

Lights, Camera, *Learning Improvement Action*— A Multimedia Case Development 'Immersive-Learning' Approach to Building Educators' Instructional Teaming Capacity for School Turnaround Success

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Abstract: This article presents lessons learned from a multi-year, externally funded school-university collaborative partnership project—the School Leadership Case Simulation (SLCS) Project—exploring the use of multimedia case development techniques as *immersive learning* means for: 1) reenergizing elementary and secondary educators and school community stakeholders' potential for collaborative organizational learning and positive school improvement vision-building; and 2) nurturing educators' instructional teaming capacity for jumpstarting demonstrable instructional improvement. The unique case learning approach employed in this multi-year, funded project effort—utilizing a combination of organizational case development and analysis, theatrical portrayal, and movie scene production techniques—taps into the collaborative teaming potential of groups of educators (teachers, counselors, instructional coaches, campus principals, and assistant principals) and school community stakeholders (parents, school board members, community social services providers, and business leaders) in multiple elementary and secondary school settings to help these stakeholders learn how to *think differently and work together in new ways* through coming together as a multimedia case production team to investigate their own context-specific, school-community instructional improvement challenges. The article provides an overview of key features of the school-university partnership project's "immersive learning" design along with a brief description of project activities. The SLCS project's unique use by collaborative teams of university researchers, multimedia production specialists, and school educators and community stakeholders of *moviemaking* as a creative "organizational case learning tool" for reinvigorating instructional teaming practices in elementary and secondary schools and school districts is highlighted. Five important *lessons learned* from collective, multi-year SLCS project work completed by the multiple teams of school community case development participants and university researchers working together in project activities about "team-centered organizational learning" and how to effectively navigate the often challenging "socio-politics of instructional turnarounds" are presented and discussed.

Keywords: Multimedia Case Learning, Instructional Teaming, Transformative Change, Organizational Renewal

1. Introduction

Movies continue to remain a mainstay of both present-day American and global culture. Enthusiastic interest in such annual events as the *Hollywood Academy Award* (the "Oscars") and *Golden Globe Award* ceremonies in the United

States, the *London Film Festival* in the United Kingdom, and the *Cannes International Film Festival* in France are just a few examples of the universal magnetic appeal the *art of moviemaking* has on people of all ages and their

imaginings. Moreover, the screenwriters, actors, producers, directors, and the wide array of visual and sound technical engineers and special effects artists who work in the moviemaking industry enjoy a special kind of “larger-than-life” status. Indeed, the special effects wizards working in today’s high-tech motion picture visual and audio special effects companies—such as George Lucas’s *Industrial Light and Magic* and Walt Disney’s computer animation movie studio *Pixar*—are continually in high demand by moviemakers interested in incorporating the latest digital special effects and visual and sound wizardry into their blockbuster movie productions.

Movies are about the *art and craft of storytelling*. And it is this element of storytelling—a natural inclination displayed by peoples of all world cultures throughout recorded history for crafting stories (through song, dance, poems, pictographs, folk tales, myths, etc.) about the passions, struggles, and adventures associated with human life—that has continued to capture the imaginations of people through the present time. From the Lascaux cave paintings in southwestern France, to Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, to the plays of Euripides and Shakespeare, to the short stories of Edgar Allan Poe, Mark Twain, and other literary giants, through today’s gripping mystery/international thriller novels by such popular authors as Tom Clancy, Agatha Christie, and the like, *stories* and the *art and craft of storytelling* continue to play an important role in human culture. Indeed, stories have always had a fascinating way of imprinting themselves indelibly in the minds of people across all cultures—and today’s digitally enhanced movies only heighten this mental imprinting effect. Movies, of course, are also big business. And screenwriters, cinematographers, and movie moguls spend millions of dollars each year attempting to outdo each other in producing and delivering ever-more spectacular and thrilling movie blockbusters (box office hits) to a perennially receptive, movie-consuming public. Moreover, thanks to today’s digital revolution, “making movies” is now even within the reach of ordinary, amateur storytellers like you and me. Today’s readily available, digital moviemaking tools and resources have empowered the “storyteller” in all of us in new, transformative ways—as even people without advanced technical capabilities can now easily purchase “off-the-shelf” digital hardware and software that enable them to storyboard, edit, and produce their own high-quality, home-made movies.

Intriguingly, it is this penchant for *storytelling*—and the possibilities of leveraging *moviemaking* as a medium for developing stories about the challenges of multi-stakeholder organizational leadership and instructional improvement in school communities—that led me to begin thinking about how to transform the ways I approach providing staff development and professional learning opportunities to teams of educators and community stakeholders in preK-12 schools and school districts. As a university researcher and staff development consultant to preK-12 schools and school districts in the Southern and Southwestern United States in the areas of organizational leadership and school improvement for the past thirty years, I have been contacted

more times than I can count by school principals and superintendents (in both urban and rural school districts across Texas and Louisiana) seeking assistance on how to effectively address the tough (often intractable) instructional improvement challenges they face daily in their schools and districts. These leadership challenges vary across individual school/district contexts and can include such daunting challenges as: 1) how to effectively serve the instructional support needs of a school district’s low socioeconomic/under-privileged students and parents; 2) how to deal with the passionately conflicting perspectives of multiple, diverse community stakeholder groups about a school district’s instructional improvement efforts, some of whom may hold substantially disparate views regarding the relevance (i.e., cost effectiveness, instructional impact potential) of a particular new “district-wide instructional improvement initiative” being planned and/or implemented by district leadership; 3) how to effectively meet the learning and family support needs of diverse populations of students within a district and/or single school community setting who may come from vastly different home socioeconomic environments, cultures, and ethnic backgrounds, etc. More often than not, these difficult organizational leadership and instructional improvement challenges can quickly morph into deeply entrenched and intractable “dilemma situations”, as school leaders at some point reach an impasse in terms of being able to come up with workable, multiple stakeholder-supported solutions to their deeply entrenched “teaching and learning improvement” challenges. Schools and school districts grappling with these kinds of tough dilemma situations will often require substantial, sustained “school turnaround” efforts—including efforts focused on school reculturing [11, 12], nurturing distributed leadership [24], and building stakeholder capacity through data-driven collaborative teaming [1, 2, 3, 4, 18, 19]—to get their teaching and learning performance levels back on track [9, 10, 14, 15, 20, 21, 25, 26].

From a staff development consultant’s perspective, although the particular organizational leadership challenge may vary depending on the individual school community and/or school district context, the underlying core “leadership dilemma” often remains the same for all of these school/district leaders, namely: How do we, as school leaders, address the apparent “multi-perspectivist logjam” of multiple stakeholder and stakeholder group perspectives that have caused our school/district community to reach such an “instructional improvement” impasse? In short: How do we as a school- and/or district-wide learning community begin to build from our school community’s multiple stakeholder perspectives a *common, shared vision of instructional improvement*—a collaborative vision of school improvement that will enable us to work together to move our school/district forward in positive ways?

These difficult school improvement challenges and the underlying common “leadership dilemma” they reflect—in conjunction with the repeated requests over time I’ve received from school leaders for creative professional

learning and development ideas on how to better prepare their school district's educators and community members to be able to address these challenges in effective, team-centered ways—led me to initiate the *School Leadership Case Simulation (SLCS) Project*. A brief overview of the SLCS Project and its unique “immersive-learning” approach to building educators and community stakeholders’ collective instructional teaming capacity for achieving school turnaround success is presented in the next section.

2. SLCS Project Overview and Case Design Features

The School Leadership Case Simulation (SLCS) Project Multimedia Lab was initiated at Texas Tech University in 1996-1998 with major grant funding support (totaling US \$400,000) from the Sid W. Richardson Foundation (Fort Worth, Texas), the Abell-Hanger Foundation (Midland, Texas), and the Franklin Charitable Trusts (Post, Texas). The SLCS Project Multimedia Lab came about in response to multiple requests I had been receiving during that time from elementary and secondary campus principals throughout Texas who were inquiring if I might be able to provide them with more context-specific and useful staff development / organizational team-learning programs for their teachers and school community stakeholders. According to these school administrators, they and their fellow educators were feeling frustrated and overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of the instructional improvement challenges besetting their “high-needs” schools and school districts (“high-needs” schools and school districts being defined as: schools/districts with insufficient personnel and fiscal resources to address the often deeply entrenched and intractable learning improvement challenges associated with meeting the learning and social development needs of diverse student populations) [8, 13]. Indeed, many of these school principals confided in me that they felt that, in many instances, they as campus leaders—along with their educator colleagues and school community stakeholders in their individual school settings—had reached what they felt was a brick wall as a result of their own multiple, unsuccessful attempts to address their “high-needs” schools’ instructional improvement challenges. For these school leaders, their school community’s instructional improvement challenges had grown so unwieldy and unmanageable that they had morphed into intractable *instructional improvement dilemmas*—dilemmas for which they and their colleagues could find no workable solutions.

In response to these school leaders’ requests for assistance, I began thinking seriously during this same time period about the possibilities of tapping into what I perceived to be the inherent case development and analysis potential of available multimedia hardware and software as new kinds of *team learning tools and resources* for transforming the nature of staff development and organizational learning in elementary and secondary school contexts. It occurred to me that these digital multimedia tools and resources could be utilized in

creative ways by school improvement consultants, such as myself, as a means to rethink and transform how we might approach the design and delivery of context-specific, meaningful staff development / organizational team-learning programs for educators and education stakeholders in these “high-needs” school communities (i.e., school communities with limited resources confronting multiple, intractable instructional improvement challenges).

Following this intuition, I proceeded to develop in earnest, through experimenting and refining multiple prototypes (during a three-year period immediately prior to receiving the initial 1996-1998 external funding), the basic design concept undergirding the School Leadership Case Simulation (SLCS) Project’s *multimedia case development organizational team-learning* approach. There is a well-established literature that already exists on “traditional teacher cases” and the value of teachers writing reflectively about their own “individual teaching experiences” in their classrooms as a form of personal “professional development” [22, 23]. The core idea at the center of the SLCS project substantively extends and deepens this traditional concept of teachers developing year-to-year cases about their classroom teaching in important ways. The SLCS project’s “multimedia case development organizational team-learning” approach transforms traditional staff/professional development programs through providing whole groups of campus-based educators and school community stakeholders with a creative means to develop “multimedia cases” about their own *team-centered* instructional challenges. The SLCS project’s unique design concept accomplishes this through leveraging the “collaborative case development” process itself in conjunction with the storytelling power of available digital movie-making tools and theatrical production techniques to create a *full-immersion learning experience* for groups of education stakeholders. This design concept enables whole groups of educators and school community stakeholders *working together as organizational case learning teams* to examine in a very intensive way their own context-specific, school community-based leadership and learning improvement challenges—and the multiple perspectives fueling these challenges—in significant detail. The “full-immersion” aspect of this team-learning experience is achieved through providing educators and school community stakeholders with a multimedia technology-integrated means for investigating in-depth the root causes of their own context-specific school community leadership and instructional improvement dilemma challenges—and, importantly, a means for developing practical, collaborative solutions to these challenges—through learning how to work together in a very different way: as a *multimedia case production team*.

SLCS Multimedia Case Design Key Features

School Leadership Case Simulation (SLCS) Project case simulation development activities (which began during the initial 1996-98 funding period and have continued to expand through subsequent funding years) consisted of university-based SLCS project researchers and multimedia design

specialists working collaboratively over extended time-periods with multiple teams of educators and school community stakeholders in the regional schools and school districts throughout Texas that participated in the project. Broadcast-quality betacam SP cameras, audio microphone and mixing equipment, and digital nonlinear editing system hardware and software (i.e., Macromedia Director multimedia editing/production software) were utilized by project researchers and school participants to facilitate field production work and to support case simulation design and post-production refinement efforts. Individual SLCS “case development teams” assigned to each participating school consisted of a variety of personnel, including multimedia specialists in camera and lighting, dramatic arts, digital editing, post-production, and instructional design—who worked in close collaboration with school community educators and stakeholders to develop each SLCS case simulation.

Multimedia case simulation project work at each participating school site (involving university specialists in camera and lighting, dramatic arts, digital editing, and post-production working in tandem with school community educators and community stakeholders “case team” participants) included a number of key multimedia production activities, including: (1) selecting and articulating individual school leadership cases (involving case teams delineating multiple school community challenges, themes, etc. present in each dilemma situation); (2) storyboarding individual case video scenes; (3) rehearsing and filming case scenes (involving actual school community members themselves studying and taking on case “roles” of other school stakeholders with varying perspectives); (4) researching, obtaining, and organizing relevant case materials (e.g., demographic information on student and school community populations, school performance and improvement data, available content information and resources relating to the case, etc.); (5) preparing various video, graphic, and text databases; (6) laying out, editing, and refining the multimedia presentation; and (7) developing reflective thinking and decision making prompts, user response/data collection mechanisms, and filmed “multiple stakeholder perspectives” discussions on individual case challenges for inclusion in each case simulation. Instructional technology specialists in digital video capture, non-linear editing, and multimedia production were important members of case simulation development teams throughout the lengthy process of envisioning, designing, and producing individual school cases. Multimedia case simulation production activities at each participating school site typically involved university and site-based case team participants working

collaboratively through a period of one calendar year.

Each of the SLCS multimedia case simulations developed by the “university–school community case teams” were based directly on the actual “real-life” school leadership dilemma situations experienced by individual school community educators (principals, teachers, instructional specialists, school counselors, diagnosticians, etc.) and community stakeholders (parents, community support agencies, school board members, etc.) at each campus site. A unique feature of case production work—and an extended SLCS production activity that involved school community-based “case team” members in becoming immersed in intensive collaborative case development and analysis—was the intensive effort invested by groups of administrators, teachers, instructional staff specialists, and community members at each school in discussing, analyzing, and then scripting their own “school leadership case dilemma”. These case scripting and development activities immersed individual school community case team members directly in confronting and analyzing the deeply engrained and unresolved organizational leadership issues (both instructional and socio-political in nature) driving their school’s instructional improvement case challenges. Importantly, these activities served to help these stakeholders begin to explore and more fully understand how their own school organizational leadership and instructional improvement dilemma challenges were often being fueled by the multiple, conflicting (and entrenched) passionate perspectives of various stakeholders and stakeholder groups regarding these challenges. This in-depth, multi-perspectivist analysis of the context-specific school organizational leadership and instructional improvement challenges confronting each school community case team was a central feature of case development project work completed at each participating school site.

The following set of figures illustrates key features of the multimedia case simulations’ interactive design. The SLCS case simulation’s interactive design employs a school leadership office as a visual, organizing metaphor and access interface for case simulation users (Figure 1). Multiple databases routinely used by school leaders (e.g., student demographic information, school performance data, personnel records, etc.) are easily accessible within this digital office environment. Through engaging with this office environment, case simulation users can: (1) obtain information regarding specific national and state standards each case addresses; (2) access online virtual mentors; and (3) search case-relevant information contained in digital file folders within the simulated office environment.

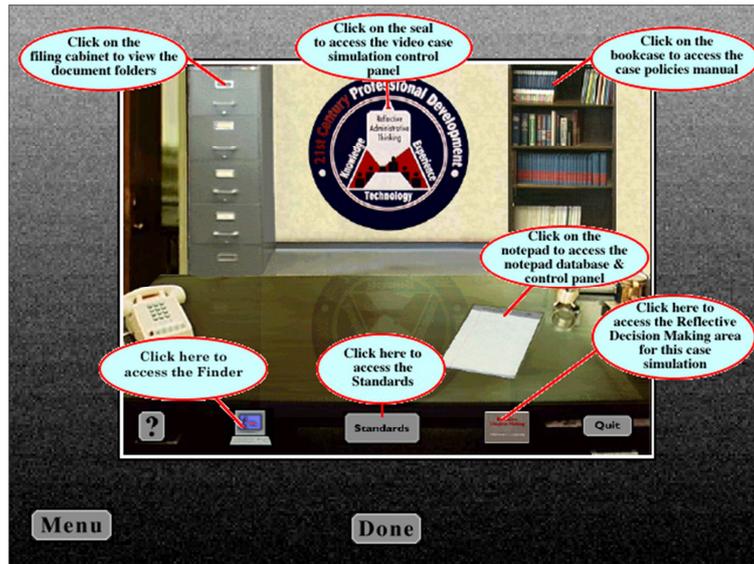


Figure 1. Navigational design template featuring “school leadership office” interactive team-learning environment and multiple resource database links.

The Case Video Scenes Database (Figure 2)—a central interactive feature of the multimedia case simulation design—allows case simulation users to view short scenes portraying multiple stakeholder perspectives and situations informing the overall case dilemma. These individual case scenes (developed collaboratively by the school-based team of educators and community stakeholders studying their own school leadership dilemma challenges) portray interactive clashes or “critical incidents” among multiple stakeholders and their conflicting perspectives on critical school leadership issues, and highlight how these interactive encounters contribute to the overall school leadership case dilemma. As an important dimension of case development activities, each school leadership team developing their own context-specific school leadership case worked intensively on scripting and producing multiple “critical incident” scenes for inclusion in the case simulation—each individual scene capturing important interactive encounters between/among

multiple school stakeholders and stakeholder groups holding conflicting beliefs and perspectives regarding their school’s instructional improvement challenges. A “video mark” frame analysis function incorporated into the multimedia case interactive design allows case users to identify and “digitally mark” specific portions of individual video case scenes (both individual frames and scene sections) for further team analysis (Figure 3). This “video mark” function enables case users (working either individually or together as a team) to zoom in on specific details of stakeholder interactions within individual scene segments, and analyze in detail nuanced aspects of individual stakeholders’ beliefs and perspectives portrayed in these individual scene segments that are fueling the school community’s particular instructional leadership dilemma situation. Case team members can develop their written critical analyses of selected “video marked” scene frame sections and then save these in the multimedia case simulation’s archive files.

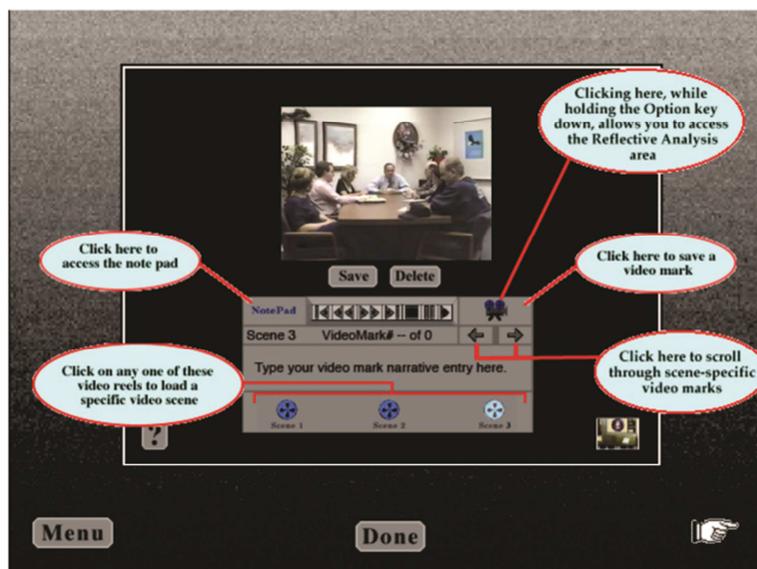


Figure 2. Case video scenes database area incorporating “video mark” frame analysis function.



Figure 3. Individual “video marked” scene frames and scene frame sections selected for further case team analysis.

School leadership teams are able to sort and further analyze their collective “video-marked” scenes within the multimedia case design’s *Reflective Analysis* area (Figure 4). Working within this Reflective Analysis area, school leadership team members can conduct cross-scene comparative analyses of various “video-marked” scenes (which can be keyed to current, relevant national and state school leadership accountability standards included in the case simulation’s accessible digital databases), examining in detail specific critical incidents involving multi-perspectivist clashes between/among multiple stakeholders and stakeholder groups and how these multi-perspectivist conflicts have contributed to the case’s dilemma situation. As part of their cross-scene comparative analyses, case users can engage in “what-if scenario” discussions to consider how

individual stakeholders portrayed in identified scene segments could have perhaps interacted differently with their school community colleagues if they had expended the time and effort earlier on to develop a more insightful understanding of the underlying beliefs fueling the passionately-held perspectives of other stakeholders regarding the school’s instructional improvement challenges. These “cross-scene comparative analyses” team discussions can be quite useful for campus-based school leadership teams to engage in—particularly for leadership teams who are needing to build collaborative, multi-stakeholder understandings and a shared vision of purposeful decision-making action in response to their school community’s instructional improvement challenges.

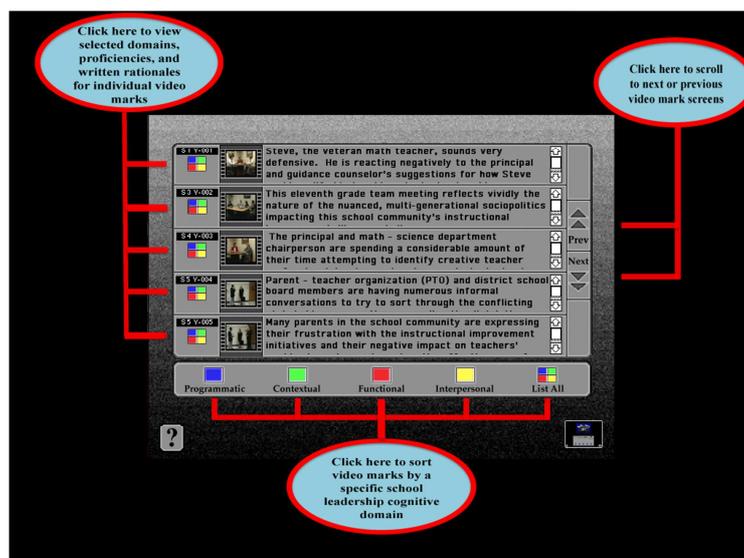


Figure 4. Case reflective analysis area showing specific examples of school case team members’ comparative cross-scene “video mark” analyses along with school leadership performance standards sorting functionality.

Finally, case users can access case scene reflective analysis “expert panel” discussions (by seasoned school leaders knowledgeable about case dilemma challenges portrayed in the case simulation) to further inform and guide their team-centered strategic leadership action planning within the multimedia case’s *Reflective Decision Making* area (Figure 5). Case users can view these expert panel discussion video segments to glean insights from experienced school leadership consultants on important dimensions of the case dilemma situation, including obtaining insights related to various “organizational impact factors” that should be considered when engaging in collaborative school leadership decision-making (such as how to effectively mine, analyze, and leverage available data to inform instructional planning and decision-making; optimizing stakeholder communication channels; designing and implementing comprehensive progress monitoring systems to track instructional program interventions; etc.). These “expert panel” video segments can be especially useful to school leadership case teams as they work collaboratively to generate their own focused short- and long-term action plans to address their school’s context-specific instructional improvement challenges.

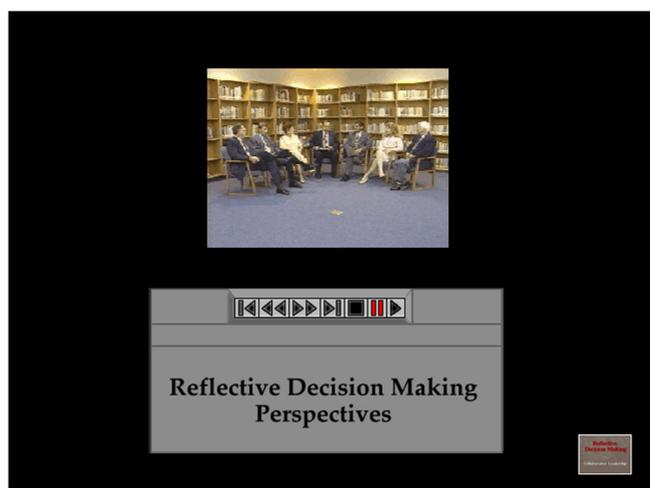


Figure 5. Case reflective decision making area presenting multiple “expert panel” video segments for case team review.

Collectively, the above “multimedia design features” enable school leadership team multimedia case users to engage together in a fully immersive and intensive way in: (1) exploring both the “macro” and “micro” dimensions of the organizational and sociopolitical aspects of their own campus-specific instructional improvement dilemma situation; (2) examining the nuanced interactive dynamics of stakeholder belief conflicts and how these conflicts could be a significant contributing factor in explaining the underlying root causes of their school community’s overall dilemma situation; and (3) utilizing case team members’ collaborative, team-centered case scene analyses as a means to reframe their school leadership thinking based on new team-centered insights and shared understandings to generate realistic, implementable sets of school improvement action strategies.

In combination, the above multimedia case design elements provide school community stakeholders—working together as a case production and analysis team—with a new set of case-specific digital tools and resources to assist them in exploring how to *think differently and work together in new ways* to develop their own instructional teaming capacity for school turnaround success. For those readers interested in learning more about the case development processes engaged in by the teams of SLCS university researchers, interactive case simulation designers, and school-based leadership teams who collaborated together in individual school community SLCS project activities during the course of the multi-year project, detailed descriptions of “individual school case” multimedia development activities of case teams at various elementary, middle, and high school case development sites can be found in several earlier published reports [5, 6, 7].

3. Lessons Learned from Collective, Multi-Year SLCS Project Activities

In the section below, five important *lessons learned* emerging from collective SLCS project work conducted over a period of two decades—from the project’s inception to the present—by multiple teams of university researchers, multimedia production specialists, and school community stakeholders (educators and community members) in the multiple schools and school districts participating in SLCS project multimedia case development activities are highlighted and discussed. Practical insights gleaned from collective, multi-year project work engaged in by the multiple teams of school community case development participants and university researchers working together in project activities about *team-centered organizational learning*, how to effectively navigate the challenging *socio-politics of school turnarounds*, and how to build *instructional teaming capacity* among school community education stakeholders to bring about transformative change and positive organizational renewal in “high-needs” schools and school districts are presented.

Lesson No. 1: Education leaders can energize teachers’ instructional teaming efforts, both on their own campuses and within their school districts, through designing and implementing “*full immersion*” *team learning experiences* that focus specifically on helping teachers and community stakeholders learn how to work together as “instructional team collaborators” to effectively analyze their school community’s own context-specific instructional improvement challenges and ongoing student learning performance data as a means to drive demonstrable school improvement.

Designing and implementing meaningful “*full immersion*” *team learning experiences* for educators and community stakeholders—with the provision of appropriate professional development (PD) programs for campus-level teaching staff and participating community stakeholders that include *proactive modeling* by administrators and highly knowledgeable, experienced teachers of fundamental

concepts and operational strategies associated with the practice of authentic, data-intensive instructional teaming—are critical efforts that school leaders should engage in to support their campus-based and district-wide instructional turnaround initiatives. Whatever the specific instructional turnaround initiative may be [for example: developing a STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) program in a middle/junior high or high school; initiating a STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, math) program at a designated elementary campus within the district; integrating instructional technologies into teachers’ student performance data analysis and student support planning; enhancing secondary students’ post-secondary readiness potential through incorporating Early College courses into the high school curriculum, etc.], finding creative ways to involve teachers and community stakeholders as directly as possible in the design, development, and implementation of these programs can go a long way toward: 1) nurturing a “team leadership mentality” among all participants; and 2) helping teachers and other stakeholders *experience for themselves*—and, thus, be able to grasp and internalize—the “multiple learning payoffs” that the initiative offers (both for students’ learning as well as for teachers and other stakeholders’ own individual and professional team learning).

Approaching the design of effective instructional teaming for teachers and related instructional staff as a “*full immersion*” experience can significantly enhance the potential for advancing teachers’ “deep thinking” about their own instructional practices. Indeed, based on my own work over the past twenty-five years as a school improvement staff developer, the only real way adult educators will become genuinely enthusiastic about new kinds of instructional practices (such as data-intensive instructional teaming and the application of digital instructional technologies to classroom teaching and learning) is if they can *experience directly the “learning payoffs”*—that is, the “professional learning benefits”—of instructional teaming practices for themselves, on their own terms. Teachers need the time and space to experience and internalize the benefits of the new tools and practices on their own and within their own grade-and/or departmental-level teams. That is why savvy education leaders who want to nurture positive, sustainable “instructional teaming cultures” in their schools and districts constantly seek out creative ways to provide teachers who are involved in working in grade-level and/or departmental instructional teams with opportunities to become fully immersed and engaged in proactive ways in *actually using* data-intensive instructional teaming practices and digital instructional technologies as integrated means to jumpstart and energize their professional learning.

Teachers need to be given time to: 1) *become familiar on their own terms* with the new tools and practices (such as data-intensive instructional teaming practices and digital instructional planning tools and resources); and then, after teachers (working individually and together in teams) begin to develop some self-confidence in internalizing and using these tools and practices, teachers can then begin 2) to start

creatively *integrating* these technologies into their own instructional planning and teaching. Importantly, most teachers only really begin to appreciate the teaching and learning “payoffs” that can accrue to them and their colleagues from new digital learning tools and data-intensive instructional teaming practices when they actually start using these tools and practices in meaningful, productive ways. It is only after teachers become fully engaged as a campus-based instructional team in ongoing immersive and data-intensive activities—structured team activities such as “deep data digs”, in which teachers collaboratively explore their own students’ learning performance data and work to uncover the root causes of students’ learning problems—will these teachers be able to glean meaningful, data-supported insights about the kinds of specific intervention strategies they will need to formulate to properly address students’ learning improvement needs.

Educators and community stakeholders at individual campuses may want to consider the multimedia case development techniques described in this article as a potentially useful means to invigorate their instructional team building, or they may come up with their own creative ideas for building their instructional teaming capacity for school turnaround success. There are many excellent opportunities available in schools today for groups of educators and community stakeholders to engage in creative team building. Some of these include such teaming activities as: developing and/or refining the school’s online website; creating and uploading grade- and department-level web pages to the campus’s main website; working together on various Google Docs (Google applications) projects [note: see Lerman and Hicks (2010) *Retool Your School: The Educator’s Essential Guide to Google’s Free Power Apps* [16] for an excellent overview of Google application tools and resources available to educators]; designing, planning, and delivering interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary instructional units centered around cross-disciplinary concepts required in the grade-level curriculum; developing streaming video lessons to enhance students’ flipped classroom learning experiences [note: streaming video lessons enables students to watch instructional videos at home and then receive teacher-driven, targeted application support of the lesson concepts presented in the videos during regular class time], etc. Most importantly, all of these kinds of creative development activities provide educators and community stakeholders with robust opportunities for: 1) expanding and deepening their own context-specific instructional team-learning practices; and 2) increasing their collective capacity for school turnaround success.

Lesson No. 2: To increase the potential for success of any school instructional improvement initiative, be sure to incorporate *relevant and customized professional training and development* for educators as an integral design component of the improvement initiative.

The provision at both the individual campus and school district level of carefully designed and relevant *professional development opportunities* to help teachers learn about the

concept of data-intensive instructional teaming and acquire practical, implementable strategies on how to engage in meaningful instructional teaming practices in their own school contexts is a critical component of effective school turnaround leadership. One key insight related to any kind of school-based and/or school district-wide learning improvement initiative is that unless school and district leaders engage systematically in the requisite planning and make the funding/resource commitment to include very carefully designed “focused and relevant” *professional training and development (PD)* as an integral and ongoing component of the implementation initiative—i.e., customized PD that directly addresses the ongoing, “initiative-specific” professional learning and instructional support needs of teachers and administrators in the district—these kinds of learning improvement initiatives will stall over time and ultimately fail. For example, in any kind of technology-integrated instructional improvement initiative, such as the multi-year SLCS project effort profiled in this article, the success of the improvement initiative to a large extent is contingent on the ability of school/district leaders, working in tandem with institutional and/or agency-related project co-partners, to incorporate directly into the design of the learning improvement initiative some ongoing opportunities for teachers, instructional coaches, campus principals and assistant principals, and other education personnel involved to have access to relevant and customized *professional training and development support*. Moreover, this professional training and development support should be integrated as seamlessly as possible directly into the learning improvement project design itself. The purposes of the training and development should be to: 1) provide education personnel with the “*just-in-time*” *knowledge and skills* they need to be able to participate knowledgeably and confidently in learning improvement initiative activities; and, in doing so to 2) position school and district personnel to be able to reap the maximum degree of *professional learning payoffs* they can from their collective involvement in project work.

For example, even at the secondary level (middle/junior high school and high school), students will not automatically immerse themselves in using digital learning tools and resources to enhance their own content-learning engagement in “technology-integrated” STEM-focused, problem-based learning (PBL) learning projects without being guided and motivated by digitally literate and savvy teachers—teachers who are comfortable with and fully engaged in instructional technology-integrated project planning and delivery themselves. Without teachers’ own substantial *immersion in and engagement with* the digital learning tools at both a training/professional development level and at a technology-integrated instructional design and planning level, PBL classroom learning projects focused on STEM and other content areas will likely not ever generate the kind of enhanced “student content-learning engagement” that will be needed in order for these learning projects to eventually translate into demonstrable student learning performance gains.

In addition to focused professional development on instructional technology-integrated project planning and delivery, teachers in many schools and districts may also need at least some level of training and support on basic “digital literacy development”. This basic digital literacy development should include professional learning opportunities associated with basic digital literacy functions such as: 1) digital information gathering and organization (creating and maintaining digital calendars, newsletters, blog posts); 2) digital media use (using and developing digital movies, pictures, podcasts, webinars/webisodes, sound clips, video games); 3) global interconnectivity and networking (learning how to link to other classrooms, using wikis for collaboration); and 4) digital citizenship (building and maintaining teacher websites and classroom websites as digital portals for social learning and online identity). Importantly, teachers in school districts who have progressed sufficiently in their own basic “digital literacy development” will then be able to engage in substantive, twenty-first-century kinds of *educator career growth activities*. Some examples of these kinds of career growth activities might include such things as: utilizing online blogs as personalized professional development tools; participating on a regular basis in available teacher online social networks such as Classroom 2.0 (www.classroom20.com), etc.

Most importantly, the kinds of instructional programming and delivery support that a school district might design and implement for its personnel need to target not only teachers in the district but also campus-level and central-office administrators as well. The professional development support provided really needs to be geared toward *all* of the district’s instructional and administrative support personnel for the specific reason that effective professional development programs centered on instructional improvement need to be designed in such a way that they contribute to and help build a positive and dynamic *learning improvement culture* that can positively impact all education personnel throughout the district. This district-wide culture of learning improvement should be one that is capable of nurturing in district administrators a “positive instructional improvement mindset” that can inform and guide district leaders’ ongoing *organizational approach* to providing resources for and supporting “teachers’ continuous professional learning” and “students’ learning improvement” at all of the district’s campuses.

One very effective professional development-related “creative immersion strategy” that campus principals can use to help teachers begin to experience for themselves the instructional and professional development payoffs of using available digital learning tools and engaging in data-driven instructional teaming practices is to encourage and assist teachers in creating their own social media and internet-enabled informal *e-learning networks*. Campus principals and teachers can leverage the availability of multiple kinds of web-based social media tools to develop their own campus-based network, including using readily available social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, MySpace, etc.,

and engaging in the creation and use of teacher blogs, micro-blogs, and wikis. Teachers and campus administrators can also participate in multiple, well-established e-learning networks that have proliferated in recent years on the World Wide Web, such as New Tech Network (<https://newtechnetwork.org>) and EdVisions (<http://edvisions.org>). As teachers become comfortable in using these “e-learning PD networks” to communicate and share instructional insights, tips, and resources with each other (both within their own campus and with teachers at other campuses), over time they typically begin to better appreciate and internalize the “learning payoffs” of these tools and, as a result, become more enthusiastic about planning together to design technology-integrated instructional units and lessons for their students. Through experiencing the learning benefits of using these tools themselves, teachers begin to “buy into” and “take ownership in” the positive learning payoffs that can come from fully integrating and leveraging the power of digital instructional technologies as tools to enhance twenty-first-century learning for all learners. The point of cultivating new kinds of “e-learning networks”, of course, is not to have campus and district personnel simply use social media communication and sharing tools as ends in themselves, but to leverage these tools to engage education personnel (teachers, principals, instructional coaches, counselors, and other staff) in dynamic ways in immersive “teaching and learning improvement” projects—such as learning how to leverage digital tools to enhance teachers’ data-driven review and analysis of students’ learning problems and to support teachers’ instructional intervention projects—to address students’ identified learning needs.

Lesson No. 3: Identify teachers on your campus with the instructional knowledge and experiences who can become powerful *modelers of effective instruction* and *enablers of positive change* for others.

Nurturing authentic buy-in/ownership by significant numbers of teachers, students, parents, and community members in new instructional improvement initiatives can be a real challenge for school change leaders. This challenge can seem even more daunting when a school is seeking to build positive momentum toward generating a consistent track record of incremental instructional improvement success over time in the overall quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning occurring on their campus.

Today’s school leaders must respond to the demands of district- and state-wide accountability measures that require the integration of readily available instructional technology tools (such as laptops, tablets/chrome books, ipads, ipods, and the like) and internet-enabled collaboration resources (such as: Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, MySpace, etc.) into classroom teaching and learning as a core requirement for individual schools to meet their state-mandated learning improvement goals *and* to adequately prepare today’s students for college, and for twenty-first-century careers in the workforce, job training programs, or the military. As a result, school leaders are continually pressed to find new,

creative ways to motivate and support teachers in their ongoing efforts to integrate relevant instructional technologies (including mobile devices and social media teaching and learning resources) into their classroom planning and teaching. Savvy campus change leaders can work to identify knowledgeable teachers in their schools who understand and are enthusiastic about implementing any number of instructional improvement initiatives and tap these teachers’ positive energies to both model effective technology-integrated instructional practices and build support among the school’s general instructional staff for identified instructional improvement initiatives.

For example, a principal may be fortunate to have one or more tech-savvy teachers on the school’s teaching staff who received excellent training during their university teacher preparation program on how to effectively integrate available instructional technologies into team-centered lesson planning and classroom teaching. This could include one or more teachers who may be proficient in such areas as: 1) integrating various kinds of instructional technology-driven teaching and learning tools—including classroom data projectors, smart boards, laptops, tablets, personal cell phones, ipads, and ipods, and online information posting and sharing resources such as wikis, blogs, podcasts, vodcasts, and other social media—into the design, planning/development, and delivery of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary instructional units; 2) developing compressed streaming video lessons to enhance students’ learning in flipped classroom learning environments; 3) helping students design and upload multimedia, content-rich web pages onto the school’s website to showcase their various instructional unit collaborative learning projects for presentation to other classes of students, parents, and community members, etc. These teachers with technology-integration experience can serve as powerful *modelers of technology-integrated instruction* to other members of their grade- and/or department-level instructional teams and assist teacher colleagues as their teams learn how to plan, deliver, and evaluate instructional lessons and units together effectively using these instructional tools and resources. Moreover, these teachers can serve as *readily available support personnel* and *enablers of positive change* for faculty generally across the school’s teaching staff—particularly in terms of: 1) working with faculty who may need some assistance in getting up to speed in becoming familiar with and using these instructional tools and resources; and 2) helping faculty change their attitudes about the value of these technologies as means to turbo-charge their team’s instructional planning and delivery of technology-enhanced lessons and to enhance their team’s monitoring and assessment of students’ learning performance progress.

Most importantly, these teachers can serve as invaluable *change agent collaborators*—working in partnership with campus administrators seeking to build momentum on their campuses for developing and enhancing their teaching staff’s use of effective “technology-integrated” instructional teaming practices.

Lesson No. 4: Address the “socio-politics of school turnarounds” in a proactive manner through *directly involving diverse school community stakeholder groups* who will be affected by the learning improvement initiative in all phases of initiative design, planning, implementation, and evaluation.

Campus leaders can add more positive change energy to their school turnaround efforts through involving multiple, diverse school community stakeholders as integral members of the instructional teaming process. To ensure authentic stakeholder “buy-in” to instructional improvement initiatives, and to proactively address the school community socio-politics that can sometimes develop when community stakeholders harbor conflicting perspectives regarding the merits of any significant school improvement initiative, it is critically important that a diverse array of school community stakeholders—including campus-level faculty and administrators, students, parents, and community members—be involved directly from the outset in shaping and customizing the design of the instructional improvement initiative. This should include multiple stakeholders being actively involved in developing the initiative’s implementation and evaluation plans. It is always a good idea to invite parents and community members to become active partners and participants in campus-level instructional improvement projects as a means to: 1) expand and deepen multiple stakeholders’ understandings of diverse community group perspectives; 2) build community-wide consensus and ownership in agreed-upon instructional improvement efforts; and 3) nurture new kinds of enduring school–community partnership relationships.

It is indeed true that nurturing a “relational culture” in which teachers work to nurture “respectful, trusting relationships” with students and parents is an important dimension of professional teaching practice [17]. However, this “relational culture–building” in school-based teaching and learning communities is only one (albeit important) dimension of the larger challenge of nurturing an overall effective “instructional culture” in schools. The other critical dimension is the challenge for school leaders to work with teachers to help them develop the kind of *professional academic mindset* that is appropriate for twenty-first-century, real-world “deeper” learning. This academic mindset is one that values the importance of teachers working collaboratively (both among themselves and with businesses and other community entities) to create robust instructional environments that challenge and empower students (as well as all learning stakeholders in the school community) to become *immersed directly* and to *take ownership* in their own active “real world–connected” learning. This kind of professional academic mindset can go a long way toward addressing in positive ways the often-contentious “socio-politics of school turnarounds” that can foment in school communities when diverse groups of education stakeholders harbor divergent views regarding the merits of any particular new instructional improvement initiative.

For example, in the SLCS multimedia case development

project work conducted at the various school sites described in the opening section of this article, university and campus-based partners worked diligently to design collaborative project activities that had the potential to nurture positive levels of trust among all participants. This positive trust-building environment served to empower these participants to want to engage in authentic multi-perspectivist sharing and collaborative consensus–building efforts that otherwise would not have been possible. As school community stakeholders in the various school/district project sites learned how to *work together in new ways* within their multimedia case development project work, these same stakeholders—through carefully scrutinizing and thinking deeply about each others’ individual perspectives and beliefs regarding their school’s teaching and learning improvement challenges and, in doing so, considering their common school learning improvement dilemma challenges from a new “communal perspective”—were able to construct a more meaningful, team-centered “shared vision” of how to move their school community forward in purposeful ways. University and school/district stakeholders working together as teams of collaborators in SLCS project activities found that this process of *working intentionally within a collaborative “immersive learning” project environment* (such as in the kind of team-centered, creative project development environment associated with the SLCS project work described in this article) to build and nurture a “shared vision” of a positive way forward to ensure their school’s ongoing learning improvement success can greatly enhance the prospects for school leaders and community stakeholders of ultimately being successful in addressing—in proactive and school–community stakeholder–inclusive ways—the very real “socio-politics of school turnarounds”.

Lesson No. 5: Avoid becoming an “*isolated island*” of campus-based instructional change and learning improvement innovation within your larger school district community. Work to ensure that your campus becomes an “*innovation hub*” of instructional turnaround practices and a model of learning improvement success that can benefit other schools throughout your district.

Creative campus-based school leaders (principals, teachers, instructional coaches, school counselors, and other instructional staff) at individual schools within a district who are committed to learning how to work together as “learning improvement data teams” to tackle their own campus’s entrenched school turnaround and improvement challenges (such as improving students’ comprehensive literacy skills development in early elementary grades, or implementing STEM-focused, problem-based learning initiatives in middle/junior high and high school settings) can sometimes end up becoming victims of their own success. All too often, these school leaders—campus principals and assistant principals working with their most enthusiastic and talented teachers who have “bought in” to the creative ideas associated with the campus’s particular instructional improvement initiatives and are working together as a team to implement intervention design strategies that are beginning to produce

measurable learning performance improvement gains—can end up creating a situation in which their individual campuses can potentially become *isolated islands of innovation* (that is, *islands of creative instructional change and learning improvement*) within a larger (and more stagnant) school district environment. These forward-looking “innovation island” individual elementary and secondary campuses—i.e., led by resourceful campus administrators and teachers who are engaged in working in creative multi-stakeholder collaborative, immersive ways to address their teaching and learning improvement challenges—can become effectively “isolated” from the rest of the schools in their district. Compared to these *island of innovation* schools, school leaders at other campuses in the district may be relatively less creative in their instructional change and learning improvement thinking and, as a result, are less advanced in their ability to provide the kinds of differentiated, student engagement-sensitive, and academically challenging instructional programming that is needed to effectively support the learning needs of their diverse learners. Importantly, although the creative “instructional improvement initiatives” may have produced some positive results on the individual “innovation-island” campuses (largely, because of the dogged, sustained efforts of the creative principals and teachers who pushed to implement the initiatives “no matter what the obstacles”), the instructional improvement initiatives, in one sense, really “failed” to a certain extent. This is the case, particularly, when viewing the learning improvement initiatives in terms of their potential for enhancing the entire district’s ability to meet the learning support needs of all of the district’s diverse learners moving forward. In these kinds of situations, the challenge for the school district becomes turning these “innovation island” campuses into *innovation hubs*—that is, transforming these individual successful turnaround campuses into “centers of creative instructional improvement and intervention design thinking” that project and share their creative ideas outward to others and that become “positive resources” for school leaders at other campuses throughout the district.

Campus leaders who are achieving incremental success in their own school turnaround learning improvement efforts should always remain mindful of the broader benefits that can accrue directly to their school district through collaboratively sharing their ideas and strategies with leadership colleagues throughout their district. Campus leaders of “innovation hub” schools can seek to leverage their own learning improvement success stories as means to expand and deepen improvement opportunities for educators in schools throughout their district in a number of specific ways. Some of these include: 1) codifying the key innovation ideas and effective data teaming methods from their own school turnaround efforts into modular school staff “professional development” (PD) programs that school leaders (teachers, instructional coaches, school counselors, principals and assistant principals, and other instructional personnel) in other schools across the district can learn from; 2) creating and managing their own campus-based *school community learning improvement website* that profiles their campus’s ongoing school turnaround and improvement

efforts, including showcasing some of the innovative intervention designs and program implementation strategies utilized by their school’s instructional improvement teams; and 3) working with district central office personnel to identify potential *school improvement funding opportunities* (perhaps through regional education foundations and/or through partnerships with area businesses) to obtain additional financial resource support to “turn-key” their learning improvement initiatives into broader, long-term district-wide programs. In connection with this turn-keying idea, school/district leaders can even explore the possibility of creating a “school turnaround leadership *regional consortium*” comprised of multiple school districts (either districts situated within one contiguous geographic region or districts broadly dispersed throughout the state) with similar learning stakeholder demographics and learning improvement challenges as a more expansive organizational means to share school turnaround and learning improvement resources and best practices with leadership colleagues in other districts who are confronting similar challenges. Through engaging in these kinds of collaborative efforts, campus leaders of “innovation hub” schools can help expand and deepen a *shared collaborative culture* of ongoing learning improvement—both within their own school district organization and with other districts—that can benefit multiple populations of diverse learners and education stakeholders.

4. Conclusion

In this article I have presented a brief overview of the *School Leadership Case Simulation (SLCS) Project* along with a description of key features of the project’s unique multimedia case development production design and team-learning activities. I have sought in the article to highlight the SLCS Project’s *immersive-learning* approach to staff development design—an approach that focuses directly on leveraging the creative potential of *moviemaking* as an “organizational case learning tool” for jumpstarting and reenergizing elementary and secondary educators and community stakeholders’ collaborative learning and instructional teaming capacities. Five important *lessons learned* emerging from two decades of collective SLCS project work conducted by multiple teams of university researchers, multimedia production specialists, educators and school community stakeholders in multiple schools and school districts participating in SLCS project activities were presented and discussed. Each individual “lesson learned” yielded multiple sets of “real-world practical insights” regarding the kinds of collaborative teaming processes required for education community stakeholders to be able to engage together purposefully in meaningful and effective instructional improvement in their school communities. These insights centered on three main areas: 1) how to nurture a *team-centered organizational learning culture*; 2) how to effectively navigate the challenging *socio-politics of school turnarounds*; and 3) how to build *instructional teaming capacity* among school community education stakeholders to bring about transformative

change and positive organizational renewal in “high-needs” schools and school districts.

It is hoped that the description of the SLCS project’s “immersive-learning” approach and multimedia case development team-learning activities presented in this article may be of some interest to psychologists and professional learning consultants working with stakeholder groups in a variety of organizational contexts. Moving forward, the collaborative teams of university researchers, multimedia production specialists, and school educators and community stakeholders who are involved in designing and developing new SLCS cases as part of ongoing SLCS project work certainly continue to remain excited about the potential of using *moviemaking* as a creative “organizational case learning tool” for reinvigorating instructional teaming practices in elementary and secondary schools and school districts. Most importantly, our SLCS project teams plan on continuing to stay focused on tackling the difficult school improvement challenges identified in their school communities through learning “how to work together in new ways”—through heeding enthusiastically the clarion call of “lights, camera, *learning improvement* action!”

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