first authorization. In 2006, the Perkin's Vocational Education Act became known as Perkin's Vocational and Technical Education Act 2006 in order to recognize the importance of technology in education. This legislation continues to provide funding to a variety of work-based learning programs in U.S. schools, including the Career and Technology Education (CTE) programs.

The School-to-Work (STW) Opportunities Act which was passed by the U.S. Congress in 1994 was designed to support schools and other educational institutions to collaborate with businesses to facilitate transitioning of high school students to workplaces. In 2010, President Barack Obama reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 to include provisions related to ensuring that high school graduates acquire both the academic and the career skills they will need when they join the workforce. The emphasis on adding the career readiness requirement for high school students complemented the No Child Left Behind legislation of 2002, which focused mainly on academics as a measure for college readiness of students.

## **Conceptualizing Work-Based Learning**

Conceptualizing work-based learning continued to gain momentum and popularity during the 1990's (Illeris, 2004). The conceptualizations of WBL were influenced by psychological, socio-cultural, and postmodern theories (Hager, 2013). In the following sections I provide a brief discussion on these theories followed by an overview of two leadership theories, the Team Leadership theory (Hill 2013) and the Leader-Member Exchange theory (LMX) (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). I will also discuss Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning theory, for its relevance to this research study.

### ***Psychological Theories of Learning***

Psychological theories, such as theories of behaviorism and cognition, investigate learning from the perspectives of the learners' behaviors and cognitive abilities. The theory of behaviorism in learning assumes knowledge exists separately from the learner; and learning can be observed and measured objectively (Watson, 1970). The behaviorists separate the learners from the process of learning by objectively observing the learners' responses to various stimuli while discarding the learners' cognitive aspects of learning, such as their reflective thinking and how they use their prior experiences and knowledge in learning new information (Boghossian, 2006). Based on behavior theory, learning in workplaces would require measuring the performance of learners against a well-defined set of expectations or workplace readiness skills. Such requirement would require an alignment of work-based learning curricula with the industry-based work standards (VDOE, 2014). Moreover, the behavioral conceptualization of learning in WBL environments would consider the learner's emotional state and individual abilities



because these factors can influence the learner's behavior and overall performance and learning outcomes (Hager, 2013).

The cognitivists explain learning as internal processes that occur inside learners' minds, and are shaped by learners' thinking abilities, their readiness to learn, and their attitudes toward learning (Marquardt & Waddill, 2004). According to cognitivists, people learn through reflecting, understanding, and thinking. Cognitive learning requires the utilization of insightful thinking, and the application of prior experiences by the learners in their learning processes.

The investigation of learning as a cognitive process requires the interaction of the learner with the learning process (Gagne, 1984; Yilmaz, 2011). According to cognitive theory of learning, learners are active participants and knowledge discoverers, as they explore their learning environments and reflect on what they learn in order to build various conceptions in their minds (Gagne, 1984; Schön, 1983). The cognitive perspectives of learning highlight learning as thinking and self-reflecting processes that require the learners' interaction with factors external to them, such as observing others, and learning and knowing in action (Schön, 1983).

Behaviorism and cognitive theories of learning have limitations as they both consider learning as something that can be acquired by individual learners. Behaviorists neglect the impact of external factors that shape learning, such as (a) the arrangements made in the learning environment that can facilitate (or discourage) learning, (b) the type of participation the learners are engaged in, and (c) the readiness of learners and their knowledge base and prior socio-cultural experiences that may support (or hinder) their

learning (Fenwick, 2006; Hager, 2013). Fenwick (2006) pointed to the limitation of behaviorists' view of knowledge as being something external to the learner and can be acquired, and he noted that knowledge acquisition "does not often account for how people construct, individually and collectively, different meanings of their experiences" (p.288). Broadening the understanding of learning, including the WBL, to include the impact of the learning environments and other factors that influence individuals' learning, has led to socio-cultural and constructive perspectives of learning.

### ***Social-Cultural Perspective of Learning***

Moving the focus from objectivity in learning, which is the limitation of behaviorism and cognitive approaches, to expand our understanding of learning to include the contextual factors, such as history of learners, culture, and norms in the place of work, that gave rise to the constructivist view of learning as a socio-cultural process. The social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) postulates learning occurs when learners are engaged in social interactions. Learners in WBL environments are engaged in social learning when they model their peers and others. Research on adolescents' learning shows that students respond well to student-centered teaching strategies which incorporate hands-on activities and make students the focus of the learning process (Tangney, 2013). Instructional strategies that encourage culturally and linguistically diverse students to think and reflect and learn from their classmates' experiences are some examples of effective teaching strategies (Amaro-Jiménez, 2014). Students are more likely to learn and retain the information when the learning is contextualized. In other words, learning is more likely to occur when students make links of what they learn

with what they already know or are familiar with (Hamilton, 2013). While learning by doing is an important aspect of WBL, learners gain knowledge through experiences.

Constructivists believe knowledge is developed when students are engaged in the learning processes (Patton, 2015; Raina, 2011). The participants in WBL programs make meanings of their experiences as learners. In the process of making meanings, WBL learners are offered the opportunity of contextualizing their learning within the given parameters of time and space of their jobsites. Learners, including WBL participants, are engaged in the learning process by utilizing their prior knowledge, the way they learn, and their individual ability and motivation to learn. All these are important factors that affect learning.

According to Hager (2013) the “socio-cultural theories emphasize learning as an ongoing process of participation... [and] reject the supposed independence of learning from context” (p.23). The role of context in shaping individuals’ learning in workplace environments cannot be ignored because it adds other detrimental factors into the complex process of learning. Such factors include individual readiness, prior knowledge, and level of expertise, as well as the scope of the WBL program, its history, and other elements of workplace culture and organization which all affect the WBL learning.

The application of cultural-historical activity theory of learning in workplaces helps us understand the various dimensions of learning in working life (Engeström, 2013; Illeris, 2004). Learning in WBL environments can be visualized as an interaction of factors in two levels: individual and social (Illeris, 2004). On the individual level, the learning process is influenced by the content and the incentives presented to learners. On

the social level, factors such as the socio-cultural learning and the technical-organizational learning environments determine the extent of learners' engagement in work-based learning. These two levels are interlinked by workplace practices and work identity and characteristics. While learners are engaged in meaningful workplace learning experiences and practices, they in fact shape their own identities and participatory roles. This model for learning in working life (Illeris, 2004) helps us understand how immigrant female students, who participate in WBL, interact as active learners, and what mentors and teachers may do to facilitate the participation and the learning of these students.

### ***Post-Modern Constructive Theories***

The postmodern thinking on learning at workplace is a work in progress because learning itself is a complex process that involves many variables, making it difficult for researchers to fully understand. While acknowledging that several theories explain the dynamics of learning from a variety of psychological, social, critical and cultural perspectives, I believe that two theories within postmodern scholars can help theorize the WBL learning: The Complexity Theory (Davis & Sumara, 2006) and the Actor Network Theory (Fenwick, 2010). I have selected these two theories because they relate to my research study; while the first theory, the complexity theory, views learning as an emerging outcome of human interactions with their environment in iterative and dynamic processes (Hager, 2013), the second theory, the Actor Network theory (ANT), views workplace learning as a system of networks where actors can be people, activities, or attributes which effects cannot be ignored when studying a phenomenon or evaluating an outcome of a networked relation (Law, 1992). The significance of applying ANT in WBL

is related to the distribution of power among the nodes of WBL networks to better understand how agency, identity and everyday relationships between learners and their supervisors are demonstrated. Both Complexity and ANT theories acknowledge the complexity of our world and the uncertainties that characterize researchers' investigation of various phenomena, including WBL.

The three main theoretical frameworks discussed above, (i.e. the psychological, social-cultural, and post-modern) provide a broad background for understanding how learning takes place. Conceptualizing WBL leadership is equally important because of the nature of implementing WBL programs within and outside schools' boundaries. Educators who implement WBL programs in community-based workplaces assume the leadership role while being away from the physical boundaries of their schools. WBL teachers and administrators need leadership skills to make decisions at various stages of their students' learning, and to communicate with different stakeholders (business managers, parents, and full time employees in the workplaces, and school districts etc.) which can be a challenging task (Kenny et al., 2015).

Successful WBL leadership requires teachers to be aware of their learners' psychological, cognitive, and social-cultural backgrounds to better respond to students' learning needs. While acknowledging the complexity of understanding and responding to individual students' needs in workplaces, teachers in WBL environments use assessment tools to clarify the strengths and challenges of their learners. In the state of Virginia, the WBL learners are assessed by investigating their present level of performances, and how they learn best in workplace environments (VDOE, 2014). Teachers in WBL programs

oftentimes take decisions and modify their students' programs and schedules to attain the best fit for their students' abilities, interests, and needs. In doing so, the WBL teachers assume the leadership roles which principals in traditional schools usually perform. In the following paragraphs, I discuss characteristics of WBL and its diverse learners. I will end this chapter by reviewing several leadership theories and collaboration as applied to WBL environments.

### **Experiential Learning**

Kolb (1984) defined Experiential Learning as “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (p. 41). According to Kolb, the transformation of experience is cyclic and integrative as it composes of four stages: (a) adaptive learning modes of concrete experience, i.e. experience; (b) reflective observation, i.e. perception; (c) abstract conceptualization, i.e. cognition; and (d) active experimentation, i.e. behavior. These four stages indicate that learning-by-doing occurs in iterative cycles of learner's feelings and experimenting, followed by watching how experimenting producing outcomes, then thinking about such outcomes before being actively engaged in doing and implementing.

Learners begin with acquiring concrete work experience; then they advance to a reflection stage when they think and reflect on their learned experiences In subsequent stages students develop abstractions, or theorizations, of what they learned thus discovering more efficient ways of implementing their learning they advance in the WBL program (Kolb, 1984).

According to Kolb (1984) individuals can gain work experience from two sources of experiential learning: concrete and conceptual. The concrete experience can be acquired through individual's direct engagement with the work assigned to them, whereas the conceptual experience is resulted from observation and interpretation.

The integration of Kolb's (1984) four stages results in improving the WBL participants' performance, learning, and personal development as they participate in WBL experiences. The experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984) helps us understand how WBL learners develop their work skills while they experiment various work skills at their work locations.

The impact of experiential learning on students' abilities to learn was researched by Konak et al. (2014) who conducted two field studies on first year students enrolled in computer and information system classes at Penn State Berks' Collaborative Virtual Computer Laboratory. In both studies, the researchers applied Kolb (1984) learning cycle as a framework for designing hands-on computer-based activities. The purpose of the first study was to explore how participants perceived their own engagement when they interacted with others. The second study focused on learning about the participants' evaluation of their own competency and performance as a result of their engagement in the computer-based activities when the four steps of the Kolb's cycle of learning were followed. In the first study, the researchers investigated if a hands-on experiential activity that included all four stages of Kolb's cycle of learning would improve students' learning through enabling them to achieve a higher learning target. In the first study, students were divided into a control group (50 students) and a treatment group (44 students).

The control group was provided with step-by-step instructional guide of implementing an activity on computers without being required to follow Kolb's four stages of learning which require functions such as reflection, observation, and conceptualization of the task on hands. Konak et al. (2014) found the treatment group's average score was higher than the control group's score in a post-activity quiz.

The second study by Konak et al. (2014) was conducted on a total of 119 students (44 treatment group and 75 control group). A computer networking hands-on assignment was provided to both groups to investigate their competency levels and interest in the presented assignment by completing a post-activity questionnaire. Konak et al. (2014) found that the treatment group who followed the Kolb's learning stages demonstrated higher competency and interest in performing the activity presented to them. However, one of the limitations of Konak et al. (2014) was the non-consideration of students' socio-demographic background.

### **Characteristics of Work-Based Learning and Diverse Learners**

WBL is implemented through job shadowing, mentorship, service learning, internship, apprenticeship, and cooperative learning (VDOE, 2014). These special characteristics of WBL require interaction of various elements of learning to make the learning experience worthwhile. Among the elements that determine the effectiveness of WBL include the quality of the programs, learners' attitudes and performances, and the quality of leadership

Students who participate in WBL experiences gain academic, cognitive and life skills (Darche et al., 2009). In particular, the learning opportunities provided through the



participation in WBL programs empower students “to learn and master skills and competencies through problem solving, [and] can help address students’ diverse learning styles” (Darche et al., 2009, p.7). In addition to gaining academic skills and work competencies, WBL students shape their own work-related identities as they interact with others around them (Ahlgren & Tett, 2010; Collin, 2009). Collin (2009) conducted interviews with four design engineers in Finland and used narrative analysis to compare the four stories of her participants to learn about the changes that took place in their WBL experiences and work-related identities. According to Ahlgren and Tett (2010), learner’s identity is shaped by the “interaction between the individual, the workplace culture, and the activities in which people engage” (p.17).

Collin (2009) defined the work-related identities as “the ways in which people understand and define themselves in relation to themselves, their social environment and their culture” (p.24), and found that WBL learning and work-related identity are individually created, socially shared, and interrelated. Collin’s (2009) findings help WBL educators and workplace supervisors become more aware that their participants shape identities based on their cultural backgrounds, work experiences, and social interactions with their work environment. Workplace opportunities help immigrant female students become more self-aware and confident as they demonstrate their capabilities, skills, and identities as active participants. When individuals are engaged in WBL experiences, they engage in social interactions that shape their work-related identities (Collin, 2009) and facilitate their overall performances (Eden, 2014).

The level of students' engagement in learning processes, including workplace learning, positively impacts their academic performances (Lee, 2014) which in turn improves their active participation and motivation as learners. Eden (2014) analyzed reflective essays wrote by 26 undergraduate students and studied how they reacted to learning challenges at a workplace program. Eden found that when WBL students faced problems and challenges, that forced them out of their comfort zones, they became more proactive; and this “led them to tackle unfamiliar activities and ideas, and develop emotionally and engage more fully in their work experience” (p. 274).

The WBL programs generally provide positive experiences for many students. However, there are negative experiences that need our attention. Winborn (2017) conducted a study about the perceptions of 20 high school students who participated in a WBL in North Carolina and found that despite her participants benefited academically from the program, they also had negative experiences. Winborn reported that a female student in her study was “frustrated and upset with racist and sexual situations” (p.103). Other female participants talked about how they felt when “treated unfairly because of their gender” (p.104). From my experience as a WBL educator, I do believe the quality of WBL leadership and supervision plays a significant role in minimizing such negative experiences for WBL students.

The challenges imposed on WBL learners stem from the specific nature of this type of learning which takes place in two distinctive learning environments: in schools and out in the community. Such specific characteristic of WBL provide opportunities, as well as challenges, for students in general, and specifically for the EFI students. When

students participate in WBL programs they engage in the Experiential Learning (Kolb, 1984) which provides them with the opportunity of applying their knowledge in a real work setting. Besides acquiring new work skills, they also learn how to appropriately socialize and interact with other people, and how to think critically and become effective problem-solvers.

There are several empirical studies that investigated the impact of experiential learning on the participants' emotions and attitudes (Zeivots, 2018); increasing students' abilities to learn (Konak et al., 2014); and interpersonal and social skills (Skinner et al., 2016). A brief discussion of these samples of empirical studies is provided in the following sections. The focus on the impact of experiential learning on students' emotions and attitudes towards learning, their abilities to learn, and their social and interpersonal skills, helps in investigating the role of educators and principals in supporting the learning of their students in WBL environments.

### ***Students' Emotions and Attitudes in Work-Based Learning***

Zeivots (2018) interviewed 15 adult learners who participated in an experiential learning course in Australia to explore what triggers their emotional highs. Zeivots stated that the experiential learning courses were chosen because they “typically address the learner’s cognitive, physical, emotional and spiritual aspects in ways that may provide a wide spectrum of triggers of emotional experiences” (p. 5). The main finding of Zeivots’ study was the emergence of eight themes that characterize the triggers of emotional highs in adult students who participate in experiential learning. These eight themes are “sense of being pushed, exhaustion, sense of safety and support, escaping one’s environment,

out-of-me experience, sense of being in, interacting with nature, invitation to explore, and acceptance” (Zeivots, 2018, p.7). Learning about the triggers of emotions high helps in understanding the emotional needs of students who participate in work-based learning which is a type of experiential learning. Understanding the triggers of emotions is critical for WBL educators and supervisors because it helps them better serve the needs of their students, including EFI students.

### ***Students’ Interpersonal Skills***

Interpersonal skills “entail effective communication, empathy, active listening, and cultural competence as well as professionalism” (Skinner et al., 2016, p.22). These interpersonal skills are gained when students are engaged in experiential learning. A study, conducted by Skinner et al. (2016) to investigate the effects of experiential learning on developing the interpersonal skills of 58 undergraduate Physiotherapy students in Australia’s Charles Sturt University to compare students, found that the group of students who utilized experiential learning curriculum “felt more prepared for practice in terms of their interpersonal skills ... than did the traditional cohort” (p. 25). The significance of this study was to highlight the need to encourage students’ participation in experiential learning not only to gain work skills but also to develop their interpersonal skills.

The literature on WBL concepts and theoretical frameworks place an emphasis on the participatory nature of the WBL programs which serve a wide range of learners with diverse abilities and cultural backgrounds. When diverse learners are engaged with the WBL they do not only gain the practical skills they need to fulfill certain job tasks,

commonly referred to as hard skills, but they also get the social and personal development skills, which are referred to as soft skills (Schulz, 2008). The literature indicates that students who participate in WBL are impacted by three factors that shape their participation. These three factors are related to the learning environment, the individual's readiness for learning, and the leadership and supervision of the program (Malloch et al., 2013; Beard & Wilson, 2006).

WBL experience provides group learning opportunities. The readiness of diverse learners to work in WBL as a group provides better opportunities for them to improve their knowledge, level of participation, and personal skills (Humphrey, 2014).

Workplace participation is a process of negotiation among participants. This type of negotiation is created when the interactions at the workplaces shape the power relationships among the participants. According to Billett (2004), the activities and interactions offered to the learners by the workplaces is coined with "how individuals elect to participate in workplace activities and interactions" (p. 312). The learning that occurs in workplaces is a kind of authentic negotiation that takes place in real-life social settings, different from the planned learning and interactions that usually take place within the confinement of schools. This very characteristic of WBL requires a degree of readiness from the individual learner to maximize their benefit from their participation in such unique learning environments.

Learning opportunities offered by participating in workplace experiences are meaningless unless the individual learner is engaged in such learning. This suggests an interdependence between the offering of the opportunity, or affordance, and its

acceptance as manifested by the level of engagement of the learners (Billett, 2008). Students' engagement in the workplace learning is shaped by their agency as they must make choices and negotiate their learning environment. Female immigrant students who participate in WBL oftentimes need support to overcome challenges due to limited language proficiency, gender, or race. As a result, these students experience limited agency in workplace negotiations.

### **Leadership Theories and Collaboration**

Northouse (2013) discussed several theories and approaches to leadership. The leadership approaches include Trait, Skills, Style, and Situational Approaches. The theories include Leadership Style, Contingency, Path-Goal, Leader-Member Exchange, and Team Leadership theories. These theories and approaches to leadership explain how leadership is manifested in organizations and in school systems as well. For example, the Trait theory explains what personal traits are present in leaders and how they impact the leaders' performances. Leaders' physical and cognitive traits and types of personalities are at the core interest of this theory (Northouse, 2013). The Leadership Style theory focuses on how leaders behave and act and places an emphasis on "two general kinds of behavior: *task behaviors and relationship behaviors*" (Northouse, 2013, p.75, emphasis in the original). The Contingency theory of leadership focuses the lens on the leader-situation matching conditions and considers leaders' effectiveness is contingent on how they adapt to their situations, as it is "essential to understand the situations in which they lead" (Northouse, 2013, p.123).

Bolman & Deal (2013) suggested four frames for leadership: Structural, human resource, political and symbolic. The structural frame is based on leadership practices in the classical bureaucratic thinking of the organizations to increase its efficiency. The human resource frame is focused on workers' motivation, satisfaction, and loyalty to their leaders, and considered the importance of human relations within the organizations as being essential to the success of the organizations. The political frame views the success of the leaders in their ability to understand reality, negotiate, and make decisions based on the balance of powers. The symbolic frame is concerned with people's ethics and values within an organization and considers them essential to the success of the organizations.

The structural frame of leadership was practiced in schools as a traditional style of leadership. Traditional leadership in schools was centered around the role of the principal in what was known as a hierarchal model, or top-down leadership. The traditional hierarchal leadership structures in schools placed an emphasis on the role of the principals as top of the hierarchy followed by the vice principals, the administrative teams, the professional and technical support staff, and then towards the bottom of the hierarchy we find the teachers. Such arrangement would not encourage teachers to become "change agents" (Fullan, 1993, p.13). However, the need for effective schools warranted a drastic change in this traditional structural frame by requiring teachers and principals to work as a team within human resource frame of leadership. Principals were required to enhance their leadership through maintaining productive and transformative relationships with their staff to gain their motivations, positive attitudes, and loyalty.

In the following sections I provide a brief review of two of the leadership theories because of their relevance to the purpose of this research study; the Leader-Member Exchange theory (LMX) (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) and the Team Leadership theory (Hill, 2013).

### **Leader-Member Exchange Theory**

The Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) posits that effective leadership in an organization must consider the relationships that exist between leaders and their followers. The LMX theory states that “effective leadership processes occur when leaders and followers are able to develop mature leadership relationships (partnerships) and thus gain access to the many benefits these relationships bring” (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995, p.225). The relationship-based focus of LMX theory takes into consideration the dynamic interaction among the three domains of leadership: leaders, followers, and the dyadic relationships among them. The LMX leadership theory is centered on “how leaders transform followers” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p.341). Rockstuhl et al. (2012) noted that “a key tenet of LMX theory is that members’ work-related attitudes and behaviors depend on how their leaders treat them” (p. 1097). Leaders become transformative when they inspire their followers and help them change by trying to improve their work and life situations.

The LMX relational theory places an emphasis on the process of leadership and how the leader interacts with the subordinates. The LMX considers the “*dyadic relationship* between leaders and followers” (Northouse, 2013, p.161, emphasis in the original). Involving followers in decision-making strengthens their trust in their



leadership and increases their motivation to achieve their organizations' goals. Followers, when involved in the running of their organization, become more engaged and help create a favorable environment for leaders to rule.

WBL leadership and supervision can be approached from the LMX relational theory of leadership due to the nature of WBL as a learning environment that requires frequent interactions between supervisors and trainees, and between administrators and teachers. The relational conceptual framework of leadership in WBL environment provides guidance on the importance of relation-making and acknowledging the transformation of participants through empowering them to make meanings out of their daily experiences. Such focus on relationships provide the principals and instructors with the power to interact with the WBL stakeholders in support of the intended learning outcomes.

Based on my experience as a WBL educator, I found that relationships and interactions among WBL stakeholders (i.e. teachers, students, parents, and work supervisors/managers) are essential for the success of the WBL programs. However, the most critical relationship is the one that exists between teachers as WBL leaders and their students as followers. According to Nikolou-Walker and Curly (2012), WBL leaders become effective when they maintain "close proximity and learning relationships with their students, in order to ensure that full participation in their learning is optimized" (p.188). The success of WBL teachers in leading the WBL programs is influenced by the supportive role of the workplace managers and supervisors which, oftentimes, is

overlooked (Henderson, 2010); suggesting the need for more research on investigating the role of the workplace supervisors as partners in the students' WBL learning.

Supervising and implementing instruction in the WBL programs can be a difficult task. Kenny et al. (2015) admitted that WBL's supervising roles, responsibilities and relationships with other stakeholders are "complex and multifaceted" (p.117). The WBL leadership is also complicated due to the challenges imposed by the nature of learning in external environments instead of the traditional within-school learning (Nikolou-Walker & Curly, 2012).

The significance of LMX theory stems from its focus on the exchanges that take place between leaders and their followers, as well as among leaders themselves, which shape the overall performance of an organization. According to LMX theory, followers demonstrate attitudes at work in response to their leaders' behaviors. In education, the LMX theory emphasizes the exchanges that take place between principals and teachers and provides ways to help educators treat students as partners in the learning process.

In WBL learning environments, the LMX theory provides a framework for investigating: (a) educators' attitudes, behaviors, and differentiated responsiveness towards their students, including minority and immigrant female students who may benefit from such differentiations in their learning; (b) students' reciprocal attitudes towards their teachers and supervisors at their workplaces, and (c) the impact of principal-teachers exchanges and interactions on the students' learning outcomes. Principals in the WBL programs are no longer seen as administrators who are isolated from day-to-day learning process in their schools and the workplaces where learning

takes place. The principal-teacher dyads within LMX framework has an impact on the quality of leadership within WBL environments.

Several studies had examined the effect of LMX on organizations. For the purpose of my research study, I reviewed three of the studies related to LMX dimensions of race, gender, and work behavior. The first study investigated the impact of race and followers' motivations in LMX dynamics (Randolph-Seng et al., 2016), the second study was related to gender as an influencing factor in leader-followers exchanges (Park et al., 2017), and the third study focused on the impact of LMX on the employees' learning orientations and their innovative work behavior (Atitumpong & Badir, 2018).

### ***Racial Diversity of Leaders and Followers***

Randolph-Seng et al. (2016) examined the impact of diversity of leadership in organizations on the four dimensions of LMX dyads, namely, affect, respect, loyalty and contribution; they examined these four LMX dimensions in two studies on same-race and cross-race LMX dyads. In their first study, Randolph-Seng et al. (2016) surveyed 336 employees grouped based on their racial identities (77% female, 74.36 % White, 16.7 % African American, 3.3% Hispanic, 2.5% Asian, 1.9% Native American, and 1.4% other), and developed four hypotheses based on Liden & Maslyn's (1998) definitions of the four LMX dimensions, and used survey questionnaires to obtain the responses of the participants who worked in a public library system in Southeast of U.S. Randolph-Seng et al. (2016) concluded that the same-race participants provided mixed results regarding their attitudes towards the four XML dimensions, suggesting more research was needed to clarify these mixed results.

The result of their first study prompted Randolph-Seng et al. (2016) to conduct another study to focus on another dimension, the performance of the subordinate, in addition to the race. In their second study, Randolph-Seng et al. (2016) investigated LMX, race, and performance, using a laboratory design, instead of a survey, to provide objective authenticity, and to account for the interrelation among the study variables in order “to examine a possible alternative explanation to the findings...on the relationship of dyad diversity in LMX” (p.758). The alternative explanation concluded by Randolph-Seng et al. (2016) in their second study was that follower’s motivations overcome racial affiliations in LMX dyads.

### ***Impact of Gender***

Park et al. (2017) examined the relationship between gender discrimination in workplace and the workers’ perceptions of their subjective career success. These researchers defined subjective career success as a measure of individuals’ perceptions of their career and job satisfaction as well as the work-related opportunities they receive to achieve their goals and expectations. Park et al. (2017) surveyed nine human resource managers and 261 employees in several brand hotels in South Korea. Among the participants, 57.9% were males and 48.1% females. The researchers used five-point Likert scales to record their participants’ responses. Park et al. (2017) found, through the application of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), that LMX had negatively impacted gender discrimination in workplace and reduced incidents of discrimination in job promotions, pay, and training opportunities, and each of these factors influenced the employees’ subjective career success. Park et al. (2017) also found that female

employees' perception of LMX is significantly higher than that of male employees, and recommended that variables such as race and ethnicity (which they ignored in their study due to the homogenous composition of their participants) must be investigated in addition to gender in order to fully understand LMX impact on career success.

### ***Impact on Learning and Work Behavior***

Atitumpong and Badir (2018) investigated the impact of LMX on employees' learning orientations and their work behavior through the employees' creative self-efficacy. Atitumpong and Badir defined learning orientation as "individual's dedication to, and concern for, developing one's ability, knowledge, skills, and competence" (p.32); and defined innovative work behavior (IWB) as "the recognition of problems and initiation and intentional introduction of novel and useful ideas" (p.33).

The creative self-efficacy as used by Atitumpong and Badir (2018) means "one's confidence in the ability to perform a specific task in the innovation process" (p.38). The two researchers collected self-completed questionnaires from 146 managers and 337 employees (46% females) working in Thailand's manufacturing sector and used five-point Likert scales in distributed questionnaires to record their participants' responses. Atitumpong and Badir used statistical analysis in their study and found a positive relationship between LMX and IWB; and that the employee learning orientation has a positive impact on employee's IWB. This finding showed high quality LMX produces higher possibility for the employees to demonstrate their innovation at work. The significance of this finding was to highlight the important role of self-efficacy as a mediating factor to enhance employees' innovative work when high quality leader-

member relations exist. According to LMX theory, leaders (managers or educators) are expected to demonstrate role models in supporting their members' innovative contribution through enhancing their self-efficacious tendencies at work.

### **Team Leadership Theory**

The Team Leadership theory (Hill, 2013) provides a model for leadership that involves teams' contributions in a distributed leadership style where leaders (a) decide their type of intervention to support their teams, monitor or take action; (b) identify the type of their intervention to support the teams, providing help for the team to complete their tasks, or to mitigate relationships within the team to facilitate their work; (c) decide the level of intervention, either internally, within the team, or externally, changing the environment around the team (Hill's, 2013).

The role of the leaders in Hill's (2013) model is to work with team members to collaborate, monitor, and act. This model of leadership identifies team effectiveness by their performance and maintenance. While the team performance is related to the team's accomplishment, the team maintenance and development is related to the continuity of the team members as a cohesive body (Hill, 2013). Team leadership is essential for collaboration in organizations and schools.

### **Collaboration in Work-Based Learning**

One way to improve learning and leadership practices in schools is by strengthening collaboration (Ronfeldt et al., 2015). Collaboration does not stop at principal-teacher relationship as it should involve other supporting staff in school (Bishop & Larimer, 1999) as well as parents and students' supervisors at the WBL places.

Teachers' collaboration with immigrant parents can be strengthened through practicing "cultural reciprocity" which means acknowledging and respecting immigrant families' cultures and values, and "recognizing that values and experiences of both the families and the educators play an important role in children's learning" (Day, 2012, p. 118). In workplaces the teachers-supervisors collaborative relations support WBL leadership effectiveness. The broad collaboration on learning in schools provides learning opportunities for teachers and benefits students and school systems because it contributes to transforming schools into learning organizations (Vangrieken et al., 2015).

Collaboration among WBL stakeholders can be enhanced by the LMX theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) and the Distributed Leadership theory (Spillane, 2006). Both theories are applicable in WBL environments for reasons related to the dynamic nature of the work-based learning programs which require cooperation and coordination among WBL educators and other stakeholders including administrators and workplace supervisors.

Collaboration in schools enhances leadership sharing and the distribution of tasks and responsibilities among staff. There is no consensus among scholars on how distributed leadership and management in schools would look like (Spillane, 2009). However, two characteristics of distributed leadership were defined as "the leader-plus aspect and the practice aspect" (Spillane & Healey, 2010, p. 256). The leader-plus aspect includes the involvement of other school personnel, in addition to the principal, in assuming formal leadership positions; whereas the practice aspect of distributed leadership and management would involve the collective interactions among the school

leaders, both formal and non-formal leaders (Spillane & Healey, 2010). The leader-plus model can be demonstrated in the implementation of WBL programs because this model allows for the WBL educators to collaborate not only with their administrators, but also with other stakeholders, such as the business managers, work supervisors, and parents.

The Spillane's (2009) Framework for Distributed Leadership includes three main elements which fit the type of WBL environment; these three elements are: (a) the employment of valid measuring tools for the effectiveness of distributed leadership in schools through "practice logs and social network instruments" (p.70), (b) the identification of the relationships between schools' leadership, the "organizational conditions, instructional innovation, and student learning" (p.71); and (c) the engagement of teachers and principals in relationship marked by Distributed Leadership through "building curriculum modules" (p.71).

WBL is one of the learning domains where the Distributed Leadership is manifested as being a practice more than a style because of the fact that learning in WBL takes place outside the schools' buildings where teachers become empowered enough to make decisions and directly influence the learning outcomes of their students. Moreover, the WBL requires effective collaboration and coordination among its staff. The teachers who instruct the WBL programs need to be knowledgeable in their subject area, but they also need to demonstrate effective communication, social and collaborative skills.

The extent of which the collaborative and distributed leadership styles in schools may improve the overall learning performances of students is one of the most important areas of school effectiveness. When principals and teachers collaborate they share the



burden of leadership in what is known as Distributed Leadership (Spillane 2006) and Instructional Leadership (Hallinger, 1992) Both of these styles of school leadership have positive impact on the collaboration in schools which impacts the learning outcomes of students and supports schools' academic improvement (Hallinger & Heck, 2010).

The Distributed Leadership in schools is characterized by three main aspects: (a) collaboration around instruction, (b) quality of teaching, and (c) improvement of students' performances (Marks & Printy, 2003). These three aspects work collaboratively to improve learning in schools and in WBL. A brief description of each of these aspects follows.

### ***Collaboration Around Instruction***

Regarding the first aspect, when teachers and principals collaborate as a team to implement and supervise the delivery of instruction, the quality of instruction will improve which in turn will lead to improving students' performances and achievements. In her study of effective primary schools in Ethiopia, Panigrahi (2014) found a strong positive correlation between schools' effectiveness and classroom teaching, and found five dimensions of classroom teaching that impacted schools' effectiveness, namely, "planning, presentation, closing, evaluation and managerial" (p.57). Panigrahi reported these five dimensions as factors contributing to improving teaching quality in schools.

Collaboration happens in the classroom when teachers and other specialists cooperate in achieving learning goals for the students. For example, teachers oftentimes collaborate with librarians of their schools around literacy goals for students. Professional learning groups in schools, composed of teachers who either teach the same subjects or

the same grades, provide other venues for collaboration in schools. Additionally, school-community relationship is an important form of collaboration too.

### ***Quality of Teaching***

Collaboration among WBL stakeholders improves school's effectiveness and quality of teaching. Collaboration in schools is achieved when teachers become effective partners with their administrators and leadership tasks are distributed and executed collaboratively. The teachers' distributed leadership was also found to be an effective tool for strengthening teachers' commitment to their schools and encouraging them to assume leadership roles.

In a qualitative study, Hulpia and Devos (2010) found that there was a positive correlation between the distributed leadership and the teachers' organizational commitment. The study conducted by Hulpia and Devos was part of a larger project on school staff's organizational commitment in Belgium's 46 schools with 1,902 participants and was done in two sets of schools identified with low and high potentials for teachers' commitments respectively. Hulpia and Devos found that the level of cooperation among the members of the leadership team as well as the team's distributed leadership were two main factors that contributed to teachers' commitment to their schools.

### ***Improving Students' Performance***

Leithwood and Jantzi (1999) investigated the effect of the leadership of the principals and teachers on students' engagement and performance and found that both components of students' engagement in schools (i.e. the behavioral and affective) are

important. While the behavioral component is related to students' participations inside and outside the school, the affective component determines the "extent to which students identify with school and feel that they belong" (p.684). In view of the specific nature of WBL as a mode of learning in the community which requires school-community partnership, and in which many stockholders have distinct roles to play, the distributed leadership style as applied to WBL becomes significant.

According to Raelin (2011) the relationship between WBL and distributed leadership can be characterized by making team leadership "concurrent, collective, collaborative, and compassionate" (p. 18). Raelin has coined the collective distributed leadership he studied in WBL environments as "Leaderful", because of the collective aspect of WBL leadership. He wrote "the idea of involving everyone in leadership and seeing leadership as a collective property is quite distinctive from its familiar individualistic and heroic archetype" (Raelin 2011, p.18). The term 'Leaderful', as applied to WBL environments, includes the need to focus on the practice of leadership more than its styles (Spillane, 2009). Such a focus becomes relevant in the context of WBL environments which require transcending the effective leadership and management from schools to the wider community where students' learning takes place.

The collective nature of educational leadership in WBL environments emanates from the nature of WBL itself. The WBL is based on collaboration, reflection, and shared responsibilities among staff. Teachers of WBL are empowered as they are expected to take decisions on matters within the boundaries of their workplace environments. By being decision-makers, WBL teachers become active participants in a "collaborative

practice that can respond to contemporary demands to take advantage of all that people have to offer their teams and organizations” (Raelin 2011, p.19).

In conclusion, this literature review covered four main interrelated topics related to history of WBL legislation, conceptualizing work-based learning, leadership theories and collaboration, and the characteristics of WBL and its diverse learners. In the following chapter I provide a detailed presentation of the research method used in this study.

## **CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGY**

Leading workplace learning effectively is a critical component for the success of Work-Based Learning (WBL) programs in high schools. Virginia Department of Education's (VDOE) recent strategic review on WBL pointed to the importance of the supervision role of "teachers or coordinators" to support the success of students (VDOE, 2017, p. 18). WBL educators and administrators are considered knowledgeable and experienced leaders of the WBL thanks to the training and professional development opportunities which school districts usually provide. This study is meant to fill in a gap in the literature on the impact of WBL supervision and leadership on exceptional female immigrant (EFI) high school students within the limitations of the high school students' participation in Career and Technology Education (CTE) as a type of WBL in high schools.

### **Research Questions**

In this study I investigated the following two research questions:

1. How administrators and teachers in high school work-based learning programs (WBL) perceive their roles to support the learning of their exceptional female immigrant students (EFI)?
2. How administrators and teachers of WBL programs collaborate to lead their programs?

In the light of these two research questions, I developed this study to investigate two aspects of leadership practices within the WBL environments: (a) educators' perceptions

and beliefs about their leadership roles to help their EFI students learn and benefit from the WBL programs, and (b) the exchanges and collaboration among administrators, teachers and families of students to support learning in such programs. As a WBL educator, I found these two aspects of WBL leadership very critical for students' success in the WBL program.

I will begin this chapter by discussing my philosophical orientation, and specifically my understanding and beliefs of ontology, epistemology, axiology, and their relationships with the methodology I used in implementing this study. I will then explain the design for this study, including the type of research I conducted, how I selected the research sites and participants, what type of data I collected and analyzed to reach at the findings of this study, and what steps I took to guard against validity threats by explaining what I have done to ensure the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Patton, 2015) of this study.

### **Philosophical Orientation**

I am aware of the influence of the researcher's ontological, epistemological, and ethical beliefs in making decisions on various elements of the study design, including decisions related to research topic, research questions, selection of participants and settings. Such awareness is the driving force behind my attempt to shape the identity of the researcher inside me, and to guide my professional behavior as a WBL educator and researcher as well. According to Glesne (2011), all research studies are informed by theories, and "Part of your duty as a researcher is to figure out what philosophical and theoretical perspectives inform the kind of work you choose to do" (p.5).

Pascale (2011) defined ontologies as “theories about the nature of existence” (p. 3). Ontology could mean how a person views the world and how they construct the reality about their own existence. The quest for finding the ‘truth’ made me realize that truth is a relative construct, not only because there are multiple ways of understanding and learning about reality that shape our understanding of ‘truth’, but also because “Truth, like reality, is not always as clear-cut as we would like it to be” (Saldaña 2015, p.50). This means the researchers’ epistemology will impact their definition of ‘truth’ and what determines it. For example, the positivist’s epistemology points to a single objective truth that awaits discovery, whereas the constructivists who are concerned with meaning-making tend to believe the subjectivity of reality, and advocate for the existence of multiple approaches to understand and learn about the truths (Patton, 2015). While ontologies help us define the scope of knowing, the epistemologies assist in facilitating the knowing process (Glesne, 2011).

My choice to study how WBL administrators and teachers view their leading role in facilitating the learning of their exceptional female immigrant students, and the collaborative processes they adopt to demonstrate such leadership, emanates from my deep concern of insuring adequate educational attention to the individual needs of this specific group of learners.

The term ‘axiology’ is centered on ethics and morals (Mertens & Wilson, 2012). Researchers are human beings; they are guided by their own values and principles that shape their identities, and they bring such values and principles to the research tables consciously or unconsciously. The adherence to human ethics in doing research, or when

performing any type of profession including the profession of teaching students with disabilities, is perhaps the backbone of one's identity as a scholar and/or professional. Such adherence reflects the researchers' personal commitments to their personal values and guiding principles. The ethics in social studies are not limited to following the preset guidelines of Institutional Review Board's (IRB) protocols but should include the researchers' accountability towards the participants and their communities (Pascale, 2011).

For me, ontology and axiology are strongly linked to one another. This is so, because I started to think about what to research in this study and how to go about doing it, from my prior knowledge, experience and understanding of reality related to the WBL programs and their participants, as well as the perspectives of my morals and ethics as a teacher. My ontology and axiology dictate my approach to reality and 'truth' and shape my behavior as a researcher. Both, ontology, and axiology constructs, define the extent of my belief in truth and reality and guide me through the process of research and the type of knowledge I seek to obtain from conducting research. In short, how we look at things and nature around us is defined by our own ontology and axiology.

The question of reality, whether believed to be discovered or is being constructed through interpretations, can be answered by the researchers' different lenses, filters and angles when applying the tools of deduction, induction, abduction and/or retrodiction (Saldaña, 2015). Saldaña's approach to multiple paths of thinking helped me as a researcher comprehend the ways to identify the patterns of reality occurrences (or non-occurrences) by looking at "routines, rules, rituals, roles and relationships" (Saldaña,



2015, p.13). I paid attention to my participants' expressions of the things they routinely do and how they explained their interrelationships and collaboration when they practiced leadership in their programs. By doing this research study I learned about my participants' different thinking and the meanings they made from their experiences as WBL educators and leaders. According to Patton (2015), reality and knowledge can be learned by the constructionists as they "study the multiple realities constructed by different groups of people and the implications of those constructions for their lives and interactions with others" (p.121). The data I collected during this study helped me understand the WBL program routines and rules, as well as the roles played by participants and types of interactions and relationships they engaged in while they delivered their instruction and leadership to their EFI students.

I confess that I am still struggling with the notions of outside/inside realities and the definition of truth. While acknowledging the fact that perceptions of realities are shaped by one's thinking and beliefs, and hence the justification of the possibilities of multiple interpretations of the reality, yet I tend to believe that reality is a double faced coin term: The part that can be felt by our five senses and exists outside us, i.e. the materialistic part which continues in existence even when we close our eyes; and the other part of reality that can be shaped by the individual's understanding, belief, perception, emotional intelligence and other ways of knowing that are non-materialistic in nature that utilize the tools of intuition, inferences and expectations. Does this understanding of reality makes me a realist? I do not know. How can I solve the conflict of objectivity and subjectivity within me as a researcher? Patton (2015) looked at realism

as a framework based on testing reality by corresponding the truth to reality through asking “what is the nature of the real world? What’s true?... and how findings correspond to reality” (p.105). But Maxwell (2013) borrowed the term “bricolage” from Claude Levi-Strauss’ which means “do-it-yourself [to use] whatever tools and materials are at hand to complete a project” (p. 42). Maxwell (2013) explained how a realist may critically reflect on realism ontologically, and at the same time adopt constructivism in epistemology, he wrote:

This position [critical realism], which has gained widespread acceptance in the philosophy of science, can itself be seen as an example of bricolage, since it combines two commonsense perspectives that have often been seen as logically incompatible. The first of these perspectives is ontological realism: the belief that there is a real world that exists independently of our perceptions and theories. This world doesn’t accommodate to our beliefs; believing that global warming is a hoax will not keep the Earth from warming... The second perspective is epistemological constructivism: Our understanding of this world is inevitably our construction, rather than a purely objective perception of reality, and no such construction can claim absolute truth. (p.43).

Being realist may be a part of my inner researcher at this point of time, but I am also struggling with how to make meaning of my work as qualitative researcher so that I can get something concrete out of it, something that would benefit the population of students I serve, who are voiceless and need advocates in the research community. As a special

education teacher, I believe that my agency is required to help justify my position which must utilize research for empowering me and my students.

Oftentimes, I ask critical questions related to the meaning of everyday rituals of my profession, its routine procedures and the impact of the collaborative atmosphere that exist among teachers and administrators with regard to the learning of my students. This deep commitment towards my profession as a teacher fosters my interest in critical theory as framework to guide my research work. I am aware that the critical theory provides a lens through which researchers can better understand the power relationships among subjects and the connections of such relationships with the bigger society. In this study I am concerned with how WBL educators respond to the learning needs of their exceptional immigrant female students at a time when immigration policy is at the center of the national debate in our society. The interviewed educators were of diverse ethnic backgrounds and different perceptions towards immigration with varying experiences in supporting the learning of their exceptional immigrant female students.

I must add that my epistemology helped me define the purpose of my research and choose the methodology I needed to follow in collecting data and reach my research findings. In doing so, I attempted to understand the qualitative research's assumptions, principals, and guided practices. I was inclined to share Charmaz's (2004) views on the three pillars of the qualitative research foundation (premises, principles, and practices), and specifically her emphasis on meaning-makings, and that "actions can make implicit meanings visible" (p.981). Thinking realistically include the mindset of thinking critically which means "exposing a social inequity or injustice that merits public knowledge and

action for righting the wrong” (Saladaña, 2015, p. 61). This aspect of transformative thinking led me to explore my identity and agency as a researcher and as a teacher of immigrant students with special learning needs.

I look at my identity and agency as a researcher and educator as being two constructs that I spent long time trying to define. While I was doing this study to learn about the perceptions of work-based learning educators who support the learning of their exceptional female immigrant students, I felt that my identity was being shaped along my time line of experiences which eventually led to who I am now, not only as an educator and researcher but also as an immigrant and a husband of an immigrant wife and a father of a son and three daughters who are all immigrants.

Perhaps one of the major aspects of my identity that I am struggling with is my agency: My ability not only to grasp the meanings offered by the experiences I am going through, but also my ability to meet the challenges that appear during my work and influence the course of things around me in order to bring better outcomes for my students and research participants. Flick (2015) expressed his own concerns about the challenges faced by the qualitative research in the present time. He based his concerns to some extent on the ongoing calls for educational reforms based on the postpositive paradigm which has dominated power on policymaking and funding control. In addition, Demerath (2006) discussed how qualitative research can be more responsive by being critical, instructive, transparent, pragmatic, and public good-oriented.

The qualitative research paradigm I followed in this study was the one that helped me provide answers to some, if not all, the concerns Flick (2015) has already mentioned.

I found that Demerath's (2006) public-access capacity of qualitative studies was closer to my understanding on how I may have built my agency as a teacher to empower my students who many of them are minority female immigrants. Such end would require me to further my understanding of the critical social science domain of knowledge, and how gender identity and empowerment can be materialized when students are making the transition from school to work life. Since immigrant students are multi-racial entity in the school where I teach, I find myself borrowing from both Flick and Demerath's arguments regarding the competency of qualitative inquiry and the framework it provides to help me in this endeavor.

I believe that qualitative research has tremendous potential to disclose meanings, realities, and perceptions to uncover the depth of the phenomena the researchers are interested in learning. In education, numbers and statistics in general are important but can't provide the whole picture of what is happening in classrooms and within students' minds and their perceptions about learning. Reforming education requires understanding the dynamics of classrooms, and the behavior of the stakeholders, including, of course, the teachers as being agents of change in their schools.

### **Study Design**

My approach to obtain answers to the two research questions of this study was based on interpretive methodology in qualitative research, because I interviewed the participants and learned about their perspectives and what meanings they constructed regarding their roles as WBL educators and leaders, and how their individual experiences impacted the learning of their EFI students. The implementation of this study in two

sister centers (Center-A & Center-B) which provide the same WBL curriculum and working experiences for their students, allowed me to explore and learn about the perceptions of WBL educators in both centers. I have learned more about WBL leadership by listening to the participants as they shared with me their own perceptions and experiences of teaching EFI students. Trusting the research participants' perceptions and views, and constructing meanings from such perceptions and views, is a common approach for interpretive inquiry (Patton, 2015).

I am aware that the knowledge I gained while conducting this study is socially constructed, because such knowledge is not readily available as a separate objective entity isolated from human beings. Glesne (2011) pointed to the importance of learning how people interpret and make meanings of their reality, as reality is “socially constructed, complex, and ever changing” (p.8).

### *Case Study*

I used Case Study design (Yin, 2014) to conduct my research study because this type of interpretive investigation can be carried out inductively within the perimeters of the specific two research questions of this study, namely, (a) How administrators and teachers in high school work-based learning programs (WBL) perceive their roles to support the learning of their exceptional female immigrant students (EFI)? and (b) How administrators and teachers of WBL programs collaborate to lead their programs?

The Case Study is “an exploration of a ‘bounded system’ or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (Patton, 2015, p. 259). Merriam (1998) noted that the

decision to choose case study design in qualitative research is based on the desire of the researcher to engage in “insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing” (p.29). While conducting this study I had the same desire to engage my participants and interpret the meanings they made of their own experiences.

Yin (2014) wrote that case study methodology is preferred to other methods when “the main research questions are ‘how’ or ‘why’; a researcher has little or no control over behavioral events; and the focus of study is a contemporary (as opposed to entirely historical) phenomenon” (p. 4). The two research questions of this study were both ‘how’ questions, and I, as a researcher, had no control on the perceptions of the participating teachers and administrators. Moreover, the topic of WBL leadership and its impact on the learning of female immigrant students is a contemporary subject because of the current status of the economy and the national debate on immigration in the U.S.

Case studies are context-based and clearly bounded (Stake, 2005), as it is the case with WBL program in the two sites where I have conducted this research. The WBL learning programs are bounded by content and participation. The WBL programs are clearly defined as missions, processes, and outcomes. The time-space boundaries of this study were clear to me as a bounded case and could be practically investigated within the constraints of time and resources I have spent 12 months seeking approvals to conduct the study, interviewing participants, and collecting and analyzing data for this study. The qualitative observation and open-ended interview questions were suitable instruments for this study as they enabled me as a researcher to interact with the participants and gain in-depth knowledge about the topics under investigation.

From the beginning of this research, I was aware that my decision to select the participants, research sites and the subject of study was critical to the overall success of my study. Reybold et al. (2013) noted that “selection must be considered as essential element of method” (p.703). In the following sections I provide details about the steps I took to select study sites and participants.

### ***Research Sites Selection and Description***

I have investigated the two research questions in two vocational centers (Center-A & Center-B) within the same school district in one of Virginia’s most diverse regions. The two centers were 12 miles apart from each other. Center-A was located in the southern region of the school district whereas the other site, Center-B, was located in the northern region of the district. The demographic and other data for students in Center-A and Center-B are shown in Figure 3 and Figure 4, respectively. At the time of this study, the students enrolled in Center-A were 80 students, and 143 students were enrolled in Center-B.

The administration structures in both centers were the same: In each center there were three administrative staff, namely the Principal, the Department Chairperson, and the Employment and Transition Representative (ETR), an administrative assistant and a secretary to run the office. A total of 34 teachers and their assistants were working in Center-A, and 40 teachers and assistants were working in Center-B.



There were five reasons for selecting these two vocational centers as research sites:

1. Both centers were the only centers which provide WBL experiences for EFI students in the whole school district, and both were located closer to where I work and live so that I was able to access them and meet the participants in a timely manner.
2. Both centers provided similar WBL programs to their students, namely the Career and Technical Education (CTE) curriculum, approved by Virginia Department of Education.
3. The learners in both centers were diverse with multi-lingual, cultural and racial backgrounds, and among these students in both centers were female immigrant students who spoke languages other than English in their homes.
4. Including two centers in my research study has provided me with the opportunity to investigate similarities and differences in the perceptions of the participants and learn how leadership was practiced.
5. Both centers were accessible to me as I utilized my personal relationships with the administrators of both research sites and my 16 years of work experience in one of the centers (as a WBL teacher) to negotiate my access to the sites.

Accessing the sites was an important issue in doing research studies, and that “gaining access is an initial undertaking” (Glesne, 2011, p. 59). I could conveniently access both research sites because of my credentials as a WBL educator for over 16 years and was known by many participants and by the administrations of both sites. I also utilized my professional relationships with the gatekeepers in both sites to facilitate the implementation of the study within a reasonable time frame and available resources. My

ability to access the two sites helped me save plenty of time which otherwise I would have spent securing approvals and scheduling of the interviews with the various participants. Freeman (2000) pointed to the fact that access in research is not only getting into the research sites “but is intricately tied to data collecting as well” (p.361). As being a colleague of many of the participants I noticed that they were very welcoming and enthusiasts about supporting me with this research. They did not hesitate to open their minds and hearts to me during our in-person interviews. I believe such positive attitudes from the participants added to the quality of the collected data. In addition, the participants were flexible in agreeing to stay after hours in their schools waiting for the interviews. In two instances the participants waited extra time when the traffic did not help me show up on time for the interviews.

### ***Participant Selection***

I used two strategies in the participant selection process: the purposeful homogenous sampling and the purposeful random sampling (Patton, 2015). I used the purposeful homogenous sampling to select the six administrators (three from each center), and I used the purposeful random sampling to select the six teachers (three from each center). According to Maxwell (2013), the purposeful selection is a strategy used to select the participants “deliberately to provide information that is particularly relevant to your questions and goals and can’t be gotten as well from other choices” (p.97). Selecting the participants purposefully enables the researcher in “selecting information-rich cases to study” (Patton, 2015, p. 264) which, in-turn, increases the quality of the research and its findings.

The purposeful random sampling allows the random selection of participants who are knowledgeable and experienced to improve the quality of collected data and to facilitate the implementation of the study within the limited available resources and time (Patton 2015). A total of 12 participants were selected in this study: six WBL administrators and six WBL teachers. (see Table 1).

### ***Participant Selection Criteria***

The only criterion that guided my selection of the six administrators was their full-time working positions as principals, department chairpersons, and ETRs. The criteria I used to select the six participating teachers were: (a) Each selected WBL teacher must have at least three years of teaching experience, and (b) The selected teachers should currently teach, or have taught, at least one exceptional female immigrant student. I assumed the criteria of the minimum three years WBL teaching experience was adequate to demonstrate the participants' knowledge and expertise which, in turn, would allow them to provide quality contributions to the data collected during the in-person interviews. In addition, all teachers in the school district, where this research was conducted, are subjected to three-year evaluation cycle which served as an indication to me that the selected participating teachers were qualified enough to pass such evaluative measure to ensure their qualitative contributions to my research study.

### ***Recruitment Process***

I sent an inviting email messages to all teachers and the six administrators in both centers to explain my study and the criteria for participation and requested their participation. I provided a cash incentive of \$50 to each participant to compensate for

their time and effort. I received positive responses from all six administrators as well as from 14 teachers (9 from one of the centers and 5 from the second center). I wrote the names of these 14 teachers and separated them into two baskets related to the centers they belonged. I asked two of my students to close their eyes and pick up three of the names from the baskets. I then communicated with the selected teachers via email to inform them about the result of the selection and to schedule in-person interviews. I contacted the non-selected teachers to thank them and informed them about the outcome of the selection process. I assigned alphanumeric code for each participant to protect their identity and use as a method of identification. I then transformed the codes into pseudonyms to use while writing the findings of this study.

Based on the participants' selection criteria and the recruitment process described in the previous section, the following participants (pseudonyms) were recruited:

1. Sam: Sam is a White male (49 years). He is the Principal of Center-A where this study was conducted. He has 28 years of teaching and administrative experiences including six years as WBL administrator of Center-A. He holds an Educational Specialist degree and a Master's in Education degree.
2. Brenda: Brenda is a White female educator, 35 years old. She is the Department Chairperson of Center-A. Brenda had 9 years of teaching and leadership experiences including three years as WBL administrator in Center-A. She holds two Masters' Degrees in Special Education and Administration.
3. Joe: Joe is a White male educator (40 years). He is the Employment and Transition Representative who facilitates the relationships of the Center-A

with the community-based workplaces and other state and federal agencies.

Joe has six years of teaching experience including three years as a WBL administrator in Center-A. He holds a M.A. degree in Special Education with a certification in administration.

4. Brandon: Brandon is an African American male, 50 years old, has 17 years of teaching experience as a Special Education educator including five years as a teacher in center-A. Brandon holds a master's degree in special education.
5. Katy: Katy is an African American female educator, 52 years old, and has 19 years of teaching experience including five years as a WBL educator in Center-A. Katy holds a B.A. degree with Special Education certifications.
6. Sahar: Sahar is a White female teacher, 54 years old, with 21 years of teaching experience including 11 years as WBL educator in Center-A. Sahar holds a master's degree in Special Education.
7. Jhon: Jhon is a White male (51 years), works as the principal of Center-B where this study was conducted. Jhon has 22 years of experience as a teacher and an administrator. He spent the last four years of his career as a Principal of this work-based learning center. He holds a master's degree in special education and is currently pursuing his Ph.D. degree in education (career and transition).
8. Kim: Kim is female educator with Asian-American background. She is 48 years old and works in center-B as its Department Chairperson. Kim has 20 years of teaching and leading experiences including five years as an

administrator in this center. She holds a master's degree in Special Education and certifications in Leadership and Administration.

9. Maria: Maria is a female educator with Latin-American background. She is 46 years old and has 12 years of teaching experience including six years as Center-B's WBL Administrator (Employment and Transition Representative). Maria facilitates the relationships of her school (Center-B) with the community-based workplaces and other state and federal agencies. Maria holds a master's degree in education and school counseling.
10. Sue: Sue is a female White teacher, 46 years old. She has 17 years of teaching experience including four years in her current position as a WBL teacher. Sue holds a master's degree in Special Education.
11. Ann: Ann is a White female teacher, 45 years old. She has 18 years of teaching experience including five years as a WBL teacher in Center-B. Ann holds a master's degree in Special Education.
12. Lisa: Lisa is a White female teacher, 48 years old. Lisa has 19 years of experience as educator including three years as a WBL teacher in Center-B. She has a master's degree in Education.

### ***Data Collection***

I obtained the data for this study from three sources; in-person interviews, documents related to WBL programs; and my own analytical memos. The data obtained from the interviews constituted a major part of the collected data which I collected and analyze for the purpose of this study. Before conducting the interviews, I piloted the

interview questions with a teacher and a current ETR in a high school with whom I worked in the past and both had experiences teaching female immigrant students in WBL programs in the center where I currently work. The feedback I received from piloting the interview questions helped me figure out to what extent the questions were clear and answerable within the time allocated for the interview. The feedback has also helped me clarify some of the vocabulary words in the interview questions to avoid ambiguity or misunderstanding. The piloting of the interview questions helps researchers to “determine if the questions work as intended and what revisions you may need to make” (Maxwell, 2013, p.101). I used two sets of interview questions; one set for the administrators and the other set for the teachers; and each set had 20 questions.

**Conducting In-Person Interviews.** Before each in-person interview, I explained the purpose of the study and reviewed with the participants the content of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) consent form (see Figure 1) before I asked them to sign the form. I used two digital audio recorders to record each interview to ensure that none of the data was lost in case one recorder fails to operate. I conducted the first interview with one of the centers’ administrators, the Employment and Transition Representative (ETR), on September 1, 2019 and the last interview was with a teacher on October 17, 2019. I drove a total of 240 miles to conduct these interviews (from home to research site 1, and from research site 1 to research site 2, and back home), and spent a total of 7 hours driving between the sites and my home. Table 2 illustrates the date and duration of each interview. I used a software program called Trint ([www.Trint.com](http://www.Trint.com)) to help me transcribe the interviews. I listened to each recorded interview to compare the audio with the

transcribed text I obtained from the software to make sure none of the data was missing or distorted, and then sent the participants their interview transcripts as email attachments to check for the accuracy of the information and to get their approvals.

**Collecting Documents.** The purpose of collecting and reviewing documents which are related to the WBL programs was to learn more about the content and processes of the programs. I reviewed the collected documents to gain in-depth knowledge about the WBL programs and their collaborative implementation by the participants. The documents collected included School Innovation and Improvement Plan (SIIP), the vision and mission statements of the research sites, the Career and Technology Education's (CTE) curriculum pacing guides, the school district's Portrait of a Graduate (POG), school to career guide, and the best practices for obtaining student independence on a job site. The complete list of the documents collected and used as a source of a triangulated data for this study is shown in Figure 7. Several interviewed participants referred to these documents when they explained their experiences teaching their students including immigrant female students.

**Analytical Memos.** After each interview I wrote memos to document my perceptions, reflections and observation of the participants' responses and body language. Writing memos is "a way to facilitate reflection and analytic insight" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 20). In these memos I wrote about the settings and other environment variable I observed while interacting with the participants. I recorded how I felt about the information I received from the participants and reflected my own perceptions and experiences as a WBL teacher myself. The memos helped me check against my potential biases toward



the data and made my own input transparent throughout the process of data collection and analysis.

In addition to interviews and documents, the analytical memos served as a support to the validity of my research through triangulation. Data triangulation refers to collecting and analyzing data of different types, such as interviews, observations, and documents (Patton, 2015). In addition, triangulation is achieved when data sources are multiple. Glesne (2011) noted that the term ‘triangulation’ is commonly used to describe multiple methods of collecting data, it also “refers to the incorporation of multiple kinds of data sources” (Glesne, 2011, p. 47). In this study I tried to apply triangulation to obtain and analyze data not only from teachers, but also from the administrators in the geographically separated sites.

### **Data Analysis**

The type of analysis I used involved coding, categorizing the codes, and then producing themes from the categories. I found this strategy of analysis suitable to answer the two research questions which focused on the participants’ perceptions, interpretations and leadership practices when implementing WBL programs to support the learning of their EFI students. The structural, ‘in vivo’, and axial methods of coding (Saldaña, 2016) helped me analyze the data and find eight themes as findings of the study. In the process of analyzing the transcribed interviews I followed three main steps; I read the transcribed interviews line by line to highlight codes, I then grouped the codes into categories, and developed themes based on the obtained categories. These three main analytical steps are explained in the following section.

### ***Coding***

I used structural and ‘in vivo’ methods of coding (Saldaña, 2016) by looking for keywords in the collected data, and by underlining the words expressed by the participants during interviews to use them as “in vivo codes” (Glesne, 2011, p. 195). In the first cycle coding I underlined the repetitive concepts, describing terms, and words or phrases that explained how teachers and administrators perceived their leadership role to support the learning of their female immigrant students (Research Question 1), and how administrators and teachers collaborated to support the learning of their EFI students (Research Question 2). I numbered the codes using serial numbering method, beginning with 1, and used an Excel spreadsheet to record the codes and their definitions; this method helped me arrange data in categories and establish relationships across data.

### ***Categorizing***

This is the second phase of coding which was achieved by categorizing similar codes under one category in the second phase of coding. I collected similar codes under parent codes for categorization. Categorizing codes can be achieved through a tree-like map, or axial coding (Saldaña, 2016). The axial coding helped me see the connections in the data within a site as well as across the two sites and help me discover common themes as final findings of the study.

### ***Finding Themes***

In this stage I identified emerging themes and concepts from the categories obtained in the categorizing stage. A total of seven themes emerged around the two research questions as explained in the following section.

With regard to the first research question (How administrators and teachers in high school work-based learning programs (WBL) perceive their roles to support the learning of their exceptional female immigrant students (EFI)?) the participants shared their perceptions regarding the participation of their EFI students through: (a) supporting student skills to promote independence, (b) facilitating employability, (c) improving educators' cultural competencies, and (d) modifying instructions for EFI students to help them access the WBL curriculum.

With regard to the second research question (How administrators and teachers of WBL programs collaborate to lead their programs?) the participants explained their collaborative efforts to lead their programs through: (a) deepening the educators own understanding of their personal beliefs, (b) leadership practices and collaboration to enhance learning environment and promote students' learning, and (c) facilitating relationships and collaboration with immigrant families to support the education of their children.

In Chapter Four I provide detailed explanations on each of the above themes.

### **Validity Safeguards, Positionality and Biases**

I believe that researchers cannot separate themselves from research because they are the instrument of their research (Maxwell, 2013). As a researcher, I was fully aware of the potential threats to the validity of this study, including threats that may arise because of my own biases which include: (a) I am a WBL teacher who believes in the critical role of WBL leadership in helping students, especially female immigrant students, succeed in these programs; (b) I believe it is very important that WBL teachers and

administrators be aware of the specific needs of immigrant female students to maximize their participation and benefiting from the offered WBL programs, (c) I perceive WBL as an effective way for immigrant students to gain real life work and social experiences, (d) I am an immigrant person who is fully aware of the circumstances which many immigrant families go through, and that my three daughters had the experience of being female immigrant students in US schools for many years, and (e) I am aware of the different attitudes in the American society regarding immigration, especially in the post-2016 Presidential Elections.

In addition to the above potential biases, I am also aware of my positionality in this study as demonstrated by my relationships with some of its participants. I worked in one of the research sites as a WBL teacher for 16 years and had engaged in a variety of collaborative relationships with several administrative teams throughout my working years. To avoid threats of positionality and biases I avoided providing feedback or expressing my personal thoughts when I interviewed the participants; I used the analytic memos to check my own biases during the process; and I conducted the in-person interviews in a business- like style that included the arrangements of the chairs across the tables, notifying the participants about the audio recording of the interview, and taking the time to explain the consent forms before requesting participants to sign. I also explained to each participant the follow-up steps, such as transcribing the interviews and sending copies to each participant to check and confirm their responses to the interview questions.

I followed the same procedure described in the previous paragraph with all participants including those whom I worked with in the same school for years. The participants were relaxed and open to share with me their views knowing that I am their colleague and not a stranger. I also minimized the effects of validity threats in my study by ensuring the study's credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Patton, 2015).

### *Credibility*

Credibility of a qualitative research is met when the study can “provide assurance of the fit between respondent's views and the inquirer reconstruction and representation of the same” (Patton, 2015, p. 685). Creditability, which is equivalent to internal validity in quantitative research, is achieved when study uses triangulation, member check, peer debriefing, and verbatim quotes from participants. Member check is “the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” of research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314). In my study I did the following to safeguard its credibility:

- I used three sources of data, namely the in-person interviews, documents, and the analytical memos; this is called Data Triangulation (Denzin, 1989) which refers to the researchers' use of multiple methods of data collection to “overcome the deficiencies that flow from one investigation or one method” (p.236).
- I provided the participants with copies of their answers to the interview questions to member check and make sure that they agree with their responses. By doing so, I have improved the research credibility and increased the transparency and quality of trust in my relationships with the participants.

- I included in my research report verbatim quotes from participants' responses to illuminate their thoughts, ideas, and concepts which were important to them.

### ***Transferability***

A study is said to be transferable when the thick description it provides can be sufficient to help researchers transfer its outcomes to other cases. The transferability is equivalent to generalization or external validity (Patton, 2015). In my study I provided as much details as possible to describe my methodology, observations, and findings to improve the chances for my study to be transferrable. I also discussed in the final chapter of this dissertation the limitations of my study and suggested future research areas to gain more knowledge about WBL leadership issues.

### ***Dependability***

Qualitative studies can be dependable (i.e. reliable) when they are properly documented and audited so it becomes easy to trace the steps implemented in their procedures. In my study I recorded all procedures and steps taken. I also wrote analytical memos to help me reflect on my biases and feelings during the in-person interviews and throughout the research stages.

### ***Confirmability***

Qualitative research's objectivity is attained when it becomes confirmable which is "concerned with establishing the fact that the data and interpretations of an inquiry were not merely figments of the inquirer's imagination" (Patton, 2015, p. 685). At the end of each in-person interview I sent the transcriptions to the participants via their email addresses and ensured that the transcribed responses were approved by the participants.

All participants confirmed their agreement with the transcriptions. This measure helped me ensure the confirmability of my study.

In addition to the above steps which I took to safeguard the validity of my research, I was aware of other safeguards that are related to the purposeful selection (Reybold et al., 2013) of the sites and the participants, and the fact that participants had seen me as an insider (Ghaffar-Kucher, 2014). With regard to the first validity safeguard concern, the purposeful selection, I was aware that selecting the two sites confirmed to my study's conceptual framework. In addition, I was mainly driven by my desire to know what meanings the participants had in their minds about supporting the learning of their EFI students. Reybold et al. (2013) wrote "The purposeful selection is a mechanism for making meaning not just uncovering it. ... [and] selection is an extension of one's theoretical and conceptual framework" (p.700-701).

Another aspect of the validity of my study was reflected by its intended transformational purpose. I focused my attention on the participants' responses during the in-person interviews. This way I was able to learn how the participants supported the learning of their EFI students, how they established their own relationships to share leadership burdens in their schools, and how they communicated with the immigrant parents of their students despite the diversity of cultures and the barriers of language. According to Cho and Trent (2006) the transformative validity is "determined by the resultant actions prompted by the research endeavor" (p.324). In the following chapter I present the findings of this study.

## **CHAPTER FOUR FINDINGS**

In this chapter I present the findings of this study which emerged from the data analysis process described in the previous chapter. Seven themes constitute the findings of this study. I organized these themes in relation to the two research questions of the study. These themes jointly answer the two research questions of this study:

1. How administrators and teachers in high school work-based learning programs (WBL) perceive their roles to support the learning of their exceptional female immigrant students (EFI)?
2. How administrators and teachers of WBL programs collaborate to lead their programs?

The first research question was focused on the perceptions of work-based learning (WBL) teachers and administrators regarding their leadership roles to support the learning of their EFI students. Perceptions related to WBL educators' leadership and supporting the learning of their EFI students were expressed by the participants under the following four themes which emerged from data and helped provide answers to the first research question: (a) supporting student skills to promote independence, (b) facilitating employability, (c) improving educators' cultural competencies, and (d) modifying instructions for EFI students to help them access the WBL curriculum.

The second research question was focused on how administrators and teachers of work-based learning programs collaborate to lead their programs. The educators' perceptions which are related to their collaboration were expressed by the participants



under the following three themes that provided answer to the second research question: (a) deepening the educators own understanding of their personal beliefs, (b) leadership practices and collaboration to enhance learning environment and promote students' learning, and (c) facilitating relationships and collaboration with immigrant families to support the education of their children.

### **Perceptions Related to Leadership and Learning Supports**

The in-person interviews with the participants revealed a variety of diverse perceptions of these participants about their leadership roles in supporting the learning of their students in general, and particularly their EFI students. The collected data show that teachers and administrators perceived their leadership role to support their EFI students through: (a) supporting student's skills to promote independence, (b) facilitating employability, (c) improving educators' cultural competencies, and (d) modifying instructions for EFI students to help them access the WBL curriculum.

In the following paragraphs, I explore each of these themes in detail.

#### ***Promote Independence***

The participants shared that their leadership roles were focused on supporting their EFI students become more independent as working adults by acquiring the skills they need to become self-reliant when they graduate from school. The theme of promoting students' independence has emerged from the interviews with the participants who explained their effort to help their students increase their independence in resolving work-related conflicts and in demonstrating behaviors which employers look for in their employees, such as self-management, problem-solving, and getting along well with

others. The participants shared that EFI students were encouraged to acquire the skills they need to gain and maintain employment and become more independent in performing their tasks. The participants mentioned that their students faced learning challenges and stated the need for educators to recognize such challenges to help their students increase their efforts for independence and improve their work skills. The data supporting these claims are shared below.

As many of EFI students demonstrate progress in being independent, still some of them struggle with acquiring the skills needed to attain independence as compared to other students. The participants explained such differences in the style of learning of their students, their prior life experiences, and their unique socio-emotional needs. Participant “Brandon”, a 50-year-old teacher, said, “The differences, you know, some of them [EFI students] in my experience learn a little bit differently because they haven't had some of the advantages some of the mainstream kids have”. Another participant “Sahar”, a 54-year-old teacher, mentioned that two of her EFI students differ from others because of their unique socio-emotional experiences which may impact their learning and independence; she said:

Two of my students have faced extreme adversity in their countries before they came here. So, they have lived in refugee camps. They have seen tragedy like we cannot even relate to. So, I think they come with a lot of different social and emotional concerns.

Another participant “Katy”, 52-year-old teacher, explained a strategy she used to support her EFI students emotionally, so they were able to socially interact with others and

demonstrate ability to improve their social skills as aimed by the mission of their school.

She said:

I find sometimes they [EFI students] are shy or the confidence level isn't as high  
You would go over and talk to them and show them pictures of different emotions  
and have them figure out how they were feeling and then we always had to get  
more language.

Administrators and teachers who were interviewed in this study suggested that their students would become more independent when they learn and apply self-determination and self-advocacy skills. Participant “Jhon”, a 51-year-old administrator, said, “we are driven to achieve success in vocation, independence, and self-determination” of all students including EFI students. Participant “Sahar” explained that her EFI students are learning “everything from self-advocacy to independent living to safety on the job to career awareness, career readiness”, and added, “I feel that I can set that situation so that they feel comfortable speaking up”. Participant “Brandon” confirmed that his EFI students are learning “how to advocate for themselves if they need something or have a question about something on the job”.

The notion of helping EFI students become more independent by teaching them how to better advocate for their needs and participate in decisions related to their learning was explained by the participant “Maria”, 46-year-old administrator who said that her center strives to “prepare and empower students to live self-determined lives by providing opportunities for growth, learning in life, social and vocational skills”. Participant “Katy” mentioned that her EFI students may need some help at the beginning

of the program so they can later work independently; she said, “ we give them opportunities [and] we would be there to help and support and model, but also let them work a little independently”. Teaching students, including EFI students, how to best advocate for themselves and being self-determined will increase their independence as mentioned several times by participant “Jhon” and is quoted as saying “we are driven to achieve success in vocation, independence, and self-determination”, and added “I am of the belief that our students are telling us what they need and not us telling them what they should need”. Participant “Sam”, 49-year-old administrator, said:

Each student has a different path toward independence. So, yes we have those students that are in that bell curve where the typical strategies may work for them, but we also have students in those standard deviations to the left and right of that bell curve that sometimes we have to really think out of the box about how to help them, especially in terms of communication and confidence, self-advocacy”.

Participant “Joe”, a 40-year-old administrator, explained how the WBL program contributed to helping students become more independent by providing the teachers with the tools to know “ what could this student do to be successful and develop like a kind of a plan of action, and try to get the students to where they need to be, to be more independent and more successful”. Participant “Ann”, a 45-year-old teacher, shared her observation regarding the ability of immigrant students to take risks as such ability in related to the students attempts to demonstrate independence as young adults, she said “ there’s a lack of risk taking that I see a lot, especially with the girls...they don’t want to take a big risk, whereas I feel like our boys are a little bit more okay to fail”. Participant

“Sahar” described the ability of one of her EFI students to generalize or to reapply the learned work skills to show their independence, she said, “I think once they had a successful experience, they were able to transfer that knowledge or do the job again”. Participant “Sahar” said, “I think there is that pride where I think most of the students feel that way” when they complete their tasks successfully. “Sahar” linked the ability of her students to transfer and generalize the knowledge and skilled they learned to their growing independence as confident adults.

Some of the teachers in this study mentioned that their EFI students gained confidence and independence by learning experientially, meaning through hands-on experiences. These teachers described certain instructional strategies they used to help their EFI students gain confidence and show level of independence, including strategies related to improving communication, building literacy, and work-related vocabulary. Participant “Brandon” mentioned that his EFI students learn best by “hands-on and visuals”. Participant “Sahar” has also mentioned the ‘hands-on’ experiential style of learning of her EFI students and said they learn by “repetition...hands-on activities every day and provide visual supports...and a lot of praise”. She stressed that such strategies are effective in helping her EFI students learn and become more independent, and said, “eventually get to the point where they could do it independently. So, I felt like they were able to build their confidence”. The goal of helping students to perform their work independently through experiential learning experiences as explained by “Brandon” and “Sahar” pointed to the efforts of the educators to achieve the mission statements of their schools.

Students, including EFI students, can be more independent in performing their work-based assignments through experiencing and reflecting on how they implement their work assignments. Teachers who participated in this study talked about the experiential learning of their EFI students. They described how their students best learn to work independently. Participant “Ann” said, “experientially, you know, they learn through experiences”. While acknowledging the specific learning needs of their students and the challenges these students face, some teachers have stated that their EFI students need support to demonstrate appropriate social skills to increase their participation in the WBL program. Teachers “Katy” and “Sahar” mentioned their EFI students benefitted from the social skills instruction they receive as prescribed by the CTE curriculum to help them with their daily interactions with other people in the community. “Katy” said, “we're able to take them in the community to work on their social skills [to] help them learn how to do functional things”. Participant “Sue”, a 46-year-old teacher, said, “when the teachers are teaching social skills, the teachers for independent living skills are in the collaborate teams meeting”. Participant “Brenda”, a 35-year-old administrator, said that several teachers’ committees help students acquire a variety of skills including social skills; she said, “we have [a] Transition Committee, a Social Skills Committee, and [an] Independent Learning Committee... teachers are very involved and make really good leadership roles in these teams”.

The EFI students’ usage of language and their skills to communication effectively can support their effort to become more independent at the workplace which in turn increases their overall employability skills through enabling them to understand

workplace rules and regulations, and through expressing their needs and wants. When the EFI students improve their communication skills they can engage in meaningful relationships with others. Some teachers acknowledged that ‘language barrier’ has inhibited the ability of their EFI students to socially interact with others as they continued to learn WBL curriculum. “Brandon” said, “you know they're not familiar with the language and some of them have to deal with the barrier”. Participant “Katy” said, “we do a lot with language, because they [EFI students] speak a different language”. Participant “Sue” mentioned that language can be a challenge for her EFI students, and said, “I think language, I mean vocabulary, could definitely be an issue”. Participant “Katy” said, “we do a lot with language, because they [EFI students] speak a different language. This curriculum has built in its literacy words, and the literacy words are tied to the work environments”.

The language barrier was mentioned by participating as an obstacle to WBL learning for many EFI students. Participant “Brenda” described a situation with one of the EFI students in her center as being a real challenge, she said the student, “has no language, so you can't just teach the way you would teach any other student”. Other participants who were interviewed for this study agreed that helping their EFI students learn English would increase their independence in learning and working. One of the participant teachers, “Sahar”, said that one of her EFI students “had absolutely no language ... I think basically she lives in a very isolated world ... I think immigrant females especially have had so many hardships”. Participant “Ann” mentioned that many of her EFI students compensated their language deficiency by just observing what was

happening around them before participating in their work activities; she said, “a lot of times they're really good at observing ... if you don't know by the language what's going, just watch”.

Some participants indicated that most of their immigrant students, including EFI students, were challenged with the language. Participant “Jhon” said, “at the beginning of the year I was having an issue with a Vietnamese student and who was very frustrated and upset and I had no way to really communicate because their English is not that strong”. Participant “Brandon” said, “I had one female student who, I believe was born here but her family [came] from another country and they didn't speak, or they spoke a little bit of English”. Language can pose a challenge for EFI students and their participation in the WBL environment. Participant “Sahar” explained, “you know sometimes it's been helpful to pair a student at the job site with and co-worker that is from the same background... and so, they feel comfortable and confident if there's a language issue”.

### ***Facilitating Employability***

Many teachers pointed to the importance of preparing EFI students to become employable at the end of their WBL programs by demonstrating good work ethic and the ability to transfer the knowledge they learned in their WBL programs to their future jobs. Lisa, a teacher, said “they [EFI students] had very good work ethic, and will get their work done”. Participant “Sahar” said:

I think once they had a successful experience, they were able to transfer that knowledge or do the job again, repeat the job, and eventually get to the point



where they could do it independently ... Students have different levels of what they accept as the norm maybe. So, they may think that they've done a really great job with, you know, a certain part of the job and it may not quite be up to the standards of the work location, or on the flip side it could be very much like the standard of the work location.

Being employable and being able to communicate was mentioned by several participants as being one of the main outcomes of the WBL program for their students. One of the interviewed administrators, participant “Joe” said that the main objectives of the WBL program was to equip students with the skills they need to gain employment; he said, “here at [this center] the driving force as you know is the employability skills”.

Several participants expressed confidence in the positive work habits of many of their EFI students. Such positive work habits will help these students become employable upon their successful completion of the WBL program. Participant “Katy” said, “I had an immigrant female student come to mind. She's a good worker, but she needed to model the job task first”. Another participant, “Sue”, said, “I’ve noticed that my students who have immigrant parents, I think, they tend to have a better work ethic”.

Participant “Lisa”, a 48-year-old teacher, noticed that EFI students demonstrate “very good work ethic...and get their work done”. Some EFI students demonstrate good work habits by staying on their assigned tasks, as witnessed by participant “Brandon” who described one of his EFI students by saying, “she knew exactly what she was supposed to do for the day...[and] was able to keep pace with everybody else and learn all the task in that particular job”.

The experiences shared by the educators in the previous paragraphs illustrated their joint effort to implement the mission of their schools through supporting their EFI students become more independent, and employable individuals.

### ***Improving Educators' Cultural Competencies***

The term *cultural competency* was frequently mentioned during the interviews with participants who expressed the need for understanding the cultural backgrounds of their EFI students to effectively respond to their learning needs. Participant “Jhon”, one of the administrators who participated in this study, mentioned that his office was aware of the need to train their staff to become culturally competent so they can meet the diverse needs of their students; he said, “we do have a cultural proficiency cohort group that meets throughout the year and does training with the staff regarding addressing any type of cultural identifying and ways to work with students”.

One of the participants shared that many of their EFI students came to USA as young adults with different experiences they acquired from the countries they came from. The challenge of fitting the students' prior experiences and knowledge with their current participation in the WBL environment was explained by participant “Joe” who said:

Focusing on female immigrant students you know that access to the workplace learning program is really in trying to build connections to build upon their past experiences and giving them new experiences, they may not have had from where they have come from.

When I investigated how the WBL administrators and teachers perceived their leadership to support the learning of their EFI students, many of the participants mentioned the need

to improve their understanding of the various cultural backgrounds of their EFI students. Some of them expressed their awareness of the cultural differences they encounter when interacting with the EFI students and their families. For instance, participant “Brenda” said, “we are not always thinking about cultural differences...there are certain cultures where it is rude to maybe ask questions of teachers”. “Brenda” has also explained how teachers interact with their students’ cultural background; she said:

There are cultures where teachers are held with the highest regard and so even if the family disagrees, they’re not going to speak up. There are cultures where women [are] in powerful positions [which can be] different and they [immigrant parents and EFI students] are not used to that ... and not sure how to interact.

Some participants highlighted the need to be culturally competent to support their collaborative relations and to build bridges with the families of their immigrant students. Participant “Jhon” said, “we are starting to tap into conversations around diversity and cultural proficiency”. Another participant “Kim”, a 48-year-old administrator, provided a personal narrative regarding the existence of cultural differences and gender bias in her own family by saying:

My father is [non-US nationality]; I did have different expectation put upon me than I did with my brothers, those cultural the subtle cultural differences that were there and so with our students with disabilities it is kind of magnifies that to another level.

Many participants expressed the need for professional trainings to improve teachers' knowledge of cultural competency so they can serve their diverse students efficiently and meet their students' learning needs. For example, participant "Jhon" said, "I have got a group that's participating in a cultural proficiency cohort to make sure we are pulling out factors that we may need to consider about ourselves and our students... and incorporating it into what we do". Participant "Maria" said, "we actually do the professional development and for the cultural proficiencies we have just started".

Curiosity about cultural differences was explained by participant "Ann" who said, "I understand that there are cultural differences and I'm always very curious about it". Participant "Brandon" has expressed the need for a professional cultural competency training for teachers to help them in their daily interactions with immigrant students; he said:

I think, as educators, we all have to know how to work with people that are from diverse backgrounds and take into consideration their cultural upbringing or their culture. It will impact their interactions with you and ultimately their learning".

Participant "Brenda" pointed to the diverse needs of her students; she said, "we focus on looking at students as a whole and really looking at identifying any type of needs that they may have... socially, culturally, academically"; she also pointed to the existing cultural training in her school "we do have a cultural proficiency cohort" to help the staff learn about different cultures and how best respond to EFI students' needs.

Another participant "Sue" shared her experience with one of her EFI students; she said:

One [EFI student] last year came from El Salvador and we talked a lot about it and what her life was like there and she did not have an easy life. I knew [that] at the time and tried to make a point to figure out where people are coming from and what we are doing and look at their cultural sensitivities for sure, I just think there are more cultural considerations that we can take into account.

Considering students' cultural backgrounds when deciding on placing them at workplaces was a concern for many participants such " Lisa" who shared her thought with regard to placing her EFI students at the job sites, she said:

If I have a Muslim female student...if I had her at the [jobsite] I think maybe that's not the best workplace for her because you know everybody does a tour in housekeeping. And if you have a male in a hotel room with a Muslim female maybe that is not going to work...we just need to look at the cultural considerations of where she is at. You know what I mean like she would just never, that would have been like her nightmare.

I learned from the collected documents that the school district, where the two research sites were located, was placing a special attention on developing educators' knowledge on diverse cultural backgrounds of their students and staff as well. The school district has established a new department to direct the training programs to support the effort of the educators to become culturally competent and serve the needs of their diverse learners.

### ***Modifying Instructions***

The teachers in WBL programs need to modify their instruction to facilitate the learning of their EFI students. Such modifications of the content and the presentation of

the curriculum make learning more attractive, accessible, and easy to understand by students. The WBL teachers present their modified lessons through a variety of ways, including role-playing, video instructions, and visual support.

The WBL program that is used in both research sites is based on the curriculum adopted by the Commonwealth of Virginia's Career and Technology Education (CTE) which contains 22 work-related competencies for students to demonstrate while being prepared for life after high school. The competencies are centered on workplace skills, including work literacy and work attitudes and behaviors. Participant "Katy" said, "this curriculum has built in its literacy words, and the literacy words are tied to the work environments". Participant "Sue" pointed to her hard work on modifying the curriculum to suit her EFI students, she said, "my first year here I created a whole curriculum for myself and ILS [other Independent Living Skills teachers]". Participant "Ann" mentioned that she continued to tailor the curriculum to meet the learning needs of her students, she said, "We're still working on how to tailor our curriculum, to what's going to give us the most benefit in the long run for the students". Participant "Lisa" said, "so we are creating a lot of our own work in the classroom" to help EFI students learn better.

The work-based learning curriculum places special focus on work safety and awareness skills. Participant "Brandon" mentioned that "in the work-based learning curriculum we focus on safety in the community. We also focus on work awareness skills". Participant "Katy" pointed to the literacy aspect of the curriculum which has benefited many EFI students build up their vocabulary words to better express themselves and advocate for their needs. She said, "this curriculum has built-in literacy words, and

the literacy words are tied to the work environment”. Teachers modify their instruction to simplify the work-related words and expressions to increase the knowledge of their students at the workplaces.

Several participants explained how the WBL learning of their EFI students was enhanced by the students’ engagement with the tasks presented to them. For example, “Katy” said when she presented one of her EFI students with a task “she needed to model the job task first”. Other participant, “Sahar” said she noticed that “sometimes their initial reactions are like oh, I can’t do that.” Participant “Sue” shared her instructional experience with some of her EFI students; she said, “I find them to be able to do a job or a task more consistently, and they're more on task”. Participant “Ann” highlighted the way her EFI students process the instructions; and said, “I think some of them translate. I think they put that into their native language”. Participant “Lisa” has shared that some of her students were less motivated than others and tended to avoid doing their tasks; she said, “some [of EFI students] were a little bit of avoidance”.

Some of the participants explained the instructional strategies they used to help their EFI students access the curriculum and become successful in their WBL programs. For example, “Katy” said, “it helps if you provide them with visuals...we use prompts and with the pictures paired with words”. “Ann” said, “visuals are really important”. “Katy” has also mentioned the rigor part of her instructional strategies by saying, “sometimes when we try to give them [i.e. EFI students] that test that we knew was a little bit harder, they would try”. Participant “Sahar” said she spent time building trust

with her EFI students, “I spend a lot of time building a level of trust prior [to teaching] so that...they feel comfortable speaking up”.

Providing EFI students with opportunities to repeat the implementation of the learned skills is one of the instructional strategies used by “Sahar” who said her EFI students “ were able to transfer that knowledge or do the job again, repeat the job and eventually [can do it] independently”. Participant “Sue” mentioned the strategy of providing praise and redirection to her EFI students to support their learning experiences; she said, “they respond well to praise...[and] they need more redirection and more prompting”.

As can be seen from the previous paragraphs, the teachers expressed the need to modify and tailor the curriculum to make it accessible to their EFI students. The teachers shared the qualitative instructional strategies they used to support the learning of their EFI students, and their effort to build the relationship of trust and encouragement to their students. All such effort by the interviewed teachers indicate the type of their instructional leadership role to provide quality instruction to their EFI students and support their learning needs.

### **Perceptions Related to Collaboration**

The second research question was focused on how administrators and teachers of work-based learning programs collaborate to support the learning experiences of EFI students in these programs. Both groups of teachers and administrators who participated in this study explained their collaborative efforts towards supporting the learning of their EFI students by explaining that:



- (a) Educators personal beliefs towards immigrants shape their collaborative support to EFI students.
- (b) Fostering leadership practices and collaboration among educators enhance the learning environment in their schools.
- (c) Collaborating with immigrant families is important to facilitate their involvement in the education of their students.

In the following section I provide detailed explanation on each of the above three statements.

### ***Educators' Personal Beliefs***

The participants shared their personal beliefs about the WBL programs and the participation of EFI students in a way that reflected their attachment to the unique mission of their programs and their perceptions of immigration in general. For instance, Sam clarified his motive of being a WBL educator by saying that he liked “spending more time with students ... I wanted to have interactions with students”. More than one participant reasoned their involvement in this program by relating it to their family. Participant “Brenda” said, “my brother has special needs, and he came through this exact program ... I saw the positive ... impact [of the program]”. Participant “Jhon” expressed similar motive for being a WBL leader by saying “my older brother has intellectual disability and he has not always had many choices or opportunities in a small town in [a US state]” and stressed that his main motive was to “make sure their voices [EFI students] are heard”. One of the participants, “Brandon”, said what came to his mind

when he heard the words ‘female immigrants’ are “hardships and disadvantages, based on gender, so gender biases” and explained it by saying:

I've had students from other countries who have prearranged marriages. I had one student who came from Afghanistan and after her senior year she was engaged to be married to someone over in Afghanistan, and talking to her about that because she wanted to stay here and continue her job because she was really a hardworking student and she got a job working in an office building and she wanted to continue with that. She didn't want to go back to her country to marry this guy.

The hardships mentioned by “Brandon” guided efforts by educators to make a difference in the lives of their immigrant female students. Participant “Joe” said, “my goal is trying to align the curriculum and what students were doing to work-based learning... [as this will] make a difference in the lives of students”. Another participant “Jhon”, confirmed the same motive of empowering students with critical life skills they will need when exiting the program, he said “It is critical for all students to be able to learn in a supportive environment the soft skills of work” so, they become independent and self-determined.

Several participants shared their perceptions about immigrants and their female immigrant students. For instance, participant “Sue” shared her limited interaction with non-white people by saying, “I’ve grown up in a very white very middle-class neighborhood. I would even say the majority of people that I worked with were white,

non-immigrants”. Participant “Jhon” expressed a different perception about immigrants by saying:

I think you know it's what we were founded on as a country that has made us such a wonderful place to live and to learn and where families still want to come for the best for their children...immigrant female students have access to opportunity just like any other male or female student would.

Other participant, “Sahar”, shared her belief about EFI students’ abilities and potentials by saying:

From my experience I find that most of my immigrant female students have been very eager to learn...they have also seemed to come with very expected roles from their background, but they are very willing and open to move beyond that and expand.

Another participant, “Sue”, expressed a concern when one of her students told her that there were so many people who were immigrants in the worksite where they attended.

She said:

It was at the [named a workplace] the other day and one of my students looked at me and said: Miss [Sue], I bet you, most of the people who work here are immigrants. And I said we don't want to offend anybody, we don't, we really can't bring our political views, and he said, ‘I don't mean it politically’. I am like ‘All right I understand that, but still that's not something we really talk about at work’, and many people [speak] Spanish; it is their primary language. We are, definitely, in the minority and speak in English.

The above quote indicates how some WBL teachers can be oversensitive when talking about immigrants with their students. In addition to different attitudes towards immigrants as explained by the administrators and teachers, the struggle between the tendency of the WBL educators to accommodate the individual needs of their EFI students and the notion of inclusiveness in the school culture was apparent. Many of the participants acknowledged the need to include all students on equal footing by providing them equal opportunities to learn and grow, yet they were sensitive about the specific learning needs of their EFI students. Participant “Brenda” explained that by saying:

I feel very strong about providing services for these [EFI] students, but yes, I do also believe that I should include them in [my] classroom. I need to talk about differences but for inclusion not to identify them as something different.

Another participant, “Maria”, said, “immigrant females work harder, are searching for more, want to learn more, and want to do more. They want to have more opportunities, but the challenge is building their self-esteem”, and participant “Jhon” said, “My thinking on how specifically support female immigrant students is that teachers must bring with them the needs of their students”.

### ***Leadership Practices and Collaboration***

Leadership practices and collaborative relationships among WBL educators are essentials for the success of WBL programs. From the interviews and available documentations on both sites of this research I found three main levels of leadership practices and collaboration existed in both research sites: (a) decision-making process, (b) teachers’ engagement, (c) layers of practiced leadership and collaboration.

**Making Decisions.** The decision-making process in both research sites vary according to the visions of the principals of the sites. For instance, participant “Sam” explained how leadership and decision-making is being practiced in his building by saying, “Anything, any decisions that need to be made there, have to go through me. Any changes have to go through me”. Participant “Jhon” explained his leadership role by stating that “my role...is really around guiding that [WBL] work and making sure that the structure of the school day supports this learning and professional development that teachers are doing together”. Participant “Joe” said, “My role is a couple of different hats that I wear. My main purpose is ...to help form relationships and partnerships with businesses and agencies within the community to then have our students who work to get employability”. Another participant, “Maria”, stressed on the importance of the leadership work being focused on individual student’s needs, she said “our leadership team really works hard on making sure that the students are being addressed as individuals”. This means all leadership practices are directed towards students to ensure their successes.

**Teachers’ Collaborative Engagement.** Engaging teachers and administrators in a highly collaborative work environment in both centers was a central point of discussion during the interviews with the participants. The participants provided their insights on this important aspect of WBL environment when asked how collaboration was practiced in their daily work. Sam, one of the administrators, said:

There are many levels of collaboration ... There is almost always a group of people that they work together to plan and organize and reach out ... the fact that

teachers have the most face time with students it is very important for them to be in a collaborative process in anything that will impact the students... [through] the collaborative learning environment we are always trying to strengthen.

One participant, “Brandon”, expressed a critical view with regard to the practices of engaging teachers in his school; he said teachers “feel like there is a lack of innovation or creativity” in the collaboration process. On the other hand, participant “Sam” provided information on the collaborative structure in his center. He said collaborative learning teams (CLT) are made of “four to five teachers per team who get together and delve deeper into subject matter such as workplace readiness skills [of their EFI students]”.

Participant “Brenda” explained the multi-tiered collaboration that existed in the building by saying, “we have a leadership council (LC) that meets twice a month.[and] admin team itself collaborate [with] clinical team which is composed of our psychologist and social worker... there is collaboration between teachers and support staff and related service providers”. Participant “Jhon” said, “teachers have begun working collaboratively together over the past couple of years. The CLTs, our collaborative learning teams, meet weekly by subject group”.

According to the participant “Jhon”, collaboration should be based on data collection and analysis. He said the usefulness of collaboration that exists between administrators and teachers is “really focused on not just what we’re doing but how are we ensuring that students are getting what we are teaching”, but he admitted that there are challenges to effective collaboration by saying, “ going from the level of pure collegiality and friendship, if you will, to having the ability to engage in professional dialogue with

our colleagues who is also our friends takes some skill”. Another participant, “Kim”, said, “we do a lot through our CLTs [Collaborative Teams]. There’s collaboration with the central office and outside resources ... Collaboration is going to impact the learning of all students”.

Participant “Kim” emphasized on the gender of her EFI students. She said, “in terms of our female immigrant students I think part of the collaboration we have is always a conversation we are having” to better meet their specific learning needs. Participant “Kim” provided an example of collaboratively working with EFI students by saying she accommodated a student’s need for “flexible scheduling” to help her care for her “little brothers and sisters” when their mother was at work.

The six administrators who were interviewed in this study were well versed in explaining their leadership roles in the WBL program, but the teachers were not as elaborative and clear about their roles. However, few teachers were aware of their leadership roles in their programs. Participant teacher “Brandon” said, “yeah, it's been nice in doing the leadership role. You know it's difficult when you're teaching, you know, full time so that's becoming challenging”. Another teacher participant “Sahar” explained her leading role in the program by saying:

I look at my job as treating the whole of the individual and it's not just there's not just one thing you work on. It's just it's a full circle and you're going to get the most benefit if you can work the whole piece.

The mixed feelings of being a leader in a WBL program was expressed by participant “Jhon” who said:

Some days you are the windshield and some days you are the fly. Most days I feel like I do a really good job here leading this building. But there are days I am like ‘My God what am I doing?’ I think that’s the nature of work.

WBL teachers are engaged in running the WBL programs across settings. This means they practice their leadership roles in school and in the community as well. Some of the interviewed teachers were aware of such duality in practicing their leadership within the WBL learning environment.

**Layers of leadership.** Leadership practices in both centers involve layers of interactions between administrators and teachers. Participant “Kim” explained, “we really kind of have layers, I guess I would say, of leadership. The top layer, you know, starts with the principal and the leadership team”. Kim continued to explain:

We will talk about something and then it will go to our teacher leadership team which is comprised of teachers’ leadership team and our CLT team leads. So, we have this teachers’ leadership team because obviously top down decision making is not going to be valuable. People do not buy in. We are not in the classrooms and we absolutely recognize that they bring a perspective that we do not have. And so, it will go through the TLT [Teachers Leadership Team]. We also have a clinical team where we may also work on some decision making and working with teachers. And then for usually what happens after that TLT meeting is they take that information to their CLT teams, so many acronyms, [Laugh], and talk about it within their CLT teams. And then that information whatever they may collect or suggestions it will be brought back to administration.



The acronyms “Kim” mentioned above are shown in Figure 2 which illustrates the leadership practices between administrators and teachers. Figure 2 also shows two main areas of leadership practices: (a) the structured practices, where instructions are delivered in a distributive manner through established teams (the left side of the divider dotted line in Figure 2); and (b) the one-on-one direct interaction and interrelation of the principal of the school with teachers and other staff.

According to Kim’s narrative shown above, the Teachers’ Leadership Team (TLT) serves as a liaison between the administration and the teachers and is shown in the right half of the Figure 2.

Participant “Lisa” said, “we have our CLT (Collaborative learning teams) for teaching social skills, priorities sets. They are collaborative learning teams”. Another participant, “Jhon”, explained, “we collaborate with 31 different businesses in [this] area ... [T]he CLTs, our collaborative learning teams, meet weekly by subject group ... We have four CLT groups; two of them are independent living skills teachers and two are social skills teachers”.

Participant “Brenda” mentioned the role of the TLT (teachers’ leadership team) by saying, “they serve as the teacher voice for us but they are also our collaborative team leads”, and added:

The administrators’ team itself collaborates. We meet once a week to talk about just things that we need to take care of. We have a clinical team which is composed of our psychologist, social worker and admin team and we meet once a week.

Such accommodations of the needs of EFI students as explained by the group of administrators and teachers were believed to be helpful and supportive to their EFI students. Another aspect of the collaborative culture, which was explained by the participants' testimonies as shown in the previous paragraphs, is the involvement of the families of the EFI students.

### **Collaborating with Immigrant Families**

How do educators view their collaboration with immigrant families to encourage the parents' involvement in the education of their EFI students in the WBL programs? That was one of the questions I asked the participants during the interview sessions. In response, one participant "Brenda" said, "depending on student's cultural background, women working may not be something that families are supportive of, or in agreement of, or think is a priority". "Brenda" explained the importance of learning about her students' inner-selves to help them, she elaborated further by saying:

You need to know a lot about where the student is coming from and build rapport with the family ... sometimes students come from areas where they have been exposed to some really scary things whether that be crime or war or difficult family life.

Another participant, "Jhon", expressed the need to educate the school staff and train them culturally to understand and interact appropriately with immigrant parents, he said:

We are doing cultural proficiency cohort which is in three full school days dedicated to learning about increasing our cultural proficiency and I'm hopeful

that out of that I may gain some more tools that can support those relationships between school and home with families who are immigrants to this country.

Participant “Jhon” explained the nature of the WBL program as family-driven, by saying, “this is a program that is reflective of the community of learners that’s both student-driven, staff-driven, community-driven, and family-driven”.

Another participant, “Sam”, shared his perception regarding immigrant parents, he said “immigrant parents are not unlike other parents, but may not have the capacity to show the schools how much they love their children”. “Sam” clarified further his point by saying that immigrant families “work much harder and more hours than when they were in their home country ... [this] makes it harder to get involved in what’s going on at schools”. Other participant “Jhon” said, “we tend to see overall is a backing away of parent involvement ... my experience with families here is that if you reach out to them, they are typically responsive but not all of them”.

Many participants acknowledged the hardship many immigrant families are experiencing which may have an impact on the EFI students. For instance, participant “Sam” said, “I feel for them because I was an immigrant in Korea...The expectation is they’re going to communicate in English”. Participant “Kim” said that some immigrants have difficulty speaking English, and such difficulty “can deter some families from interacting”. In addition, the economic hardship faced by many immigrant families can prevent them from participating in the school activities. Participant “Brenda” explained, “there is an economic disadvantage [of immigrant families] that people aren’t always thinking ... the families that are involved maybe have the financial means to be able to

take off work to be here”; she added, “we have families here that parents work two or three jobs. But we are asking a lot of them to take off work and lose pay”.

Another participant, “Joe”, said, “we have parent-teacher collaboration committee... providing knowledge and resources”. One of the tasks of such committee, according to “Joe”, was to “encourage parents to get involved” in the learning of their students and to participate in school’s extracurricular activities. However, “Joe” acknowledged that “parents have limited time because they are so busy with work and providing for their families”, and also “there is that language piece or the communication barrier”. “Joe” concluded by saying “I have seen some families where the brothers or sisters of the female immigrant students would be more involved ... help try to communicate”.

Several participants believed that the limited ability of some immigrant parents to speak English was a real challenge to the parents’ involvement in their children’s learning and their schools’ activities. For example, participant “Kim” said the language challenge “is huge. It really is. And I think it really can deter some families from interacting. It could be very, like I said, intimidating”.

Two of the participants, “Brenda” and “Sahar”, expressed concerns about the impact of the immigrant families’ cultural backgrounds on the learning of their EFI students in WBL environments. “Brenda” said, “depending on student’s cultural background women working may not be something that families are supportive of or in agreement of or think is a priority”. “Sahar” said, “I think they [EFI students] might be

limited culturally in a culture where maybe women are geared towards doing certain jobs or certain things”.

Participant “Jhon” expressed a concern regarding involving immigrant parents in the schoolwork and the learning of their students by raising an interesting question about the challenges these parents face when their students exit the school system. He wished that parents would get involved and become knowledgeable about the availability of community resources for their students. He said:

Are you, as a family, prepared to face those real and perceived challenges out in the community without the school being there to do that with you? And that I think is one of the scariest challenges for families because they don’t know what they don’t know. We are starting this year in an effort to just increase school-home communication.

Participant “Kim” gave two reasons that made her believe that immigrant parents were reluctant in getting involved in their children’s schoolwork: being busy with work, and fearful of school as being perceived as a government entity that shares information about undocumented students and parents with the government. She said:

I have seen kind of two ways that parents have been involved ... I have seen parents who for various circumstances cannot be involved in what their student is doing ... with work restrictions and things like that ... [and] I have seen parents who are very fearful of being involved [for believing] school is like government sharing information [about] undocumented students.

Participant “Maria”, who herself was an immigrant from a country in the Caribbean, shared her own experience regarding the involvement of her parents in her education; she said, “my parents were involved when I was a child in school in [the foreign country] but not here. Why? Because my mom worked, and my dad worked long hours. My parents did not have the time to come to school”.

Another aspect of immigrant parents’ involvement in schools’ activities was raised by participant “Ann” who said she met parents from Mexico, and was “unusual for them to be involved, and they knew it because in their culture, the teacher does the teaching and the parents do the parenting”. These immigrant parents, “Ann” explained, “neither of them had gone very far in their Mexican schools. So, they didn't feel qualified to be helping their children with their homework or helping or actively involved with their education”.

Three participants shared different perspectives regarding the involvement of immigrant families in the education of their daughters in the WBL programs. One of the participants, “Ann”, talked about her experience working with different immigrant students including Spanish speaking and Muslim and Arab-American students; she said:

There's a distinct difference between the different populations. I feel like, I hope this doesn't sound wrong, but in my experience, the Spanish speaking immigrants, their families are less hands-on, and they may respect education, but they don't necessarily actively involve themselves in it. Whereas the Muslim population or the Arabic population tend to be more actively involved in the students’ education.

Some participants were cognizant of the impact of current U.S. immigration policies on education as manifested in several cases related to immigrant students. In their interviews these participants mentioned terms like ‘undocumented’, ‘ICE’ (immigration and custom enforcement) and ‘DACA’ (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) which is also referred as DREAM Act. For example, participant “Sam” explained why some parents were hesitant to get involved in schools for being fearful of sharing their information to ICE (immigration & Custom Enforcement); he said:

Yes, afraid that if they give a little too much information then ICE is going to come knocking on the door which is not. They do not understand that the school is not interested in politics, whether immigrants or not, we just care about the students ... a couple years ago there was a student that we were little concerned that the family might have ICE involved or something, and they would not come to the school.

Another participant, “Lisa”, mentioned the help she offered to one of her EFI students to “apply for [immigration] status under the DREAM Act because of her age now. So, I feel like it's an important responsibility to have that leadership”.

Participant “Ann” narrated her own experience of helping one of her EFI students go through the undocumented status implications, she said “I know we have a student now who is undocumented, and, you know, like her bank account is a little bit weird”. Teaching students how to manage their own personal finance and bank accounts is one of the instructional activities all students, including EFI students, participate in.

Participant “Maria” said:

I noticed that those specific students [i.e. EFI students] seek counseling a little bit more than our other students, and I’m sure it’s because some of mixed emotions of what’s happening in the American life and then them coming from another country.

One of the participants, “Sue”, explained how she offered legal help for one of her EFI students, she said, “I am doing a lot of helping them understand and deal with social issues and help them access immigration attorneys that can help with citizenship”.

In conclusion, the findings of the study were categorized and explained in this chapter under two main categories: Perceptions related to leadership and learning support, and perceptions related to collaboration. Under the first category of the findings four themes emerged from data: (a) supporting students to promote their independence, (b) facilitating employment, (c) improving educators’ cultural competencies, and (d) modifying instructions for EFI students.

Under the second category of the findings three themes emerged; (a) educators’ personal beliefs towards immigrants, (b) leadership practices and collaboration, and (c) facilitating relationships with immigrant families.

In the next chapter I will discuss the findings of this study and connect back to the theoretical framework when appropriate. I will also discuss the limitations of this study and suggest some areas for future research based on these findings.



## **CHAPTER FIVE DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this case study was to investigate (a) How administrators and teachers in high school work-based learning programs (WBL) perceive their roles to support the learning of their exceptional female immigrant students? (Research question 1), and (b) How administrators and teachers of WBL programs collaborate to lead their programs? (Research question 2). In this chapter I will discuss the findings of this study as they relate to the two research questions. I will then connect some of the findings with the work-based learning (WBL) theories, as applicable, and discuss my own reflections on the study. I will end the chapter with a discussion on the research limitations and suggestions for future research areas.

### **Perceptions on Educators' Leadership Roles**

The first research question focused on exploring the perceptions of WBL administrators and teachers on how their roles as leaders have supported the learning of their EFI students. The WBL educators who participated in this study expressed their views regarding ways to support the learning of their EFI students through three areas of engagement: (a) supporting the independence and employability of their EFI students, (b) demonstrating effort to improve their own intercultural competencies to understand the needs of their EFI students, and (c) stressing on the importance of modifying their instructional activities to help their EFI students access the CTE curriculum. These three areas of engagement are discussed in the following paragraphs.

First, providing exceptional students, including EFI students, with employment

opportunities and helping them to become independent is a social justice issue. Nationwide, the employment rate of people with disabilities is much lower than those without disabilities. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018), the U.S. Department of Labor, only 19.1% of the people with disabilities (aged 16 and older) were employed in 2018 as compared to 65.9% of the people without a disability. The employment ratio for women with disabilities (aged 16 and older), in 2018, was 16.4% as compared to 60.2% without disabilities. Within this context, participants also identified the difficulties which many of their EFI students face in the program as being related to certain factors such as the students' limited academic and social abilities and their limited language skills; and that such limitations hinder students' abilities to gain the required employability skills and work independently as adults.

Work-based learning (WBL) programs provide students with disabilities significant opportunities to help them transition from school to work life. However, EFI students face obstacles in accessing such opportunities as provided by WBL programs. Such obstacles can be related to individual's culture and psychology (Lehman et al., 2004) which can be observed when immigrant students are engaged in social and academic interactions within the WBL learning environments. The participants were aware of the obstacles and challenges their EFI students faced in the WBL programs. Nonetheless, the participants were optimists and shared that helping students attain and maintain employment was the main mission of their programs.

The EFI students who participate in WBL programs face additional challenges, beside those imposed by their own disabilities, such as their legal status as immigrants as

well as challenges related to their gender and race. Exceptional students in the WBL programs, including EFI students, benefit from the learning opportunities to make the successful transitioning to independent adult life and to obtaining and maintain employment. Therefore, the role of WBL teachers and administrators in supporting the learning of their exceptional students is critical because such role helps these students improve their work readiness skills and pursue the career of their choice better than many of other students who did not participate in WBL programs (Bellman et al., 2014).

Second, the participants in this study expressed their awareness of the need to improve their intercultural competency which is defined as “the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Deardorff, 2008, p. 33). With growing diversity of students and teachers in U.S. schools the intercultural competence for teachers, administrators and learners become important. Cushner (2012) noted “a focus on intercultural aspects of teaching and learning is essential to consider in the preparation of educators” (p.42). The participants in this study had the opportunity to share their perceptions about their intercultural competency skills through sharing their experiences in interacting with immigrant female students in their WBL programs. In particular, the participants explained their intercultural knowledge and attitudes within the context of their leadership as they supported their immigrant female students and help them become more independent and employable.

The participants described their own beliefs about their roles as WBL educators and their intercultural competency skills as being the main two ingredients of their

effective leadership in the WBL programs. Investigating the personal beliefs and attitudes of WBL teachers and administrators in this research study has helped me understand how the participants perceived their individual leadership roles to support the learning of their diverse students. Specifically, I learned that the participants were aware of the need to improve their intercultural knowledge to better understand the needs of their diverse students and to teach them effectively.

Work-based learning environments, as being shaped by the diversity of WBL stakeholders, requires teachers and administrators to demonstrate adequate levels of knowledge and competency to deal with diverse needs of their learners and other people with whom they interact in the workplaces. However, WBL teachers and administrators are human beings; and despite their best intentions in being impartial when interacting with their diverse students, they are susceptible to the influences of their own implicit and explicit racial bias (Stark et al., 2020).

The above discussion on racial bias may be beyond the scope of this current study, yet it is very valid, especially in the present days when the national debate on racism is intensifying. The news outlets in the U.S. talked about killing incidents of African American youth by police officers who happened to be White. (Hill et al., 2020). Apparently, such incidents pushed many protesters across the racial spectrum in many U.S. cities to demonstrate and demand justice. A nation-wide Black Lives Matter movement was created following the killing of an African American citizen, George Floyd, by a police officer in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on May 25, 2020 (Del Real et al.,

2020). It is becoming clear to me that discussions on race and immigration in U.S. national politics will gain more momentum as the 2020 Presidential Elections approach.

The participants in this study mentioned they were aware of the racial background of their EFI students and the implications of current immigration policies on the status of some of these students. One participant shared with me that she helped one of her EFI students fill out her immigration forms which the student needed to adjust her legal status. Another participant described the fear of some of undocumented parents towards school as they wrongly believed schools were obliged to report to immigration authorities and would eventually deport them.

The participants mentioned their engagement in intercultural competency trainings to improve their knowledge about the different cultures. However, one administrator said that what is going on in her school regarding the intercultural competency training did not include her students. She pointed to the need to include students in the conversation about cultural diversity. Some of the participants said their intercultural competency and awareness had helped them in their engagement with their EFI students and their immigrant parents. These participants valued the involvement of immigrant parents in the education of their students. It was important to learn about the issues that impact the immigrant parents' engagement with school activities (Day, 2012) which can be dealt with through the collaborative relationships among WBL stakeholders.

Third, the participants in this study shared their perceptions regarding helping their students, including EFI students, in accessing the Career and Technical Education

(CTE) curriculum through modifying the 22 work-related competencies listed in the CTE curriculum. These competencies were identified by Virginia Department of Education after surveying business owners in the State. The 22 competencies of the CTE curriculum cover three main areas of instruction, labeled by Virginia Department of Education as the *21<sup>st</sup> Century Workplace Readiness Skills (WRS) for the Commonwealth* (VDOE, 2020), (a) personal qualities and abilities; (b) interpersonal skills; and (c) professional competencies.

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills refer to learners' competencies including collaboration, critical thinking, information technology and problem-solving skills that students need to demonstrate in order to become successful in today's world (VDOE, 2020). The missions of the investigated WBL programs are centered on implementing the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Workplace Readiness Skills (WRS) for the Commonwealth of Virginia. The two centers' missions were almost identical as both stressed on helping students achieve learning outcomes based on the 22 WRS competencies (see Figure 5).

I learned that the missions of the two research sites were founded on the school district's Portrait of a Graduate (POG) which stipulates the expectations of all students who will graduate from the high schools and other related programs, such as the investigated WBL programs. The POG was announced in 2014 in the school district where this research took place. According to the POG, all graduated students must demonstrate the ability to communicate, collaborate with others, be ethical and global citizen, be creative and critical thinker, and goal-directed and resilient individual.

The POG (see Figure 6) was mentioned by one of the participants, “Maria”, who said, “I think when they come here, we're kind of like the finished touch for that Portrait of a Graduate”. She said WBL program is designed to prepare “the student to be a true graduate, meaning that they're getting all the skills necessary to be successful in life”.

During the in-person interviews, many participants explained their instructional strategies to support their students’ independence, social competency, and vocational skills. The participants believed that such instructional strategies would help their students gain employment when they exit the school system.

While WBL teachers and administrators are engaged in educating their students, including EFI students, these teachers, oftentimes, face a variety of challenges including, language barrier, and social-emotional needs of their EFI students. The term ‘language barrier’ was identified by several participants, e.g. “Brenda” and “Sahar”, as a real challenge for EFI students as it negatively impacted their learning. “Sahar” described the language barrier as a real challenge to one of her EFI students who “had absolutely no language. And I think basically she lives in a very isolated world”. “Brenda” said that one of the EFI students in her school “has no language, so you can't just teach the way you would teach any other student”. “Brenda” has considered the language challenge as an incentive for WBL teachers to innovate their strategies to help their students.

In addition to the communication deficit due to language barrier, I also learned that some EFI students suffered from traumatic events in the past before immigrating to U.S. thus adding more challenges to their socio-emotional well-being and learning outcomes. These challenges may have impacted the students’ abilities to become

independent and employable adults. “Sahar” explained that some of her EFI students demonstrated socio-emotional behaviors which had negatively affected their learning; she said, “ Two of my students, in particular, have faced extreme adversity in their countries before they came here...they come with a lot of different social and emotional concerns”. Another participant, “Katy”, said she had noticed her EFI students were “shy or the confidence level isn't as high”, and mentioned that her students’ language deficiency prevented them from expressing their feelings. “Katy” said she had provided her students with visual aids to help them “figure out how they were feeling and then we always had to get more language”. “Sahar” stressed that she did not only teach her students the career education curriculum, but also, she taught them how to “understand and deal with social issues”, and that she helped some of them “access immigration attorneys that can help with citizenship”.

### **Collaboration in Work-Based Learning**

The second research question was focused on exploring the collaboration of educators in work-based learning (WBL) environment, and its impact on the learning of their EFI students. One of the findings of this study was that collaborative efforts of WBL teachers and administrators were directed towards supporting the learning of their EFI students through: (a) clarifying the educators’ motives and personal beliefs towards collaboration, and how it impacted their EFI students; (b) clarifying the educators’ attitudes and sharing their experiences while implementing the WBL programs together as a team, (c) reflecting on the status of the educators’ collaboration across settings, i.e. in their schools and out in the community-based workplaces, to support the learning of their



EFI students; (d) fostering leadership practices to enhance the learning environment in their centers, and (e) collaborating with the families of their EFI students to facilitate their involvement in the education of their students.

The participants perceived their collaborative relationships as being critical in supporting the learning of their EFI students. The participants were clear about their leadership roles in collaborating with other teachers, their administrators, and the parents of their students. A brief discussion of these three aspects of collaboration follows.

### ***Collaboration Among Teachers***

The collaboration among WBL teachers is a critical part of the success of the program. The participants who were interviewed in this research described different venues where they collaborated with their colleagues. They explained their involvement in Collaborative Learning Teams (CLT) which focused on the best practices of modifying and implementing the CTE curriculum in their buildings. They also mentioned ways to collaborate with the service providers in their school. The service providers are specialists who help with students needs in speech and language, behavior management, and social work. In addition, collaboration among teachers happened around specific objectives, such as planning for career days, job-interview activities, and capacity building, including learning the usage of technology in implementing instruction.

### ***Administrators-Teachers Collaboration***

Teachers-administrators collaboration happened in two levels as explained by the participants: Vertical and horizontal. The vertical collaboration was defined by the daily practices of the participants. The interviewed administrators said they usually mandated

some teachers to implement certain tasks, but the final decisions were the responsibility of the administrators. In the horizontal collaborative practices, the teachers were engaged with the administrators in structures called ‘Leadership Teams’ where many aspects of running their schools were discussed and decisions were made on a consensus basis. Such a dynamic style of practicing collaboration was adequate to ensure the inclusion of teachers in the decision-making process of their schools.

### ***Collaboration with Immigrant Families***

Collaboration between schools and international (immigrant) families is critical for the learning of their students (Day, 2012). Engaging immigrant parents in the education of their students, including the EFI students, can be challenged due to several reasons, such as the language barriers, parents working more than one job, and the immigrant families’ intercultural attitudes towards schooling of their daughters. The participants mentioned these challenges in their in-person interviews and described the difficulties many immigrant parents had to deal with when they tried to get involved with the education of their daughters in the WBL programs.

One of the main goals of the WBL programs is to prepare students to transition from school to work successfully. However, the perceptions and cultural backgrounds of many parents may interrupt their students’ transition. One of the participants, “Brenda”, shared her thoughts on the possible impact of the cultural beliefs of some immigrant families on the participation of their daughters in the WBL programs; she said, “I think depending on the students’ cultural backgrounds, women working may not be something that families are supportive of, or in agreement of, or think is a priority”. It remains

unexplained why a student may participate in a WBL program when obtaining an employment is not a goal for their families.

Many participants shared their perceptions and experiences working with immigrant parents. Participants “Maria” and “Kim” disclosed to me that they had immigrant backgrounds. These two participants shared their experiences regarding the attitudes of their parents towards their education. “Maria” immigrated to U.S. when she was young, whereas “Kim” was a U.S. born of an immigrant father. “Maria” is now an immigrant parent too and shared that many immigrant parents do not have enough time to get involved in their children education because they work long hours. Working long hours for economic reasons can hinder the participation of immigrant parents in the education of their children. Participant “Kim” said that her immigrant family had gender-based expectations towards her when she was in school; she said, “I did have different expectations, I think, put upon me than I did with my brothers”. These family expectations have an impact on the education of the EFI students, and Kim has pointed to such impact when she said, “there are family issues that are preventing the students from fully accessing the program”.

Another reason that may impact the engagement of immigrant parents with the school activities is the fear of government. “Kim” explained that school has been seen as a government surrogate when it comes to immigration status; she asked, “Do they [parents] want their students going out to a workplace and exposing them to the community when the community could potentially turn on them?”

The fear of many undocumented immigrant parents and their children was also mentioned by other participants during the interviews. Participant “Sam” said some immigrant parents were “afraid that if they give a little too much information then ICE [Immigration and Customs Enforcement] is going to come knocking on the door, which is not [true]”. “Sam” said many immigrant parents “don’t understand that the school is not interested in politics, whether immigrants or not, we just care about the students” which is true. But the fear remains a fear whether being justified or not.

The EFI students may need help from their teachers to adjust their immigration status. Participant “Lisa” said she offered help to one of her EFI students who met the qualification to apply for the legal residence in U.S. in accordance with the DREAM Act of 2014. She said, “I talked to her about where she could apply for status under the DREAM Act because of her age now”. The DREAM (Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors) Act was first issued by President G.W. Bush in 2001. In 2014 President Barack Obama introduced an improved version of DREAM Act two years after his administration created Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). DACA was designed to provide legal status for about 800,000 children of undocumented parents. In 2017, President Donald Trump’s administration tried to cancel DACA, but the US Supreme Court intervened in July 2020 and ruled against the cancellation (AIC, 2020).

### **Connections to Theoretical Frameworks**

The participants shared their observations regarding the work behavior of their EFI students and explained the dynamics of the collaboration and leadership styles they performed as they worked in the WBL environment. Such shared observations can be

categorized around three theories relevant to WBL: The Experiential Learning (Kolb, 1984), the Team Leadership (Hill, 2013), and the Leader-Member Exchange-LMX (Graen and Uhl-Bien 1995) theories.

### ***Connections to Experiential Learning Theory***

Some participants provided examples of their observations regarding how their EFI students reacted to various stimuli during the students' engagement with their work assignments at the workplace. I found that many of the given examples confirm to the Experiential Learning Cycle (Kolb, 1984). Following are examples of the observation shared by some participants which were related to Kolb's cycle:

1. Experience: Participant "Katy" shared that one of her students need "to model the job task" to acquire the skills so the student can continue with "the next thing to do" and build up her work experience.
2. Perception: Participant "Lisa" shared that her students generally do not show their reflective thinking on the implemented jobs "As far as individual tasks, not so much", but they do share some perceptions about their overall work. Another participant, "Sue", said her students "realize when things are hard. They recognize when they're struggling".
3. Cognition: Participant "Sahar" shared that some of her students were "usually pretty forthcoming" and would suggest ways to do things when they feel trusted and supported. The atmosphere of trust and acceptance would encourage EFI students to learn more and be cognizant of their own work performances.

4. Behavior: Participant “Kim” said some of her students were able “to use their learned skills outside school”. Participant “Sahar” has also confirmed that her students “were able to transfer that knowledge or do the job again”. Another participant, “Sue”, shared that she found her students “to be able to do a job or a task more consistently, and they're more on task”, thus reflecting ability to apply the learned task across settings and improving their own work behavior and attitudes.

The participants who shared the above observations regarding the learning behaviors of their EFI students were specific in their explanation with examples as indicated by their testimonies and they were not necessarily aware of the theoretical backgrounds of such observations as explained by the theory of the Experiential Learning Cycle (Kolb, 1984).

#### ***Connections to Team Leadership and Leader-Member Exchange Theories***

Another finding was related to the leadership practices at both research sites as explained by the participants during the in-person interviews. It was clear from the participants’ testimonies that they were following the Team Leadership approach (Hill, 2013) and the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) style of leadership (Graen & Uhl-Bien 1995). The participants shared their leadership experiences and practices through a variety of thematical teams, such as collaborative learning teams (CLT), and teachers’ leadership teams (TLT), to accomplish their tasks and further develop their cohesive and collaborative relationships (see Figure 2). One participant, “Brenda”, described the work of some of the teams in her school by saying, “we have [a] Transition Committee, a

Social Skills Committee, and [an] Independent Learning Committee ... teachers are very involved and make really good leadership roles in these teams”.

Another participant, “Jhon”, shared that one of his goals was to make “sure that the structure of the school day supports this learning and professional development that teachers are doing together” as teams. “Kim”, one of the participants, explained the team leadership in her school as ‘layers of leadership’. She said, “we really kind of have layers, I guess I would say, of leadership”; she said the top layer was the “administrators’ team” that monitors and acts together with other teams in lower layers, and “we will talk about something and then it will go to our teacher leadership team which is comprised of teachers’ leadership team and our CLT [Collaborative Learning Teams] team leads”.

Figure 2 illustrates the leadership practices as layers according to the testimonies of the participants.

In addition to the Team Leadership (Hill, 2013) style which was practiced in both research sites, I found that another type of leadership was in practice as well; the LMX: Leader-Member Exchange-LMX (Graen & Uhl-Bien 1995) type of leadership. The LMX leadership identifies the leader-subordinate dyadic relationship in vertical and horizontal levels and visualizes leadership as “centered on the *interactions* between leaders and followers” (Northouse, 2013, p. 161, emphasis is in the original text). The administrators-teachers’ interactions in both research sites were noticeable to me as an insider and a researcher. Participant, “Sam”, described these interactions by saying, “there is almost always a group of people that they work together to plan and organize and reach out”. “Sam” emphasized his role as a final decision-maker within the leadership structure by

saying, “anything, any decisions that need to be made there, have to go through me”. This dual aspect of team interaction and leader-follower relationship was visible in running the business in both centers where this research study was implemented. I tend to call this type of leadership practice (i.e. the mix of LMX and Team Leadership) as a *hybrid leadership* which I found flexible enough to meet the demands of the dynamic nature of the WBL programs. The hybrid leadership practiced in both research sites seemed working well with the demands of WBL environments where collaboration was manifested in teams as well as relationships across school and community settings. I would suggest further investigation of this emerged style of WBL leadership in future studies.

### **Self-Reflections**

This study is significant in recent time of increasing debate on race and diversity in the United States, as well as at the time when the focus on teachers’ accountability and leadership is growing in our schools. Attempts to learn more about the leadership processes in executing WBL programs and the impact of such processes on the learning of exceptional immigrant students, specifically female students, would provide opportunities for improvement in this area of education.

As a WBL educator, I believe leading WBL programs to support the learning of a specialized group of students is a daunting task. While bounded by a curriculum to teach students the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Workplace Readiness Skills, teachers will need to be innovative in their instructional strategies and approaches to help their exceptional students become successful learners. One way to support WBL educators in their endeavors to better serve



their EFI students is the professional development. Through effective professional trainings on diversity and cultural competency, teachers in WBL programs will respond adequately to the needs of their diverse students. Some participants in this research study mentioned they were engaged in cultural competency trainings to improve their knowledge about different cultures. However, one administrator said that what is actually going on in her school was not including the needs of their students; she said “I feel like right now the county's focus and our focus and our building has been cultural competency among staff. But I do not know...we're really taking into account the students”. This statement indicates the need to expand awareness of the impact of diversity on our schools in general, and particularly on the WBL environments where most of the instruction and learning happen in the community outside the school classrooms.

All participants valued the involvement of immigrant parents in the education of their students. However, it was interesting to me to learn about the issues that impacted the parents' engagement in school activities. Reasons such as ‘language barriers’, ‘working more than one job’, ‘cultural attitudes towards schooling’ were among the frequently used expressions during the in-person interviews to describe the difficulties many immigrant parents deal with when they try to get involved with the education of their daughters.

Participant, “Brenda”, shared her thought on the possible impact of the cultural beliefs of some immigrant families on the participation of their daughters in the WBL programs; she said “ I think depending on the students' cultural background, women working may not be something that families are supportive of or in agreement of or think

is a priority”. It remains unexplained to me why a student may participate in a WBL program when obtaining an employment is not a goal for their families. This may suggest a need to organize a dialogue with international families to learn more about their goals, perceptions, plans and needs.

Two other participants, “Kim” and “Maria” disclosed to me their backgrounds as daughters of immigrants themselves. These two participants shared with me their experiences regarding the attitudes of their parents towards their education. They said such background helped them understand the issues related to educating female immigrant students and helped them relate better to students and their immigrant families.

Finally, the fear of many undocumented immigrant parents and their children was mentioned by some participants. According to one participant, “Sam”, some immigrant parents were “afraid that if they give a little too much information then ICE [Immigration and Customs Enforcement] is going to come knocking on the door which is not”. I expected such concern in view of the heated debate in US about immigration and racial discrimination. Schools will need to do more to assure students and parents that politics should not be allowed to negatively impact education.

### **Study Limitations.**

This study was unique in WBL leadership literature because it focused on learning about the perceptions of WBL administrators and teachers about the learning of their EFI students in two separate, but similar centers, within a school district.

There are three limitations of this study which are related to:

- (a) Exploration vs evaluation: which means this study was focused on exploring the perceptions of the teachers and administrators on their leadership and their support to their EFI students without considering any evaluative measures of the WBL programs in both centers where the study was conducted.
- (b) Integration vs comparison: which means this study was limited in its scope by focusing on the participants in both research sites as one integrated unit without considering any differences to compare between the two sites.
- (c) Convergence vs divergence: which means this study is limited by focusing on the perceptions of the work-based programs' teachers and administrators regarding a convergent, special group of learners, the EFI students. It would be beneficial for future studies to include different and wider groups of learners.

An explanation of each of these limitations is provided in the following section.

### ***Exploration vs Evaluation***

The explorative nature of investigation in this study may have diminished the tendency to carry a measured evaluation of successes mentioned in the narratives of the participants. Evaluating the successes of WBL programs may be further suggested as a follow-up research topic. The need to check data related to successes of the WBL programs and the level of the participation of immigrant female students in these programs were beyond the scope of this study. Given the limited time and resources, it was not visible to expand the scope of investigation to include the elements of evaluation

as well. In future studies it would be appropriate to expand the data collection method to include the participating immigrant students and their families.

### ***Integration vs Comparison***

This study was implemented in two similar sites; two vocational centers in the same school district which provide WBL learning opportunities to exceptional students within the same age range (18-22 years). The two research sites were treated by the researcher as an integrated unit with the focus of learning about collective perspectives from teachers and administrators in both sites more than focusing on differences and contrasts. It would be beneficial if another scope has been added to the investigation to compare the dynamics in both sites.

### ***Convergence vs Divergence***

The two research questions focused on the need to learn how WBL teachers and administrators perceived their leading roles in the program to support the learning of a special group of learners, i.e. the exceptional immigrant female (EFI) students. Based on this converged focus the interview questions were centered on learning how the participants perceived their role while thinking specifically about their EFI students. While this specific approach provided valuable insights and unprecedented knowledge about an aspect of WBL leadership, it limited the broadening of the conversation to include other aspects of learning in WBL environments. An added divergent lens to the scope of the investigation in this study would be welcomed and add more knowledge to the topic.

## Further Research Suggestions

The three limitations of this study suggest further investigation on the following topics:

- evaluating the successes of WBL programs as related to the learning of special groups of exceptional learners including immigrant students,
- comparing the performances of two or more related centers or schools which provide WBL learning opportunities to special groups of learners,
- focusing on students as diverse learners within one site or multiple sites and to include wider perspectives on their experiences as WBL learners,
- studying the effectiveness of WBL leadership as related to supporting the learning of special groups of diverse learners. This may include the study of the newly emerged leadership style, which I labeled as *Hybrid Leadership* in WBL context, because it emerged from the application of two styles based on LMX and Team Leadership theories as being practiced in the two WBL centers,
- recognizing the need to further investigate the challenges which impact the full participation of immigrant students in WBL programs. For example, one of the findings was related to what some participants termed as the ‘language barrier’ that inhibits the ability of many EFI students to access their WBL programs and demonstrate the ability to become independent, employable, and socially competent individuals. Based on this finding, I suggest carrying more research on the socio-emotional impact of the language barrier which many immigrant students demonstrate while participating in WBL programs,

- highlighting the importance of engaging immigrant parents in the education of their students. In view of the dearth of research on this aspect of WBL it would be beneficial to conduct a study in which parents and their students are participants to understand their own perspectives on their involvement in WBL programs. It would also be valuable to investigate the participation of immigrant students in WBL within the general education settings (e.g. high school academies), and
- studying the impact of the national immigration policy and practices (e.g. DACA, ICE, and DREAMER) on the learning of immigrant students in WBL environments.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to explore the perception of teachers and administrators of work-based learning programs (WBL) about their leadership role in supporting the learning of their exceptional female immigrant students (EFI), and how these educators collaborate with other stakeholders of the program including the families of the EFI students.

The participants in this study shared their experiences and beliefs in teaching their exceptional female immigrants students and how they supported the learning of this special group of students and collaborate to practice their leaderships of the WBL programs in school and in the workplaces as well. The reality that EFI students are being immigrants and females with disabilities adds more obstacles to their learning in WBL environments, because such environments require social and cultural interactions among

stakeholders, and amidst such interactions issues related to gender and disabilities may come into play and need our attention.

The participation of EFI students in WBL is an issue of social justice in education. The participants in this study shared their experiences on how they supported the learning of their EFI students and how they practiced their educational leadership as teachers and administrators to support the learning of their students in a learning environment that is different from the traditional learning inside schools.

Beside focusing the attention on the learning needs of a special group of learners, the findings of this study shed light on how the educators perceive their roles as leaders to support the learning of their students across settings; they shared how they practice their leadership in collaboration with their administrators and students' families.

A collaborative leadership was practiced by the educators of the two research sites and was found very effective in supporting the learners in WBL programs.

As a case study, this research was affected by the contextual reality of the U.S. socio-politics. The word 'immigration' was repeatedly mentioned during the in-person interviews with the participating teachers and administrators who shared their awareness of the impact of immigration policy on their schools. For instance, one participant explained how she helped one of her students complete and submit the student's immigration papers, another participant expressed her worries about the fate of one of her 'undocumented' students and hoped the student would benefit from Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program-DACA. One of the participants described how some of the

‘undocumented’ immigrant families became suspicious of schools as they were under wrong impression that schools may report them to local authorities.

Finally, all participants acknowledged the diversity of their students and expressed their awareness of the need to receive trainings in intercultural competency. The literature informs us that diverse schools require teachers and administrators to be interculturally competent and professionally prepared to meet the learning needs of their students (Deardorff, 2008). The school district where this research study was conducted have recently placed emphasis on the need to train its staff to become culturally competent so they can effectively serve their diverse students.



## APPENDICES

**Table 1**

*Participants' Demographic Data*

Code	Pseudonym	Position	Tenure	Years in position	Gender	Race	Age	Degree/Certs
PA1	Sam	Principal	28	6	M	W	49	Education Specialist
PA2	Brenda	DC	9	3	F	W	35	2 Master's degrees in Special Education & Administration.
PA3	Joe	ETR	6	3	M	W	40	M.A w/ certification in Special Education and Career & Transition leadership
PT1	Brandon	Teacher	17	5	M	AA	50	Master of Education Special Education.
PT2	Katy	Teacher	19	5	F	AA	52	B.A. w/ certification in Special Education.
PT3	Sahar	Teacher	21	11	F	W	54	Master of Education Special Education.
DA1	Jhon	Principal	22	4	M	W	51	M. Ed. Leadership, PhD Candidate
DA2	Kim	DC	20	5	F	A	48	M.Ed. Special Education & Administration.
DA3	Maria	ETR	12	6	F	LA	46	Master's degree in school counseling
DT1	Sue	Teacher	17	4	F	W	46	Master's degree in Special Education
DT2	Ann	Teacher	18	5	F	W	45	Master's degree in Special Education
DT3	Lisa	Teacher	19	3	F	W	48	B.A./Certifications in Special Education.

Note: DC= Dept. Chair; ETR= Employment & Transition AA= African American; A= Asian American; LA= Latin American.

**Table 2***Interviewing Log*

Interview #	Date	Duration (Minutes)	Interviewee (Pseudonym)	Position	Research Site #	Member Check Date
1	9/1/2019	45	Joe	ETR	1	9/13/2019
2	9/11/2019	50	Brandon	Teacher	1	9/14/2019
3	9/12/2019	52	Katy	Teacher	1	9/14/2019
4	9/13/2019	45	Brenda	Dep. Chair	1	9/19/2019
5	9/16/2019	47	Sam	Principal	1	9/19/2019
6	9/19/2019	30	Sahar	Teacher	1	9/23/2019
7	9/24/2019	45	Maria	ETR	2	9/30/2019
8	9/30/2019	67	Jhon	Principal	2	10/5/2019
9	10/2/2019	72	Sue	Teacher	2	10/10/2019
10	10/3/2019	46	Kim	Dep. Chair	2	10/10/2019
11	10/15/2019	60	Ann	Teacher	2	10/22/2019
12	10/17/2019	50	Lisa	Teacher	2	10/25/2019

*Note:* ETR= Employment and Transition Representative; Dep.= Department

## Figures

### Figure 1

*IRB Consent Form*

**IRB ID# 1405069-1 (Submitted by: Ahmed Atef)**

**Leading Work-Based Learning Programs: How Administrators and Teachers Support Learning for**

**Exceptional Female Immigrant High School Students- A Case Study.**

### **INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

#### **RESEARCH PROCEDURES**

This research is being conducted to explore the perception and role of high school work-based learning teachers and administrators in supporting the participation of their immigrant female students. The specific purpose of the study is to (a) explore ways and processes which high school teachers and administrators adopt to specifically help immigrant female students who participate in work-based learning (WBL) programs, (b) contribute to the body knowledge of social justice in education by highlighting the current practices in WBL as related to responding to the learning needs of immigrant female students; and (c) explore the application of leadership theories within the context of WBL environments. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to attend a one-hour in-person interview. Your responses will be recorded on an audio digital device. In the interview you will be asked about your tasks, assignments, perceptions, and overall experience in teaching and leading work-based learning programs in your school, and how you collaborate with your administrators to support learning of your immigrant female students. You will be requested to provide the researcher with your phone number to call you after the interview is being transcribed. The purpose of the call will be to check the authenticity of your answers and make sure they reflect what you exactly intended to say. This call is not expected to exceed 30 minutes. The researcher will collect from your school publicly available un-confidential documents related to WBL program's mission and vision, in addition to WBL documents available on the websites of \_\_\_ County Public School, Virginia's Department of Education, and US Department of Education.

#### **RISKS**

There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this research.

#### **BENEFITS**

There are no direct benefits to you for participating other than to assist with the research on current leadership practices in WBL environments.

#### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

The data in this study will be confidential. None of the information will identify you by name. Instead a code key will be used, which will be saved in a password-protected file on the computer of the researcher. All records, including interview audio recording, will be kept in a password-protected database accessible only to the researcher and his advisor who is the Principal Investigator (PI) of this study. The records, including interview audio tapes, that identify you as a participant, will be deleted right after the researcher checks with the participants on their agreement with the transcribed interviews. All other documents, transcripts, and records related to

**Figure 1 (Continued)**

this research study will be stored in a safe place in the PI office at George Mason University for 5 years from the date of their creation. The de-identified data could be used for future research without additional consent from participants.

**PARTICIPATION**

The participants in this research study will be chosen according to the following criteria: (1) The participants from the administrators' group should be working full time, licensed to lead WBL programs (convenience selection). (2) The participants from the teachers' group: should have at least 3 years teaching experience in WBL programs; currently teaching (or have taught in the past) female immigrant student(s); and have full time position as licensed teachers (Purposeful random selection).

Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. If you decide not to participate or if you withdraw from the study, there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no costs to you or any other party. You will receive \$50 after the in-person interview as a compensation for your time and effort.

**CONTACT**

This research is being conducted by Ahmed Atef, a PhD candidate who can be reached at \_\_\_\_, email \_\_\_\_, and the faculty advisor is \_\_\_\_ who can be reached at \_\_\_\_, email: \_\_\_\_, College of Education and Human Development at George Mason University for questions or to report a research-related problem. You may contact the George Mason University Institutional Review Board office at 703-993-4121 if you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant in the research.

This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your participation in this research.

**CONSENT**

I have read this form, all of my questions have been answered by the research staff, and I agree to participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to audio (video) taping.

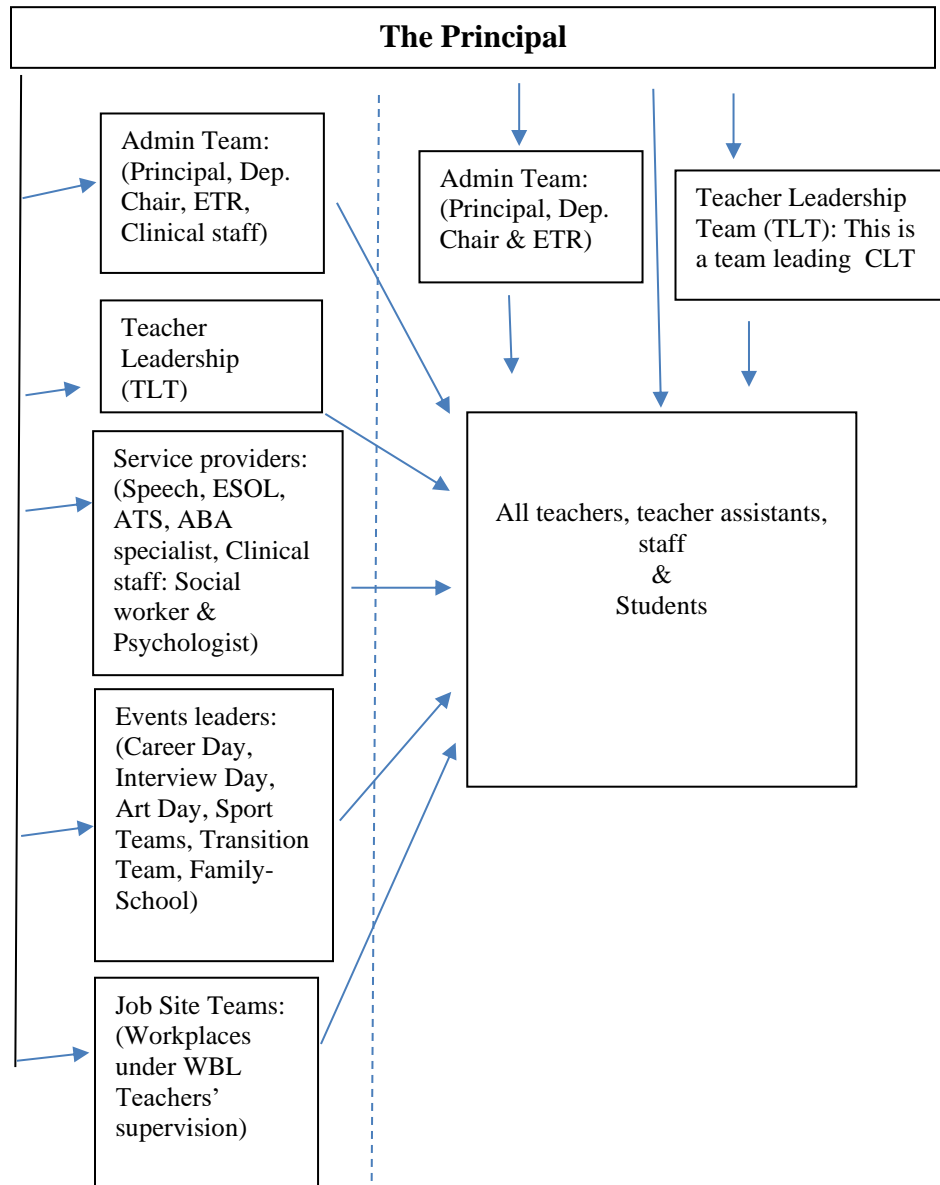
\_\_\_\_\_ I do not agree to audio (video) taping.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Signature

**Figure 2**

*Leadership Practices*



*Note.* The Leadership Practices in the two research sites, Center (A) & (B), as learned from the interviews and the researcher's observation.

**Figure 3**

*Center (A) Students Data*

**Student Membership Demographics and Supplemental Programs (as of June for each school year)**

Enrollment	2017-18		2018-19		2019-20	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
English Learner Services	50	45.05	40	44.44	35	43.75
Special Education Services	111	100.00	90	100.00	80	100.00

Type of Chart:  Bar  Line  Marker

 [Enrollment Graph](#)

 [Enrollment Graph](#)

Gender	2017-18		2018-19		2019-20	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Female	33	29.73	30	33.33	26	32.50
Male	78	70.27	60	66.67	54	67.50

 [Gender Graph](#)

Ethnicity	2017-18		2018-19		2019-20	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Asian	22	19.82	14	15.56	15	18.75
Black (Not Of Hispanic Origin)	31	27.93	27	30.00	22	27.50
Hispanic Or Latino	19	17.12	20	22.22	17	21.25
White (Not Of Hispanic Origin)	35	31.53	26	28.89	22	27.50
Other	4	3.60	3	3.33	4	5.00

 [Ethnicity Graph](#)

Note: Modified from [http:// www.fcps.edu](http://www.fcps.edu)

**Figure 4**

*Center (B) Students Data*

**Student Membership Demographics and Supplemental Programs (as of June for each school year)**

Enrollment	2017-18		2018-19		2019-20	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
General Education					1	0.70
English Learner Services	36	30.51	41	32.28	47	32.87
Special Education Services	118	100.00	127	100.00	143	100.00

Type of Chart:  Bar  Line  Marker

 [Enrollment Graph](#)

 [Enrollment Graph](#)

Gender	2017-18		2018-19		2019-20	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Female	39	33.05	43	33.86	46	32.17
Male	79	66.95	84	66.14	97	67.83

 [Gender Graph](#)

Ethnicity	2017-18		2018-19		2019-20	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Asian	25	21.19	19	14.96	28	19.58
Black (Not Of Hispanic Origin)	12	10.17	14	11.02	17	11.89
Hispanic Or Latino	27	22.88	30	23.62	26	18.18
White (Not Of Hispanic Origin)	51	43.22	62	48.82	67	46.85
Other	3	2.54	2	1.57	5	3.50

 [Ethnicity Graph](#)

Note. Modified from [http:// www.fcps.edu](http://www.fcps.edu)



## Figure 5

### *The 22 Work Readiness Skills Competencies*

#### **Work Readiness Skills**

##### **Demonstrating Personal Qualities and Abilities**

1. Demonstrate creativity and innovation.
2. Demonstrate critical thinking and problem solving.
3. Demonstrate initiative and self-direction.
4. Demonstrate integrity.
5. Demonstrate work ethic.

##### **Demonstrating Interpersonal Skills**

6. Demonstrate conflict-resolution skills.
7. Demonstrate listening and speaking skills.
8. Demonstrate respect for diversity.
9. Demonstrate customer service skills.
10. Collaborate with team members.

##### **Demonstrating Professional Competencies**

11. Demonstrate big-picture thinking.
12. Demonstrate career- and life-management skills.
13. Demonstrate continuous learning and adaptability.
14. Manage time and resources.
15. Demonstrate information-literacy skills.
16. Demonstrate an understanding of information security.
17. Maintain working knowledge of current information-technology (IT) systems.
18. Demonstrate proficiency with technologies, tools, and machines common to a specific occupation.
19. Apply mathematical skills to job-specific tasks.
20. Demonstrate professionalism.
21. Demonstrate reading and writing skills.
22. Demonstrate workplace safety.

*Note.* This list is modified from a poster available at <http://www.doe.va.gov>

## Figure 6

### *The Portrait of a Graduate (POG)*

#### **The Portrait of a Graduate (POG)**

##### **Communicator:**

- Applies effective reading skills to acquire knowledge and broaden perspectives.
- Employs active listening strategies to advance understanding.
- Speaks in a purposeful manner to inform, influence, motivate, or entertain listeners.
- Incorporates effective writing skills for various purposes and audiences to convey understanding and concepts.
- Uses technological skills and contemporary digital tools to explore and exchange ideas.

##### **Collaborator:**

- Respects divergent thinking to engage others in thoughtful discussion.
- Demonstrates the ability to work interdependently within a group to promote learning, increase productivity, and achieve common goals.
- Analyzes and constructs arguments and positions to ensure examination of a full range of viewpoints.
- Seeks and uses feedback from others to adapt ideas and persist in accomplishing difficult tasks.

##### **Ethical and Global Citizen:**

- Acknowledges and understands diverse perspectives and cultures when considering local, national, and world issues.
- Contributes to solutions that benefit the broader community.
- Communicates effectively in multiple languages to make meaningful connections.
- Promotes environmental stewardship.
- Understands the foundations of our country and values our rights, privileges, and responsibilities.
- Demonstrates empathy, compassion, and respect for others.
- Acts responsibly and ethically to build trust and lead.

##### **Creative and Critical Thinker:**

- Engages in problem solving, inquiry, and design of innovative solutions to overcome obstacles to improve outcomes.
- Uses information in novel and creative ways to strengthen comprehension and deepen awareness.
- Demonstrates divergent and ingenious thought to enhance the design-build process.
- Expresses thought, ideas, and emotions meaningfully through the arts.
- Evaluates ideas and information sources for validity, relevance, and impact.
- Reasons through and weighs evidence to reach conclusions.

##### **Goal-Directed and Resilient Individual:**

- Engages in healthy and positive practices and relationships to promote overall physical and mental well-being.
- Persists to accomplish difficult tasks and to overcome academic and personal barriers to meet goals.
- Uses time and financial resources wisely to set goals, complete tasks, and manage projects.
- Shows strong understanding and belief of self to engage in reflection for individual improvement and advocacy.

*Note.* Modified from <http://www.fcps.edu>

**Figure 7**

*List of Documents collected as source of data for the research study*

Document title	Author(s)	Type	Date of issue	Relevance to my research study	Date collected & how?
Career Assessment: A valuable resource for transition planning.	Fairfax County Public Schools	PowerPoint Slides Print-out	8/20/2019	Some teacher participants mentioned the assessments of their students including Exceptional Female Immigrant (EFI) students.	8/20/2019 During in-service training
Best Practices for Obtaining Student Independence on a Job Site	Fairfax County Public Schools	PowerPoint Slides Print-out	8/20/2019	Some teacher participants mentioned their support to students’ independence at workplaces.	8/20/2019 During in-service training
Immigration facts: Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)	Metropolitan Policy Program at Brookings	Pdf Document	8/14/2013	Some participants mentioned DACA in the in-person interviews. They explained some DACA cases related to their EFI students.	September 13, 2019 (online)
Adult Service Resources	Fairfax County Public Schools	Poster	Unknown	The participants (ETR) mentioned the adult services in their in-person interviews. These services are offered to EFI students.	October 10, 2019 (Taking a picture)
21 <sup>st</sup> Century Workplace Readiness Skills for the Commonwealth: needs Identified by Virginia Employers.	Virginia Department of Education-Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education	Poster	2019	Many participants mentioned the “Workplace Readiness Skills” when they explained the WBL curriculum they teach to their students including EFI students.	October 10, 2019. (Obtained a hard copy from one of the ETRs).
School to Career	Walch Publishing	Pdf document	2006	To learn about skills needed for students, including EFI students, to transition from school to work	October 20, 2019. (from one ETR)

**Figure 7 (Continued)**

*List of Documents collected as source of data for the research study*

Supporting Student Workers on the Job	Fairfax County Public Schools	PowerPoint Slides Print-out	2019	This document provides information related to supporting students in WBL environment.	October 25, 2019. (from a teacher who attended training in Dec. 2018)
CTE Curriculum Pacing Guide for Education for Employment (EFE)	Fairfax County Public Schools-Career & Transition Services	Document	Fall, 2018	This document provides information on the CTE curriculum taught in the research sites.	October 25, 2019 (from one of the administrators)
CTE Curriculum Pacing Guide for Independent Living Skills (ILS)	Fairfax County Public Schools-Career & Transition Services	Document	Fall, 2018	This document provides information on the CTE curriculum taught in the research sites.	October 25, 2019 (from one of the administrators)
Portrait of a Graduate	Fairfax County Public Schools	Pdf Document	Unknown	Several participants mentioned the Portrait of Graduate as a guiding mission for their centers.	October 25, 2019 (from one of the administrators)
School Innovation and Improvement Plan (SIIP)	Pulley Career Center	Document	2019-2020	The participant administrators mentioned SIIP in their interviews as a document that defines the mission of their centers.	09/13/2019 (From one administrator)
Statistic Data About EFI students in both centers	Fairfax County Public Schools	Document	2019-2020	This document is very valuable in providing my study with the statistics about the Exceptional Female Immigrant (EFI)students	11/1/2019 (From ESOL teacher)
Five Ways Culturally Responsive Teaching Impacts the Students Experience	Fairfax County Public Schools	Pdf Document	2019	This document outlines how responsive teaching impacts students, including EFI students.	October 25, 2019. (from one ETR)

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## **BIOGRAPHY**

Ahmed A. Atef graduated from Abood High School, Aden, South Yemen, in 1978. He received his Bachelor of Science from Punjab University, India, in 1984. He worked in Yemen Telecommunication Corporation until 1986. During the period from 1987 until 2000 he worked in Yemen's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He was employed as a teacher in Fairfax County for 16 years and received his Master of Arts in Special Education from George Mason University in 2008.