

VOICES OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERS IN THE FIELD OF VISUAL
IMPAIRMENT: HISTORY, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, IMPACT, AND
VISION FOR FUTURE LEADERS

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

This study documented the career development and contributions of 11 established leaders in the field of visual impairment who hold or have held influential positions across the state of Texas in the period 1995-2018. This investigation used Hanson's Integrative Life Planning, Schosseburg's Transition theory, and several adult learning theories as a base for the investigation. Each participant was selected for interview from a pool of leaders identified by award from the state professional organization and who responded to an initial survey about the phenomenon of moving from practitioner to leader in the field.

Profiles of the leaders were developed through collected vitae. Bridling was used as a means of controlling bias and an epoché of the author was developed. Interviews were transcribed, coded, and separated using the phenomenological techniques of horizontalization. Analysis led to the development of meaning clusters both in and between narratives. These clusters were then developed into themes. The study discusses themes around entry into the field, highlights the advancements witnessed and fostered by the leaders, details their hopes and fears for the future, and collects thoughts on the future of leadership in the field. All the leaders showed an incredible passion for and commitment to the field of visual impairment. This was in spite of the fact that most had discovered the field accidentally. Uniformly these leaders felt not enough was being done to develop future leaders. With the identified shortage of trained personnel and the impending departure of many leaders in the field, the collection of this data was both a

means of developing a field history for this period and of transferring knowledge of these leaders to the next generation.

The field is one built on unity of purpose and has had its focus on improving lives of the population served. Advocacy and leadership skills need to be developed across the field as a means of improving these individual lives. However, to maintain current standards and to aid continued improvement, more needs to be done in regards to succession planning and training professionals in what it takes to transition to leadership.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to family. The support of my wife and 5 children has been essential to the completion of this project. To my daughters, Marlowe and Iris and my sons, Ryan, Trey, and JT, I am so very thankful for your patience and understanding. Special thanks to my wife Heather, the love of my life, who has always been my strongest advocate and biggest supporter. I cannot comprehend how I would be here today without her continued help and care, and too often, her forgiveness. Finally, I want to also dedicate this study to my parents and in-laws who have consistently jumped in to assist us, been models of love and faith in God, and served to encourage me and my family along the way.

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investigation serves as a means of documenting your contribution to the lives of individuals with visual impairments.

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ACRONYMS AND NOMENCLATURE

AER	The Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired = Professional organization
AVIT	Alliance of and for Visually Impaired Texans – Advocacy organization
COMS	Certified Orientation & Mobility Specialist
ECC	Expanded core curriculum for students with visual impairments
ESC	Education Service Centers – Network of 20 regional centers that are spread across Texas.
Long-term leader	For this study, a long-term leaders is one who has held a leadership position in visual impairment for 20+ years and who has been a witness to the changes in the field over that time
O&M	The field of orientation and mobility—services and skills that enable individuals who are blind or visually impaired to travel independently in both familiar and unfamiliar environments
TVI	Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments
TSBVI	Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired
VI	Visually impaired (individuals who are blind or have low vision as well as those who may have concomitant multiple disabilities)

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Visual impairment is a low-incidence disability impacting between 2.2% and 3.2% of the United States population, and less than 1% of school-aged students (Erickson, Lee, & von Schrader, 2014; Leonard, 2002). The field of education and training of individuals to work with persons with visual impairment (subsequently referred to as the field of visual impairment or *the field*) has had a relatively short but eventful history in comparison to education in general. Waves of change have revolutionized the field at various points in time. Leaders worked both individually and in unison to foster change that has positively impacted the lives of students and adults who are visually impaired. Early advances in the field were led by a small group of individuals who made national and international impact. Leaders in each stage propelled the field forward by calling for change, developing innovations, raising expectations, and establishing and revising the standards of services provided (Corn & Lusk, 2010; Huebner, 2000; Scholl, 1986). According to Koestler (1976), these leaders also helped to foster shifts in public perception, expectations, and educational practices that were identified as being essential in order for persons who were blind or visually impaired to be fully participating members of society.

Origination and Progression of the Field of Visual Impairment

Changes to the field of visual impairment have come periodically, as powerful and innovative surges in practices and policies. Leaders at various stages originated, expanded, developed, and specialized the educational services provided to students who

are blind or visually impaired, and revolutionized training of instructors who served this population. After a review of literature, the following stages were developed. (see Table 1 below)

Table 1 – The Progression of the Field of Visual Impairment

Stages, actions, dates, and examples of past leaders

<u>Pioneers and Founders in Visual Impairment</u> <i>(Established the field)</i>	<u>Early Developers</u> <i>(Beginners of innovation and change)</i>	<u>Development of Profession</u> <i>(Instructional standards and personnel preparation)</i>	<u>Modern-day Leaders</u> <i>(Research, extension of field and services to new populations)</i>	<u>Current Leaders</u> <i>(Championed legislation, enacted drastic expansion)</i>
(1830 – 1880s)	(1890 – 1930)	(1930 – 1970)	(1970 – 1995)	(1995 – beyond)
Samuel Howe Helen Keller Francis Campbell Edward Allen Others	Frank Hall John B. Curtis Edward Nolan Robert Irwin	Edwin Allen Georgie Lee Abel Berthold Lowenfeld Paula Moor Virginia Sowell Others	Sam Ashcroft Natalie Barraga Selma Fraiberg Phil Hatlen Sally Mangold Pete Wurtzberger	Legislative innovation Expansion of personnel preparation Outreach Specialized service to unique populations

Pioneers and founders established educational institutions and methods. Early developers moved students (and the training provided to those students) from institutions

to public schools, and brought services to underserved populations. In the development of the profession, leaders in personnel preparation programs helped to cultivate standards, teacher training, and professionalism. Modern-day and Current Leaders further specialized and regionalized the field while continuing to expand the populations served and the services provided.

Pioneers and founders (1830 – 1880s). Founders and leaders like Samuel Gridley Howe, his protégés Edward Allen, Francis Campbell, and Michael Anagnos, transformed both the education and the training of individuals with visual impairments (Koestler, 1976). These leaders also helped to sway public perception about the *educability* of persons with blindness (Lowenfeld, 1946). Howe led the first wave of change, and was considered the most innovative and influential leader in education of persons with visual impairment (Koestler, 1976; Lowenfeld, 1975). His residential school, the New England Institution for the Education of the Blind (later known as the Perkins School for the Blind) served as a model for other schools for the blind (Koestler, 1976). This leadership was demonstrated in the development of educational techniques and by direct training of teacher apprentices (Hatlen, 2000; Roberts, 1986). These residential institutions provided the only available education for students who were blind in the United States through 1900, and were also the only source of specialized training for teachers who worked with this population (American Foundation for the Blind, 1954; Roberts 1986). These dual training opportunities for students and practitioners/teachers were restricted not only by the capacity of available schools, but also by the fact that several states have never provided a residential school option for students who were

blind (Roberts, 1986). This provenance of educational services for persons with visual impairments, though only directly impacting a small part of the population (Koestler, 1976), provided the bedrock upon which future developments could be made.

The leaders of these residential schools helped to bring attention to the educational needs and capabilities of students who were blind. Howe and other early champions also provided a model for future leaders by challenging the status quo and popular held beliefs of educators and society to show how much individuals who are blind could achieve with proper support and intervention (Allen, 1926; Bledsoe, 1993; Lowenfeld, 1975). In some cases, these pioneering leaders called for reforms and changes in services that would not be accepted or adopted until many years later. As early as 1866, Howe called to eliminate the practice of educating students with disabilities in separate residential facilities, and highlighted the importance of home and community in the education of individuals with visual and other impairments (Wolfensburger, 1969).

Early developers: Innovation and push for change (1890s – 1930). In spite of these early pleas for what is now known in education as *inclusion* (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments, 1997), the first formal program to educate children who are blind in the public school setting did not occur until 1900 (Irwin, 1955). Leaders like Frank Hall, John B. Curtis, and Edward Nolan organized, operated, and modeled the practice in Chicago public schools. The education of children who are blind in the public-school setting has been referred to as “the most important single

factor” (Lowenfeld, 1975, p. 104) and the “most fundamental change” (Koestler, 1976, p. 456) in education of students who are blind.

Leaders like Robert Irwin continued the trend of widening the population and scope of services for persons with vision loss. Irwin began differentiating educational practices for individuals who were *partially sighted* (now referred to as *low vision*) by championing legislative action and placement changes (Koestler, 1976; Roberts, 1986; Hathaway, 1943). Irwin followed the innovative spirit of previous leaders by adding services for students considered partially sighted, and inventions such as two-sided braille printing and talking books; advocacy in state and federal legislation; and the establishment of a nationwide library system to provide braille books to persons with visual impairments (American Printing House, n.d.; Irwin, 1955; Koestler, 1976).

Compulsory education for students who were blind or visually impaired, requiring these students to attend some sort of school, did not begin until the early 1900s. As of 1930, only 39 states in the US legally required parents to send their children who were blind or visually impaired to school (Koestler, 1976). The lack of local educational options and/or the lack of schooling as a requirement often resulted in students who were visually impaired not receiving formal education of any kind. More educational options, and in turn, more professionals with specialized knowledge in visual impairment, were needed to serve this population.

Development of the profession (1930s – 1970). Leaders like Edwin Allen followed the tradition of challenging the status quo by questioning both the quality and the scope of services provided to students in residential schools for the blind, and the

training of the teachers providing services in those schools (Allen, 1926). The apprenticeship model routinely used for training was informal, resulting in incomplete or splintered knowledge to new instructors, and causing wide variations in training and service (Roberts, 1986; Irwin, 1955). In discussing the variations in training accorded through the apprenticeship model, Roberts (1986) stated, “Many school superintendents of the time preferred this pattern [apprenticeship] and resisted university-based teacher preparation because they wanted to foster their own ideas and techniques among their teachers” (p. 12). Those who were trained through the apprentice model often had no teacher training or college/university degrees, and were frequently recruited from the population of individuals who were blind and had themselves graduated from residential schools (Koestler, 1976).

Lowenfeld (1975) posits that as the education of students with visual impairments developed, leaders pushed the field away from an institutional, residential, and structural entity to a study and practice. Trailblazers urged the field to meet local needs and finally recognized of the importance of the family in the education of children who are blind (AFB, 1954). As the need for specialized teachers increased, the apprenticeship model became untenable and incapable of keeping up with demand (Lowenfeld, 1975, p. 342). The development of training standards helped to establish, legitimize, and professionalize the services provided and the field itself. In response, the leaders of this stage codified educator standards, garnered government sponsorship, founded university training programs, and increased their training capacity (Lowenfeld, 1975).

The field of visual impairment slowly began to offer a range of service options; from institutional or residential schools, to centralized resource rooms, to the current model in which visual impairment educational services are provided locally through the use of traveling or itinerant teachers in the home districts and schools of students and their families (American Foundation for the Blind, 1954; Lowenfeld, 1975). Despite this push for local educational options, Koestler (1976) states that as of 1958 over 60% of children with visual impairments were still being educated in residential schools.

New epidemics arose in this era, which introduced new populations of students with varying abilities including a drastic increase in the number of children blinded as infants (Moor, 1968). Baker (2000) detailed that medical advances were now saving the lives of premature babies who may not have survived in previous years. These health-related issues/improvements ushered a large influx not only of students who had visual impairments, but also those who had visual impairments in combination with other serious disabilities and impairments (Hatlen, 2000; Koestler, 1976; Moor, 1968; Roberts, 1986).

As teacher standards were formed and preparation began, basic curricular and training resources were either non-existent or conferred informally to protégés. According to Lowenfeld (1975), all of the original university-level training programs to prepare teachers in visual impairment were directly linked to the established residential schools. The few entities that began training teachers to work with students with visual impairments were responsible for developing their own more formal curriculum. These new university programs showed a clear demarcation from the residential school

apprentice model by seeking more established training, degrees, and certification for teachers (Roberts, 1973). Bishop (1996) highlighted the dearth of formal training materials when she stated, “in 1970, there was only one text on how to teach students with visual impairments” (p. ix). These leaders were in fact innovators in program development, curriculum development, and general personnel preparation of teachers of students with visual impairments, as well as innovators of formal research into the field.

Though several of these early personnel preparation initiatives have since closed (Corn & Spungin, 2002), the impact of those trained is still felt. Lowenfeld (1975) states that “the years between 1950 and 1970 saw the greatest expansion of teacher training courses” (p. 117). The number of training programs went from 15 in 1950 to 35 in 1973 with much aid from federal funding (Lowenfeld, 1975). These inaugural programs increased the number of people educated in the emerging field of study, and in time, increased the number of students with visual impairments who could receive services from these newly-trained professionals. These programs also embraced new options in educational placement and delivery of instruction by cultivating specially trained teachers who could travel from one area to another to better this low incidence population of students in the students’ home districts (AFB, 1954). Training programs and delivery of services to students moved from “special or separated arrangements to integrated ones” (Lowenfeld, 1975, p. 117).

Modern-day leaders (1970 – 1995). The field is presently led by individuals who have fought for and risen to meet the dual challenges of an increasingly heterogeneous population of students with visual impairment and an expansion of

services to meet the disability-specific needs of these individuals (Hatlen, 1990; Lohmeier, Blankenship, & Hatlen, 2009; Spungin & Ferrell, 2007). Early leaders/developers continually worked to broaden the population served by the field. Leaders like Helen Keller championed improved services to all who were blind across her long and distinguished life (Lowenfeld, 1980). Natalie Barraga changed the way the field served students with low vision (Barraga, 2004; Hatlen, 2000). Paula Moor pushed for services for students who were blind and who had concomitant diminished intelligence levels and/or additional disabilities (now called *multiply disabled and visual impaired*, or MDVI). This population of students with MDVI often did not receive any services (Moor, 1968), but now makes up between 50-75% of the population of students with visual impairments in schools (CDC, 2015; Silberman, 2000). Silberman and Sacks (2007) contend that the latest expansion of services includes those with decreased or impaired brain capacity due to neurological visual impairments associated with brain injury/cortical visual impairment. This generation of leaders extended the population beyond blindness to include persons with low vision. In addition, they expanded service delivery to begin from birth, and take place in homes and/or hospitals and in specialized classrooms. Services provided by teachers in the field further broadened to comprehensively address all areas of learning that were impacted by vision loss (Hatlen, 1990; Spungin & Ferrell, 2007).

As the field grew, focus shifted from an institutional or national perspective to a call for regional/state-level leadership, improvement, and legislation to improve education for students who are blind (AFB, 1954). In Texas, local districts were finally

forced to take responsibility for the education of students who were blind with the passage of the 1975 Act for the Blind (Garret, 1976; Texas Education Code, 1975). This bill, introduced in 1974, sought to drastically improve services that had been characterized as anything from inadequate, to indefensible, to victim-making for students who were blind (Preston, 1974). The Texas bill was passed almost simultaneously with the federal Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975). Changes in public perception, along with legislative mandates regarding increased involvement of parents in education and protection of the rights of all person with disabilities, have pushed practitioners (those in the identified areas of special education in general, and visual impairment in particular) to adapt and adjust services and training (Hatlen, 2000; Koestler, 1976; Lowenfeld, 1975; Roberts, 1986).

As the modern stage of change evolved, leaders established policies, support, training, and legislation that improved services to all persons with visual impairment at state, regional, and local levels. These leaders helped train vision professionals to meet new federal legislative guidelines related to appropriate student service environment (Smith & Wild, 2006) and qualification standards for teachers (Steele, Fox, & Harris, 2006). The newly-trained professionals provided the human capital needed to fill the increased number of leadership positions currently held in the field of visual impairment. Though residential schools were established in the 19th century, local programs and services were slow to develop in Texas, as in other states. The largest influx of professionals and practitioners in the field of visual impairment occurred in the years since 1970. Data from a report commissioned by the Texas Legislature in 1971 revealed

that there were only 55 teachers trained in visual impairment (Management Services Associates Inc., 1973). These 55 teachers served 2,300 students who were identified as visually impaired. Another 1,200 students with visual impairments did not receive any services, because at that time services were not mandated for students younger than 6 years old (Management Services Associates Inc., 1973) or those with lower cognitive levels (Moor, 1968). As of 2004, there were 774 professionals in visual impairment serving 7,291 children (Dignan, 2005). This forward transformation of the field and the services provided occurred as current leaders pushed for innovative legislation, established professional outreach networks, continuously worked to enhance personnel preparation, and orchestrated a significant expansion of services to individuals with visual impairments, developing techniques to meet the unique needs of a variety of previously underserved populations.

Background of Problem

The leaders in each developmental period detailed above shared qualities of dedication, advocacy, and innovation. The American Printing House for the Blind (APH) has enshrined many of these individuals in their Hall of Fame for Leaders and Legends of the Blindness Field. The Hall “is dedicated to preserving, honoring, and promoting the tradition of excellence manifested by the specific individuals inducted into the Hall of Fame and through the history of outstanding services provided to people who are blind or visually impaired” (APH Hall of Fame, n.d.). These individuals used their passions, experiences, values, and energies to meet changing needs. In doing so,

they developed themselves into *authentic leaders* (George, 2003; Shamir & Eilam, 2005).

Although a generation of leaders passing into retirement might be considered a challenge to many fields or vocations like teaching (Fibkins, 2012), or nursing (Bleich et al., 2009), the impact of the loss of leadership and knowledge has been shown to have a more significant impact in specialization fields like aeronautics, petrochemical engineering (DeLong, 2004), electric power (Ashworth, 2006), special education, and special education university faculty (Smith, Pion, Tyler, Sindelar, & Rosenberg, 2001). The field of visual impairment, with its heterogeneous population and varied training needs, is a highly-specialized vocation, and according to the American Foundation for the Blind (2006), may face a more acute shortage of leadership than other specialties due to the low-incidence nature of the discipline. It is feared that visual impairment as a field may face the same leadership shortages as educational entities described by Leubsdorf (2006), who contends that “many institutions are largely unprepared for what lies ahead” (p. A. 51). Shortages in visual impairment may be more dramatic in areas of leadership and research as university programs focus on the development of new practitioners as opposed to developing leaders and/or researchers (Corn & Spungin, 2002).

The leaders in visual impairment are specialized and significant in the same way a crucial individual may be to an industry or organization. Without planning, “the rare or difficult-to-imitate knowledge which makes them important” (Massingham, 2008, p. 543) will essentially disappear. The collective of professionals serving students with visual impairments will feel this loss in the short and long term.

Additionally, the field of visual impairment has been historically plagued by shortages of trained professionals (Corn & Silberman, 1999; Mason, McNerney, Davidson, & McNear, 2000; Swallow, 1990). While training programs and partnerships have succeeded in bringing new practitioners to the field, increasing student populations and professional attrition have failed to fill the ever-growing demand for instructors (Dignan, 2015). Moreover, researchers have identified a significant shortage in the development, training, and availability of leaders to meet current and future need (Corn & Spungin, 2002; Mamer 2001; Silberman, Ambrose-Zaken, Corn, & Trief, 2004; Sweet-Bernard & Brostek, 2006). The shortage of teachers in the field of visual impairments may have inhibited the transition to leadership for some professionals in the field. Current practitioners may be reluctant to move into leadership positions because of the foreseen impact of leaving the students they have served and been personally involved with for years. As Dignan (2015) states, “Unlike other disciplines... when a VI professional [teacher or specialist trained in visual impairment] is unavailable, no one else can help meet blind students’ needs” (p. 29). As long-held leadership positions now become vacant, the limited supply of individuals willing or able to take on the roles has led to unfilled positions, with previous duties absorbed by other over-taxed leaders, or positions being eliminated outright (Corn & Spungin, 2002). This reduction or merging of positions may negatively impact the supply of talent, ability, and/or reserve of knowledge available to the field (Massingham, 2008). Since the majority of current professionals entered the field of visual impairment in the same period, the field is facing an unfortunate and significant increase in retirement of professionals. The expansion of

services to and identification of students with visual impairments has also put pressure on the field. Dignan (2015) calculated that the increase in student population and increase of professional attrition is projected to cause a shortage of approximately 200 trained professionals in visual impairments in Texas over the next three years. The shortage of trained professionals on the national level is estimated between 3,000 (Ambrose-Zaken & Bozeman, 2010) and 5,000 (Mason, Davidson, & McNerney, 2000).

The loss of individual leaders and expertise, followed by the loss of the leadership position itself, may prove to have a long-lasting negative impact on the field. Increased workloads related to shortages have already limited the research and resulting innovation capacity of university faculty (Corn & Ferrell, 2000; Mason et al., 2000). In a discussion of the limited amount of current research, Corn (2007) states that “On many topics we have minimal or only older literature and very few intervention studies or replications of studies; [so few that] meta analyses cannot be completed with the existing literature” (p. 742).

Additionally, results from a 2010 survey of university professionals indicated that 50% of those with experience leading or working as faculty in professional preparation programs are expected to retire by 2015 (Ambrose-Zaken & Bozeman, 2010). This lack of research not only limits the ability of leaders to identify and provide instruction in educational best practices, but also limits the professional ability of the field as a whole to further support the provision of these enhanced practices and services (AFB, 2006). What has been learned and developed by key leaders must be preserved if the field is to continue moving forward. The knowledge of these departing leaders must

be collected, stored, and made available for retrieval if it is to be reused and built upon in the future (DeLong, 2004).

Accomplishments of early leaders in visual impairment have been detailed in books, articles, and interviews. Their achievements are the fabric, foundational compass, and narrative of the field. Those pioneers provided insight and guidance for each successive leader through these works. The expansion and regional nature of leadership in the field will require additional mining of histories to chronicle the more recent past. It is important to not only collect, document, and preserve the information from current leaders on the local level, but also to make this information part of the ongoing memory of the field at the local, state, regional, and national levels. This information should be available for retrieval and ultimately for use by the next wave of individuals needing support, guidance, or encouragement to fill leadership positions. The collection of reflective narratives of those individuals who have overseen this most current transformation of the field is intended to provide such a resource for future leaders.

Problem Statement

A succinct description of the problem addressed in this study is that the field of visual impairment is facing the impending retirement or departure of long-term leadership personnel who have successfully held a variety of positions. The experiential and tacit knowledge of the leaders must be mined before the institutional history of this important period is lost.

This study is based on the belief that the field of visual impairment has a life history—or better stated—a field history; one that shares and is set apart by challenges

of knowledge loss faced by other fields. Many organizations may sustain a similar threat of knowledge loss due to aging and retirement, as is experienced by visual impairment today. Specifically, entities and agencies in the specialized fields of energy, aerospace, and defense are facing what is feared to be staggering losses of talented professionals and leaders (DeLong, 2004). The unique nature of these disciplines, combined with the highly specialized knowledge of their professionals and leaders, makes losses in visual impairment analogous to losses in the defense and aerospace industries. Granted, a teacher of students with visual impairments (TVI) is not a “rocket scientist,” however, these instructors provide a unique service that cannot be simply absorbed or co-opted by other educators. Dignan (2012) concurs, adding that “without instruction provided by professionals trained in visual impairment students’ functional and academic progress may suffer” (p. 29).

One strength of the field of visual impairment is the commitment of many who have revolutionized the services provided to individuals who are blind and visually impaired (Dignan, 2015). Significant numbers of these current leaders have been invaluablely entrenched in their respective positions for years—leading and guiding the field as services exponentially expanded. These leaders are part of a small, interconnected network of professionals who share a history, background, commitment, and relative length of service.

Unfortunately, this connection and commonality may also pull many of these leaders into retirement at or near the same time. As each of these leaders departs, or is tragically lost due to age, health issues, or death, the remaining leaders surely evaluate

their own departure. Dignan (2015) predicted that improvement of the economy, with associated rebounding of retirement funds, might also lead to a significant increase in the exodus of leaders and practitioners in the field.

The confluence of factors which are unique to visual impairment, along with those shared with other disciplines, have combined to create to an almost generational turnover in the field. It is hoped that the collection and subsequent sharing of insights from current leaders will allow retention of knowledge that may otherwise be lost as a result of this impending wave of retirement in this aging workforce (DeLong, 2004). It is imperative that the next generation of leaders in the field of visual impairment employ the collective insights and other knowledge-retention strategies as a way to preserve implicit and operational knowledge of these long-time leaders before this wealth of information is lost forever. Maher (2002) states:

It is hoped that the reader will consider thoughtfully both the individual and collective messages from those who have given a lifetime of lessons, resources, and experiences to the field. The richness of their reflective wisdom is offered to shed new meaning on the past and stimulate thoughts about goals for the future of the field. (p. 14)

Today's leaders in the field of visual impairment grew from training programs that were developed in the early 1970s. These programs were established and run by the aforementioned *Modern-day* Leaders, who, with the help of federal legislation and funding, helped advance the field in depth and scope (Koestler, 1976). This relationship helped the leaders imbue knowledge and passion for the field of practice into the next

generation. This direct link provided a way for the newer leaders to witness the values of the past, understand the purpose of the field, and realize their place in the future. Per Linde (2009), personal connections between generations help develop the identity of a field or organization as a whole. This study will help to bridge current leaders to those in the future.

Purpose of the Study

Acknowledging the impending departure of long established leaders and confronting the impending loss of specialized understanding and expertise in the small but heterogeneous field of visual impairment (Dignan, 2015), the purpose of this study was to collect, analyze, and document the career development and contributions of leaders in the field of visual impairment who hold or have held influential positions across the state of Texas. This study should seek to draw from these leaders a reflection on their legacies and shared mission while examining their vision for the field and a vision for growth of future leadership (Rosenwald & Wendell, 2013).

This study used data from professionals who had served in field of visual impairment in the state of Texas, had held multiple and varied leadership positions, and have been employed by various stakeholder entities. The investigation sought to collect and organize these professionals' perceptions on achievements, innovative practices, leadership development, and future needs of the field. The collection of histories of those across this group of all-too-soon departing leaders would provide guidance for those who now begin to fill vacated leadership positions, and a foundational institutional memory upon which to base continued progression of the field (Linde, 2009).

Leaders were called upon to use and develop skills to enhance the knowledge of teachers who were already practicing in the field by providing support in workshops, seminars, on-site, and through other outreach services. The skills and expertise to complete these tasks are the tacit knowledge held by the leaders. Puusa and Eerikäinen (2010) detail tacit knowledge as *experience; mastery of the big picture; development and participation in expert networks; and social skills* which build collaboration. Through these activities, leaders have transformed professionals and the public through social action to enhance services for persons who are visually impaired. It is not yet apparent how current leaders trained in visual impairment pedagogy could develop the will and skills necessary to transform themselves into leaders and deliver meaningful instruction to adults. The selection of Texas as an area of study is not based upon geography, but rather based on the multi-level organizational structures and varied leadership positions that make up the support services provided in the state.

Research Questions

Before these voices become silent, and the wealth of information is lost forever, their narratives must be collected, explored, and used as a foundation for new innovations, new initiatives, and the development of new leaders. Ross-Gordon (2002) states, “Improving our effectiveness as teachers of adults begins with reflecting on our own beliefs about learners, the learning process, the teaching-learning relationship, and the social context in which the teaching learning transaction occurs” (p. 89). The same could be said of the beliefs and histories of those who came before. These dedicated professionals are our link to our past and to the emergence of visual impairment as a

profession. This study sought to investigate the personal and professional career development of current or recently-retired individuals who have held positions of leadership in the field of visual impairment in Texas for extended periods. Their collective insights and shared experiences may help us to gain perspective on current issues, and identify concerns or problems lurking on the horizon. The following questions guided this study:

1. How did current or newly retired leaders describe their professional career development history in the field of visual impairment?
2. How have the identified leaders impacted and contributed to the field of visual impairment in policy, practice, service, and training?
3. What concerns did these leaders have for the field?
4. What vision do these leaders have for the field?
5. What supports could be identified as necessary to help build and develop leaders to meet the future needs of the field?

Theoretical Frame

The unique nature of the field of visual impairment and the transfer between generational waves and/or transitioning from the role of teacher to that of leader can at times make this topic difficult to effectively describe. This is especially true when examining leaders or instructors who provide training to teachers or teacher candidates, who are themselves teachers of students with visual impairments. This study seeks to investigate how individuals who may have been trained in pedagogical work, training students who are blind or visually impaired, were then able to move to a position of

training adults. Or, how individuals working in, or alongside, the field were able to transform their roles to lead agencies and/or coalitions of adults in an effort to drastically change policy, improve practice, and ultimately improve the lives of all persons who have visual impairment.

The following section will explain a tripod of general theories that are used as the orientation of this study. As called for by Merriam and Simpson (1995), a specific explanation of how these orienting frameworks will be explicitly applied to this study is provided. Adaptations of certain theoretical frames are collected here to support this investigation with several key concepts provided as support. The following frames will be used to guide this research:

- a) Hanson's Integrative Life Planning (ILP)
- b) Schlossberg's Transition Framework
- c) Learning – including Transformational learning, Experiential Learning, and Self-Directed Learning

Hansen's Integrative Life Planning. Key elements of Hansen's (1997) integrative life planning (ILP) are used to examine the process by which Texas leaders in the field of visual impairment transitioned into positions of leadership and achievement. Specifically, Hansen describes six tasks that are deemed critical "to career development and decision making" (1997, p. 19). The way in which the six tasks intersect with the career histories of identified leaders will be explored. To address the first task, *Finding Work That Needs Doing*, the interviewed leaders will be asked to respond to how they took on a career and eventual leadership in the field of visual impairment. Further

investigation will show how these leaders were able to *Weave Their Lives into A Meaningful Whole* by examining how dimensions of “identity, development, roles, and context” (p. 85) were blended together to assist in their career development. This task was later redefined by Hansen (2011) as “*Attending to our health: Physical, Mental and Emotional*” (p. 168). To provide deeper understanding of the lives and career development of these leaders, the process of *Connecting Family and Work* will be explored. Specifically, leaders will be asked to reflect on how their career and leadership choices impacted their families, and how familial support was part of those decisions.

The task of *Valuing Pluralism and Inclusivity* addressed here is specifically related to valuing diversity—especially in the area of disability—as the leaders began to “seek and create more humane workplaces whether in business, government, school, university, or agency” (Hansen, 2001, p. 267). The next critical task, *Exploring Spirituality and Life Purpose*, will also be examined in the reflections of these leaders. The dedication, determination, and commitment demonstrated by these leaders may have provided a community of support, and a cause in which to believe and to follow. The final critical task, *Managing Personal Transitions and Organizational Change* is of special interest in this study. The careers of these leaders developed in context, and involved both personal and organizational change (Hansen, 1997, p. 215). This task will be examined through further investigation of transitions, in both their lives and their work, with a focus on “the importance of people being change agents in their personal, family, and organizational lives” (Hansen, 2001, p. 268).

The planning nature of ILP is intended to imply a sense of agency that people

have or feel they need to have to give them a sense of control over their lives (Hanson, 1997). The author discusses this control as everything from fate and destiny to empowerment in career decision making. Hanson (1997) adds:

Although I still believe we can help clients and students in a changing society to plan through greater self-knowledge, environmental information, and knowledge of the decision-making process, increasingly we know that we cannot predict lives or anticipate the random events -- positive and negative -- that influence opportunities and life choices. (p. 15)

For these events and non-events the Hanson points to the next theoretical pillar of this study, the work of Schlossberg (1981).

Schlossberg's Transition Framework. Schlossberg's transition framework (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012; Schlossberg, 1981) will serve as the primary theory upon which to examine the conversions experienced by the identified leaders in the field of visual impairment. According to Schlossberg (1981), "A transition can be said to occur if an event or non-event results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one's behavior and relationships" (p. 5). This definition will be used to examine the career paths and the shift to leadership positions experienced by the participating leaders.

Of special interest to this study are considerations that assist individuals to make or reject change. Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2012) describe four factors that influence an individual's ability to adapt to change as "the 4-S System – Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies" (p. 61). The authors posit that each of these factor categories

can be assets or liabilities, and that the manner in which these pros and cons are balanced helps to explain differences in adjustment and behavior related to change. This study hopes to examine how the benefits and the drawbacks of the 4-S system impacted the choices and development of current or newly retired leaders, and how these categories may be addressed in the development of future leaders.

Since several of the interviewed leaders may have transitioned from teaching to leadership, an additional teacher-specific framework will be used to address that shift. Snell and Swanson (2000) offered a 4-part framework concluding that content expertise, collaboration, reflection, and empowerment were essential in the development of teacher leaders (p. 19). York-Barr and Duke (2004) also highlighted the importance of experience, expertise, and development of collaborative partnerships, and found that most teacher-leaders develop leadership through practice. Additionally, York-Barr and Duke (2004) called for further investigation of “the paths by which teachers positively influence student, instructional, professional, and organizational development” (p. 292). The investigation of the learning and career paths of leaders who have addressed each of these areas of development is a central focus of this study.

Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2012) describe the 4-S’s of Schlossberg’s theory as resources, including assets and liabilities, that are coping resources for change. This study does investigate how the leaders approached these transitions and how they moved through them to either ending or new beginnings. Schlossberg’s full transition theory is more than the 4S’s focused on in this investigation. Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2012) describe the full Integrated Model of the Transition Process as

interconnected triangle of points: (a) *Moving In* – including new roles, new relationships, socialization, and learning on the job, (b) *Moving Through: Betwixt or Between* – including figuring out new roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions while dealing with the confusion or uncertainty of the transition and sometimes finding renewal and hope, and finally, (c) *Moving Out* – ending the transition and exiting of previous roles and/or disengagement from others. (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012, p. 56). The moving out may in itself be a starting point for an individual to take on a new transition. In other words, start the *Moving In* process once again. This study will address the process of moving into transitions and address the supports the individual has to make these transitions to leadership with special focus on family and other supports. Since a large percentage of the selected leaders are expected to be still working in the field the transition out will not be addressed here.

Adult Learning. While it may seem unspecific to use such a general term as *learning* as a piece of the tripod of theory upon which to base this study, the concept of learning and some of the theories surrounding our understanding of learning are key to this investigation. As Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) stated, “The accumulation of information and experiences grounded in practice often leads to thinking about how the parts of what we know might fit together to form some sort of explanatory framework” (p. 79). Aspects of three different theories of learning are used here to think about what is known about leaders’ transition and leadership roles in the field of visual impairment in general. Elements of Transformational Learning,

Experiential Learning, and Self-directed Learning are used to explore the transitions, contexts, outcomes, and experiences that helped these leaders develop.

Transformational Learning. Transformational learning theory, most closely associated with Jack Mezirow, is a foundational theory of adult education (Merriam, 2001). Transformational learning occurs when an individual changes the way he or she understands or views the world and his or her place in that world. Taylor (2008) stressed the importance of this change in both understanding and perception when he stated:

Developing more reliable beliefs, exploring and validating their fidelity, and making informed decisions are fundamental to the adult learning process. It is transformative learning theory that explains this learning process of constructing and appropriating new and revised interpretations of the meaning of an experience in the world. (p. 5)

This world-view is based on the vast array of experiences that have been accumulated along the journey to adulthood. According to Mezirow (1997), “We transform our frames of reference *through critical reflection on the assumptions* upon which our interpretations, beliefs, and habits of mind or points of view are based” (p. 7, italics in the original). Taylor (2008) states that:

Frames of reference are structures of assumptions and expectations that frame an individual’s tacit points of view and influence their thinking, beliefs, and actions. It is the revision of a frame of reference in concert with reflection on experience that is addressed by the theory of perspective transformation—a paradigmatic shift. (p. 5)

As shown above, critical reflection is an integral aspect of transformational learning.

Transformational learning focuses on the transformation of the individual, but the concept and the learner may be better served by infusing a contextual focus that addresses societal and personal factors (Caffarella & Merriam, 2000). Dirkx (1998) contends that by including societal, cultural, economic, and political contexts, the learner can develop a better understanding of his or her situation in society, and in doing so, be better able to identify the *gift* of transformation, and navigate coercive societal influences which may hinder growth and actualization.

Though authors like Dirkx have separated the emancipatory focus of transformational learning away from Mezirow to leaders like Freire, the lines between the perspectives are not distinct. Mezirow (1994) contends that he, unlike Freire, was focused on the development of a comprehensive learning theory rather than a philosophy, adding that since he did not focus solely on social change, critical reflection and perspective transformation may not always occur as a result of a need for social action. Merizow (1990a) posits “However, reflective discourse and its resulting insight alone do not make for transformative learning. Acting upon these emancipatory insights, a praxis, is also necessary... The learner must have the will to act upon his or her new convictions” (pp. 354-355).

Baumgartner (2001) details Taylor’s examination of the expansions of Mezirow’s theory to include the impact of feeling, the fluid nature of transformation, the combined influence of factors as a trigger event, and the importance of relationships. One interesting area of development is the focus upon transformational learning on

groups and organizations (Baumgartner, 2001). The ongoing expansion and modification of transformational learning theory will continue to inform practice and build understanding of how adults learn (Baumgartner, 2001; Pounder, 2006; Taylor, 2008).

Aspects of transformational learning theory can be adapted to this study of leaders in the field of visual impairment. Several key experiences related to the history of the field of visual impairment, and the personal history and career path of each leader, are associated with transformational learning whether as individuals or as a group. Exploration of possible triggering factors that led individual leaders to change their perceptions and beliefs about visual impairment and/or leadership, factors related to leadership development or resistance to change, and implications and identification of contexts that may have facilitated each leader's ability to change or lead, or facilitated transformation in themselves or others will be explored.

The importance of this reflective view of accomplishments is stressed by Merizow (1990b), when stating, "Perhaps even more central to adult learning than elaborating established meaning schemes is the process of reflecting back on prior learning to determine whether what we have learned is justified under present circumstances" (p. 5). The telling of these leaders' stories may motivate, challenge, and provide guidance for others who might consider future leadership (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007).

Additionally, the use of a transformational lens may be of special interest when researching the lives of leaders who are themselves visually impaired. Munger and Mertens (2011) contend that disability studies should be joined with transformational

learning theory, stating that “By adhering to the assumptions underlying the transformative paradigm, researchers can gain a fuller understanding of the genuine lived experiences of people with disabilities while simultaneously and steadfastly working to better those experiences” (p. 31).

Self-Directed Learning. Merriam (2001) identified self-directed learning (SDL) as a second foundational pillar of adult learning theory, and as one which, along with andragogy, helped differentiate adult learners from children. Allen Tough is recognized as incorporating the work of Houle and Knowles into the first organized formal studies and the first formal description of self-directed or self-planned learning (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). SDL can be formal or informal, teacher led, individually planned or done collaboratively, and can cross settings to address work, school, or personal interests. “Self-directed learning is our most basic, natural response to newness, problems, or challenges in our environment” (Guglielmino, 2008. p. 2). While Candy (1991) describes SDL as either a goal or process, Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) add that self-directedness is inherent in the individual learner as a trait.

Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) delineated the three goals of SDL by stating:

- (1) to enhance the ability of adult learners to be self-directed in their learning, (2) to foster transformational learning as central to self-directed learning, and (3) to promote emancipatory learning and social action as an integral part of self-directed learning. (p. 107)

Candy (1991) relates the first goal, being self-directed, into subsets of self-management and autonomy or self-determination. The identification of the two distinct aspects helps Candy (1991) illuminate how a person can excel in one aspect while failing in another. As posited by Candy (1991), “The extent to which people are, or can be, self-determining is largely situational specific” (p. 21). The second goal is aligned with transformational learning. The achievement of this goal requires critical self-reflection (Merriam, 2001a). This reflection brings autonomy and transformation. The final goal of self-directed learning “is the promotion of emancipatory learning and social action” (Merriam, 2001, p. 9). The key here is action. Self-directedness that focuses only upon the individual without an action and emancipatory mindset (as with goal one) is a source of criticism for SDL (Merriam, 2001).

From this perspective, “Self-directed learning [is] a process of learning in which people take the primary initiative for planning, carrying out, and evaluating their own learning experiences” (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007, p. 110). Spear (1998) and Berger (1990, as cited in Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007) found that learning was influenced by various factors, that random events and opportunities significantly impacted learning directions and outcomes, and that multiple approaches to learning may be undertaken until the learning goals were accomplished. Other models address the influence of personality, self-management, emotion, responsibility and ownership, motivation, social context, and the influence of catalysts and facilitation of SDL (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Models of SDL draw on person-

centered principles where the end goal and the processes are controlled by and focused on the development of individual learners (Elias & Merriam, 2005).

Since the leaders of the field of visual impairment took their newly created positions at a time of emergence and expansion, much of their learning may have been self-directed. SDL could be readily used to investigate whether the individuals in this identified group of leaders embodied the traits necessary to be self-directed learners or if the presence (or lack) of the various elemental clusters of opportunity, past knowledge, and chance occurrences identified by Spear (1988, as cited in Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007) facilitated their transition.

Experiential Learning. Almost every theory of adult learning relates at least in some way to experience. According to Fenwick (2000), “Much adult learning is commonly understood to be located in everyday workplace tasks and interactions, home and family activity, community involvement, and other sites of nonformal education” (p. 243). What has become clear across the various ways that educators and researchers divide experiential learning is that in order for learning to occur, the learner must connect an experience to past knowledge, current situations, and future possibilities (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007).

Fenwick (2000) identifies five broad typologies related to experiential learning that help delineate both the educational purpose and relation to the learning context. The five categories identified are:

reflection (a constructivist perspective), interference (a psychoanalytic perspective rooted in Freudian tradition), participation (from perspectives of

situated cognition), resistance (a critical cultural perspective), and co-emergence (from the enactivist perspective emanating from neuroscience and evolutionary theory). (p. 247)

Interference is based in the unconscious, resistance is based in power relations and draws from critical frameworks, and co-emergence is centered in the “ecological relationships between cognition and environment” (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007, p. 160). The constructivist perspective, in which learners are responsible for constructing their own knowledge, is often considered and criticized for being outside of context, apart from internal forces—rather, knowledge is created and stored in the mind of learner where it can be represented and used in new learning situations (Fenwick, 2000). The final typology will be further addressed below.

Fenwick’s participative typology is based in the situative perspective, where “participation in a community of practice is the goal” (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007, p. 160). Fenwick (2000) differentiated this situative perspective from the aforementioned constructivist perspective when she stated:

Situated cognition maintains that learning is rooted in the situation in which a person participates, not in the head of that person as intellectual concepts produced by reflection Knowing and learning are defined as engaging in changing processes of human activity in a particular community. Knowledge is not a substance to be ingested and then transferred to new situation but, instead, part of the very process of participation in the immediate situation. (p. 253)

In other words, knowledge is created by being an active and engaged participant in a situation. “The person *learns to* participate more effectively by participating” (Fenwick, 2001, p. 248, italics in original). Knowledge is experienced in community, and understanding is conveyed through joint interaction with others in that particular situation or setting, whereby each situation brings new learning (Fenwick, 2000). This embodies the definition of tacit knowledge as described by Puusa and Eerikäinen (2010).

Experiential learning theory will provide a useful lens in examining the professional lives of the selected leaders in the field of visual impairment. The innovative and uncharted nature of the leadership positions held by these individuals, in conjunction with the tight community of stakeholders in and around the field would facilitate the use of the situated perspective to assist this investigation. The pace and amount of change that was shepherded over by these leaders indicates that these individuals may have frequently worked at a frenetic pace, being forced to learn as they were experiencing and building knowledge. The fact that these leaders kept the field connected as it expanded in population and services helps to verify a vibrant and close-knit community of practice. This community of professionals is still present and active today, but as with many such changes, this specialized community is predicted to have a difficult time dealing with the departure of leaders who possess significant skill and tacit knowledge.

Significance of this Study

The following sections will highlight the impact of this study as it relates to research, policy, and practice. Though in some cases these aspects may overlap, each

area will be addressed separately. A summative view of how the three aspects related to significance intersect or overlap will be offered.

Related to research. The collection and sharing of explicit accomplishments and experiential knowledge of leaders in the field of visual impairment in the state of Texas may allow others in and out of the state to follow or build on present and past accomplishments in policy, practice, research, and leadership. Moreover, the use of narratives in the collection of these experiences will allow for the conveyance of implicit and tacit knowledge that may be foundationally absent in other methodologies or practices. The voices of these leaders will not only provide insight into leadership development, transformation, and vast knowledge, but will also provide documentation of the institutional or organizational memory of the field, providing a bridge from past and current leaders to those leaders of the future. Information produced by this research may provide guidance to help those in the future to make informed and practical decisions about transitioning to positions of leadership. By collecting and analyzing the impact and career development of those who have stepped into leadership roles, this study will be able to retrieve and use the wealth of knowledge and experiences of the previous generation of leaders in the field of visual impairment as a guide or support for future developments.

Related to policy. A central premise to this investigation is that there continues to be a shortage of leaders in special education in general (Smith, Montrose, Robb, Tyler, & Young, 2011) and in the field of visual impairment in particular (Ambrose-Zaken & Bozeman, 2010). As previously mentioned, this research is intended to serve as

a bridge between generations of leaders and to function as a means of recording and providing access to the experiences of the leaders studied. On a policy level, it is hoped that this research will promote three additional initiatives: a) to produce and encourage plans to develop and recruit new leaders at the higher education and local levels, b) to provide insights into and development of various pathways to leadership for future candidates, and c) to provide direction for planners and for candidates of available supports that may be beneficial to aid and further leadership development.

The insights derived from the reflections of current or newly retired leaders may be a way to demonstrate to new candidates how they too can impact the population served by the field. These insights could serve as a calling to new leaders relating to Hanson's *work that needs doing* or finding meaning in their future lives. The identification of possible paths may provide the impetus for some individuals to move through the transition process toward leadership (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012), and eventually transform themselves into leaders (Mezirow, 1997). Finally, the identification of supports and situations that facilitate leadership development may help individuals evaluate themselves, align family and others to provide backing (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012), provide the opportunity to weave family and career life goals together to manage transition (Hanson, 1997), and provide an opportunity to reflect on and change the way he or she understands or views themselves and his or her place in the world/field of visual impairment (Mezirow, 1990a).

Related to practice. Increased levels of attrition will only exacerbate the identified shortage of leaders and lessen the ability of those in leadership positions to

conduct and share evidence based practices. Corn (2007) and Ferrell (2006) have strongly criticized the dearth of general and evidence based research articles produced by the field. As Ferrell (2006) states, the “development of only 16 promising practices in 50 years has a weak research foundation for its pedagogy” (p. 46).

Leadership in the field of visual impairment has moved from a national to regional/state level, and from centralized issues to vastly diverse topics. In that expansion, leaders have developed unique skills and knowledge that are part of a vast web of support for the population of persons with visual impairments. In many cases, state and regional leaders are now organizationally linked to the separate issues of the states or regions. Leaders in Texas have been innovators and trailblazers in many areas related to population-specific and specialty support services, curriculum and resources, advocacy and legislation, and cooperative training and mentoring of professionals. The collection of reflective narratives of these leaders will serve to document accomplishments and possibly provide a look at what are perceived to be potential problems facing the field in the near and distant future. These leaders may provide insight into important activities such as committee work or advocacy groups as essential means to further the field.

Overlapping areas of significance include contentions that an improved policy to develop and infuse increased numbers of leaders into the field will relate to an increased capacity to train future teachers and to improve research and practices. Smith, Robb, West, and Tyler (2010) state:

It is now well acknowledged that a shortage of special education faculty does contribute greatly to a shortage of special education teachers and other service providers, ultimately producing a negative effect on the quality of services provided to students with disabilities and their families. (p. 36)

A shortage of faculty decreases the numbers of trained teachers, and in turn limits the research capacity of the field (Ferrell, Mason, Young, & Cooney, 2006; Silberman, Ambrose-Zaken, Corn, & Trief, 2004). Additionally, the infusion of additional professionals into the specialty field of visual impairment increases the pipeline from which future faculty and leaders may be drawn.

Definitions of Terms

Authentic Leadership: According to George (2003), authentic leaders understand their purpose, practice solid values and lead with their heart, establish connected relationships, and demonstrate self-discipline (p. 18). Authentic leadership is anchored in values, morals, service, and commitment to make a difference.

Current Leaders: Those leaders who are currently working or recently retired. Often these leaders have held long tenures in their positions.

Integrative Life Planning: Integrative life planning is a holistic view of career development that highlights critical tasks including personal and spiritual elements.

Knowledge: Knowledge uses information that is processed, decoded, and combined with personal experience to produce the ability of an individual to act (DeLong, 2004). This increased capacity is the fuel for innovation and for the development of new awareness and/or understanding (Merriam & Bierma, 2014).

Long-term leader: For this study, a long-term leader is an individual who has worked in a high-level position in the field of visual impairment and who through that service has witnessed the transformation of the field that defines the phenomenon under study.

Modern-Day Leaders: Modern-Day Leaders are those who are one generation removed from the current leaders. These leaders often developed personnel preparation programs that trained the Current Leaders

Organization: McLean (2006) defines an organization as “any situation in which two or more persons are involved in a common pursuit or objective” (p. 2). Others use a similar term, *institution*, to expand thinking about how to define and distinguish focused communal activities.

Organizational memory: Organizational memory helps construct who or what an organization is or does in an ideological sense (Maclean, Harvey, Sillince, & Golant, 2014). “Organizations make sense of the present, creating new knowledge, but also consigning other knowledge to oblivion, through narratives of their past” (Rowlinson, Casey, Hansen, & Mills, 2014, p. 441).

Summary

This introductory chapter was developed to provide the background for a study that will collect, analyze, and make available the knowledge and reflections of identified leaders who have exited or are soon to exit influential positions in the field of visual impairment across the state of Texas. To best collect the reflections of these leaders, a series of qualitative interviews presents as the best method to meet the purpose of this study. Through this process, these leaders will follow the established practice in the field

of visual impairments of recording reflective histories, sharing knowledge, and providing insight, as well as motivating and challenging stakeholders and professionals to become future leaders. The next chapter will provide a review of literature used to inform this study. Later chapters will focus on methodology – chapter 3, findings – chapter 4, and conclusions and implications – chapter 5.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

As stated, the purpose of this study is to investigate the career development and contributions of leaders in the field of visual impairment who hold or have held influential positions across the state of Texas. This chapter provides a review of literature and is organized in the following five sections:

- a) Growth and attrition of available practitioners and leaders
- b) Historical evolution of the field,
- c) Development of the field as a profession,
- d) Current view of the field of visual impairment, and
- e) Theoretical framework and related research.

Growth and Attrition of Available Practitioners and Leaders

As detailed in the previous chapter, the field of visual impairment has grown and diversified since its inception, and is currently on the verge of a significant transition in leadership. Researchers and authors have been consistently calling attention to the shortage of trained personnel available to fill positions of leadership in visual impairment (Barraga, 1981; Corn & Spungin, 2002; Mamer 2001; Silberman, Ambrose-Zaken, Corn, & Trief, 2004; Sweet-Bernard & Brostek, 2006).

Corn and Spungin (2002) and Sweet-Bernard and Brostek (2006) detailed that the field had only trained on average 4 doctoral graduates per year between 1995 and 2006. The data related to the shortages in visual impairment in many ways mirrors the teacher and leader shortages in special education as highlighted by Cook and Boe (2007)

and Boe, Cook, and Sunderland (2008). The field also shares the problem of a too-limited supply of trained educators earning advanced degrees to fill both faculty and other leadership positions as detailed in special education by Smith, Montrose, Robb, Tyler, and Young (2011). In 2000, Mason, McNERney, Davisson, and McNear estimated an increase in over 5000 trained professionals are needed to fill positions from a field that adds about 250 professionals per year.

Ambrose-Zaken and Bozeman (2010) state, “The number of individuals with severe visual impairments is expected to rise in the United States and Canada for all age groups, from newborns with congenital visual impairment to baby boomers with age-related vision loss” (p. 148). Populations of students who are visually impaired have showed steady growth (Shore, 2017) and adult populations with visual impairments are expected to drastically rise in the next 20 years (Varma et al., 2016).

As the field of visual impairment evolved to its present state, many leaders, researchers, faculty members, and teachers have either departed, or are soon planning on leaving the profession. These departures are attributed to aging, retirement, burnout, high caseloads (Ambrose- Zaken, 2010; Dignan, 2015), or personal reasons including declining health, and, too often, death. It was the death of several icons, Natalie Barraga, 2016, and Phil Hatlen, 2016, coupled with the loss of several other key leaders in Texas that brought my focus to this study. Regardless of the specific individual reason, each of these departures exacerbates the attenuation of experienced leaders and educators during a time of ongoing shortages.

Several factors have combined to put this field in the perilous position of losing a significant amount of experience, leadership, and tacit knowledge from the small, specialized discipline that is visual impairment. Many of these professionals, like others across the country, stayed on in their respective positions and extended their careers in response to the recent economic recession, but now may be ready to exit the workforce. As Dignan (2012) states, “It is likely that as delayed retirements are realized, attrition over the next 3 years will be substantially increased” (p. 38). This increase is already being felt, attrition rates inside the different disciplines that encompass the field of visual impairment have spiked periodically. One of the most noticeable spikes occurred when departure of teachers of the visually impaired in Texas were found to triple from 2011 to 2012 (Dignan, 2012). These losses appear to an ongoing problem as the field has lost an average of 43.66 FTE professionals per year from 2011-2016 (Dignan, 2011- 2015; Shore, 2016 and 2017). The shortages estimated by Mason, McNerney, Davisson, and McNear (2000) combine with threats of closure to training programs and currently published visual impairment faculty retirements estimates. Sweet-Bernard and Brostek, (2006) have estimated that current 70% of faculty needed to meet shortages will retire in the next 10-15 years. Per the annual summaries of needs for VI professionals in Texas published by the Texas School for the Blind (Dignan 2004-2015; Shore, 2016 and 2017), 489 professionals have left the field over the past 12 years from a workforce that has averaged only 813 full-time professionals over that period. (see Table 2)

Table 2: Attrition of Professionals in the Field of Visual Impairment in Texas

Data from 2004-2016

	<u>Year</u>	<u>Attrition</u>	<u>FTE</u>	<u>Attrition Rate</u>
	2004	40	798	5.01%
	2005	29	806	3.60%
	2006	28	744	3.76%
	2007	40	754	5.31%
	2008	37	724	5.11%
	2009	27	806	3.35%
	2010	26	821	3.17%
	2011	46	824	5.58%
	2012	54	848	6.37%
	2013	42	823	5.10%
	2014	49	884	5.54%
	2015	42	885	4.75%
	2016	29	869	3.33%
TOTAL	13 years	489	869 FTE current professionals in the field	59.98% turnover in 13 years

Though the attrition rate is below 5% per year, the impact of turnover on the future leadership development of such a specialized and small field may be impacted over the long term. This is especially true in considering the increase in population of students served by these professionals (see Table 3 and Table 4).

Table 3: Student Population, Growth, Percentage of Growth in Texas

School aged student population 2004	7291	
School aged student population 2016		9900
Increase in student population		2609
Average yearly % growth in population		2.6%
Percentage increase in population across 13 years		26.45%

Shore (2017) reported that for the seventh year in a row the majority regional leaders witnessed larger caseloads across the field as the population has grown. The loss of experienced professional practitioners, coupled with the higher demand for practitioners, may limit the pool of those available and willing to step into leadership positions. This is especially true as services have continually expanded, populations have increased and diversified, and more and more specialization has occurred over time.

Texas may be doing better than other regions, as it is one of only a few states with more than one training program in visual impairment. According to Meador (2015), “only 41 programs for teachers of the visually impaired were in operation nationally during the 2013-2014 school year” (p. 3). Ambrose-Zaken and Bozeman (2010) stated that at least 19 states, DC, and 7 Canadian provinces did not have any training programs in visual impairment available from which to draw practitioners and/or leaders.

Even while new educators and practitioners move into vacated leadership positions, it is feared that the departure of key service providers at every level may create a dearth of professionals and leaders who possess the requisite training and

experience to shepherd the field forward. During a conference presentation called “A Look Behind – a Glance Forward” at the Texas Association for the Education and Rehabilitation conference, D. Mercer (March 22, 2013, personal communication) compared the changeover and departure of current leaders to the dawning of a new generation by result of a tsunami. These departing leaders have seen and fostered incredible growth and change in the field, and most were trained directly by the initial innovators and foundation-builders of the discipline.

Table 4: Average Departures 2004-2016, Average Professionals Across Those Years, Average Attrition and Percentage of Turnover in Texas.

Average departures per year	37.62	
Average count of professionals	814	
Average attrition per year		4.61%
Percentage turnover across years		59.95%

Before the voices of these pioneering leaders fall silent, and the wealth of information is lost forever, narratives of their experiences and insights must be collected and preserved. These dedicated professionals are our link to our past and to the emergence of visual impairment as a profession. Exploration of their career development will serve to not only document the impact made by these leaders, but also to identify supports and environments that assisted them in their own ascension into top positions. This exploration will also chronicle their personal transformational journeys into leaders. Their collective insights and shared experiences may help us to gain perspective on current issues, and identify concerns and problems lying in wait on the horizon. By

collecting the reflective past experiences of these professionals, perhaps we can further our understanding of the field of visual impairment today and in the future. Specifically, it is the goal here to address or examine: How do current, or newly retired leaders describe their professional career development history from entry to practitioner to leader? How have the identified leaders impacted and contributed to the field of visual impairment in policy, practice, service, and training? What vision or concerns do these leaders have for the field? What supports can be identified as necessary to help build and develop leaders to meet the needs of the field in the future?

Historical Evolution of the Field

The investigation of the historical evolution of the field of visual impairment includes evidence of how the field adapted to changes in the population of individuals served and how it addressed the educational demands of society. Historically, organized instructional services for individuals with visual impairment in the United States began as early as 1829 with the establishment of the New England Asylum for the Blind—an entity later renamed Perkins Institution for the Blind, and now known as Perkins School for the Blind (Roberts, 1986). Other schools were established in many states, but each followed the European boarding school model. For the next 80 years, these residential schools, operating outside of the public-school system, were the only source of formalized instruction that was made available to students with visual impairments (Hatlen, 2000). Education of students with visual impairments remained the domain of these residential schools for decades, and only began to move to the public schools in the early 1900s. As Koestler (1976) stated, “By 1910 there were, all told, just over 200 blind

pupils in the public schools of various cities, where the population of residential schools came to 4600” (p. 416). The access to traditional public-school instruction by students with visual impairments remained very limited for most of the 1900s (Roberts, 1986). Lowenfeld (1981a) categorized this lack of educational access when he stated that as of 1952 about 85% of the students with visual impairments who received specialized instruction were still taught at residential schools.

Often, the same pioneers who led and operated these residential schools also worked to develop the first methods used to educate students with visual impairments, including those with additional impairments. These innovating teachers of the visually impaired then used a system of apprenticeship to pass along their knowledge and instructional techniques (Hatlen, 2000). Unfortunately, most of these schools were isolated from one another, and did not regularly share effective practices between institutions (Irwin, 1955). The first formal and enduring training programs for those who wished to work with individuals with visual impairments were not available until after 1920 (Roberts, 1986). Those programs that were available lacked regulation, and were based on a workshop model typically offered over short periods of the summer. The first formal, year-round university teacher preparation program designed to train individuals to work with persons with visual impairment was not established until 1957 (Bishop, 1996).

Changing perceptions and societal demands for services. The move from the workshop model toward more formalized training in the field of visual impairment was facilitated by both internal and external factors that occurred in the 1940s, 1950s, and

1960s. Societal transformations in the general public's view of blindness began to occur as two new populations of persons with visual impairments emerged. The first populations were "war-blinded" veterans who had lost their sight serving in World War II, and who were now returning home (Goodrich & Lueck, 2010). The second population was the estimated 10,000-12,000 premature infants who were part of an epidemic of visual impairment due to retrolental fibroplasia, or RLF (this condition is known today as retinopathy of prematurity, or ROP) (Koestler, 1976). The impact of a subsequent infant epidemic, rubella, brought about a drastic increase in the number of students identified as deaf-blind (Hatlen, 2000; Koestler, 1976; Roberts, 1986). Infantile rubella peaked in the late 1960s in the US and other countries due to the development of a vaccine, and has since sharply declined, yet other congenital diseases, such as CHARGE and Usher's syndromes, have continuously diversified and expanded the population served by visual impairment professionals.

The presence of these two high-profile groups, babies and veterans, caused a dramatic shift in the goals and focus of training and rehabilitation programs (Goodrich & Lueck, 2010). As for the burgeoning population of infants with visual impairments, the main shift was a movement away from residential placement, and a call for the provision of educational services in the student's home district (Hatlen, 2000). Families and members of society were no longer willing to "ship off" and "sequester" individuals with visual impairments exclusively at residential schools. Parents and advocacy groups increasingly began demanding that services be provided in their own hometown schools, so that their children could have traditional or more typical family lives. This advocacy,

from parents as well as overburdened residential facilities, that students with visual impairments be educated in their local public-school districts, caused a revolutionary change in placement for this population. With the growing expansion of the population, and in spite of the unique needs presented by those with deaf-blindness from rubella or other conditions, advocates still pursued local educational options by trained professionals (Lowenfeld, 1975). These factors also influenced the instruction of persons with multiple disabilities including dual sensory loss, an issue that was greatly impacted by the rubella epidemic of 1963-1965 (Lowenfeld, 1975). According to Koestler (1976), the percentage of children with visual impairments in public schools rose from 10% before the epidemics to 60% by 1960. This move to provision of local services was a monumental achievement, especially since it was accomplished long before the passage of any mandate requiring access to regular education classes. As Hatlen (1990) proudly states, “Thus, children with visual impairments were the first children with disabilities to be placed in regular classrooms” (p. 79). Societal calls for improved services, local placement options, and better overall outcomes to meet the needs of this expanding population pushed the field forward.

For veterans, this new focus included the call for and implementation of increased services provided to returning soldiers who were blinded in World War II so that they could resume their lives in their home communities. The needs of the returning veterans directly led to the development of the associated visual impairment field of orientation and mobility (Voorhees, 1962). According to the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals (ACVREP) Handbook (2014),

“Orientation and mobility instruction is a sequential process in which visually impaired individuals are taught to utilize their remaining senses to determine their position within their environment and to negotiate safe movement from one place to another” (p. 5) with a primary goal of increasing independence of the individual with a visual impairment. It was the success of these first trained veterans that helped grow and validate the need for the provision of orientation and mobility services (Sauerburger, 1996). Crouse and Bina, (1997) assert that orientation and mobility services have paralleled the field of visual impairment through a vast increase in services to meet the needs of individuals with a variety of persons of different ages, physical and mental abilities, additional disabilities and varying levels of visual impairment.

Innovation and expansion of services. New research findings within the field of visual impairment in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s also caused changes in the status quo. Practitioners were forced to reevaluate programming and concepts upon which they had based some of their instructional practices. Through the doctoral work of Barraga (1964), several suppositions or theories related to the instruction of individuals with reduced vision (low vision) were revised or scrapped. Students who had a visual impairment yet retained some visual abilities were historically taught as though they were completely blind. Prior to this period, all students who were partially sighted, now called *low vision*, were instructed to avoid using their remaining or residual vision for learning (Erin et al., 1993). These students were no longer taught to read only tactually, using blindfolds or darkened rooms as a method of “sight-saving.” Barraga’s research showed that students would benefit from lessons aimed at increasing their visual

efficiency. They would be taught to use and improve their remaining vision rather than erroneously attempting to conserve it (Barraga, 1964). Barraga (1964) revolutionized the field by proving visual abilities could actually be improved through specialized training involving the use of available vision.

The focus on differentiated instruction for students with low vision led to the identification of appropriate learning media, improved use and prescription of optical devices, and the move away from utilizing the legal definition of blindness to a functional definition instead (Hatlen, 2000). The current functional definition is based on the student's ability to *use* his or her vision in the regular environment as a method to determine educational need (Hatlen, 2000).

Other research also challenged the instructional practices and training models of the day. Moor (1968) showed that previously unserved or underserved students who were blind and had developmentally lower intelligence levels were in fact *educatable* and *trainable* (p. 4). This called for an end of institutionalization of students who were blind and who may have shown lower levels of intelligence. Fraiberg (1977) proved the effectiveness of training provided to infants who were blind, showing that with intervention, the development of a child who was blind mirrored the development of a sighted child more than that of a child and who did not receive intervention. In other words, blindness did not limit development in areas like language development (Warren, 1984), and intervention could mitigate developmental losses. Research showed that with intervention across areas of cognition, social, personality, and perceptual-motor

development the population of individuals with visual impairment demonstrated improved outcomes (Warren, 1984).

With the call for an increase in the provision of local services, low vision services, services to individuals with cognitive impairments, and the need for orientation and mobility training came a thrust for the provision of daily living skills instruction for students with visual impairments (Roberts, 1986). As the demand for local delivery of a seemingly ever-increasing variety and depth of services to a broadening population the field began to address the challenge of finding a way to provide these services. These changes required more teachers and specialists to be trained to meet this need as the field moved away from residential or institutional services. Leaders like Ashcroft, Barraga, Corn, and Hatlen would later expand their impact on the field as they moved from the role of researchers to developers of personnel preparation programs training teachers to serve the newly identified populations with innovative practices.

Development as a Profession through Standards and Capacity Building

The development of the field into a profession is addressed by detailing its establishment as a field of study, establishment of standards, innovative research, and the initial development of formal training programs. Leaders who sought to professionalize the field were commissioned with development of training protocols for individuals interested in serving this population (American Foundation for the Blind, 1954). These leaders were then confronted with the task of essentially inventing original programs that would train new or practicing teachers to meet the needs of students with visual impairments (Koestler, 1986). These developers were asked to create necessary,

efficient, useful, and practical training systems that had not previously been offered or had not existed (Roberts, 1986). One major difference was that the leaders who developed these personnel preparation programs were simultaneously seeking to establish and refine teacher training standards as programs were implemented (American Foundation for the Blind, 1954; Hatlen, 2000). This was seldom the case for individual teachers trained using the apprentice model (Hatlen, 2000; Roberts, 1986). In discussing problematic training practices in schools for the blind in the early 1900s, Irwin (1955) posits:

The great majority of teachers in the schools for the blind have not been trained for their work. During the first 25 years of the century, superintendents seemed to feel that almost anyone could teach blind children. Some of the schools...did not hesitate to place entirely untrained graduates in charge of classes for the blind who taught by methods by which untrained teachers before them had taught them. (p. 134)

An innovation of this time was the increase of a previously seldom-used instructional delivery system, the itinerant model of teaching (Lowenfeld, 1975). This practice fits visual impairment as it is defined as the low incidence disability (IDEA, 2004) and field of visual impairment. Through this practice, one specialist would serve a variety of students across a regional area. As Swenson (1995) defined it:

The *itinerant* model has many advantages. It allows children who are visually impaired to attend their neighborhood schools, when it is the least restrictive

setting for them, and to experience normal educational, social, and recreational opportunities in their own community. (p. 115)

It would take the work of a group of passionate, skillful innovators to develop standards and establish training programs to not only address the growing need for personnel, but also to train these new professionals to meet this innovative instructional focus now needed in the field of visual impairment. Leaders needed to ensure that the new training programs were of high quality, practical, and would assist teachers in meeting the needs of their students.

Establishment of professional standards. Prior to the development of personnel preparation programs in visual impairment, leaders in the field of visual impairment worked with government and consumer agencies, as well as with other stakeholders, to develop standards and guidelines for the training provided to a teacher of the visually impaired (Hatlen, 2000; Roberts, 1986). The vital information used to develop curriculum and training models was collected, in part, through research conducted by Romaine Mackie and his colleagues in the US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Office of Education (Mackie & Dunn, 1955; Mackie & Cohoe, 1956). Each of these studies collected data from 100 teachers of students with visual impairments to identify a set of competencies deemed necessary in order to effectively train students who were blind or partially sighted (Hatlen, 2000). The resultant reports recognized additional training areas beyond traditional pedagogy (referred to as *plus curriculum*) that were needed by teachers to work with each specific aspect of this population (Mackie & Dunn, 1955; Mackie & Cohoe, 1956). Some of the most

commonly-mentioned areas of instruction in these reports relate to current standards (Council for Exceptional Children, 2015). These competencies included medical factors, use of equipment for reading and writing, selection and use of aids, adapting curriculum, and accessing related services. Each of these areas is associated with determining how the student will access the curriculum rather than centering on specific aspects or subjects of the curriculum itself (Abel, 1959).

Leaders during the era of the professional development of the field worked together to establish standards and training requirements for those wishing to teach or provide services to individuals with visual impairments. Collaborative meetings and the resulting publications, such as *The Pine Brook Report* (American Foundation for the Blind, 1954), provided a detailed blueprint of instructional services, called for a continuum of placement options, prescribed services to be provided to the family, and delineated a model for itinerant service delivery for students with visual impairments. As Abel (1959) stated, each of the participants demonstrated “a real desire to consider at all costs the individualized approach in meeting the needs of each blind child and perhaps a conscious effort to refrain from projecting on to the child our sighted concept” (p. 87). This process not only laid the foundation for the field by identifying needs of this population, expanding services, and championing local, state, and national issues and agendas, but it also helped move the field to a more professional level. In the words of one such innovator, Dr. Phil Hatlen, this was the “time when it [the field of visual impairment] moved from being a ‘folk art’ to a profession” (Hatlen, 2010).

As developers continuously sought to revise and improve the standards for instruction, they also worked to raise the quality of all services related to visual impairment and blindness. Koestler (1976) posits that through collaboration and the efforts of the 22-member Commission on Standards and Accreditation of Services for the Blind (COMSTAC), the development of standards for service programs was established in 1966-67, along with the formation of the National Accreditation Council. The National Accreditation Council (NAC) established standards in seven distinct fields of service, including education, orientation and mobility, rehabilitation centers, and sheltered workshops (Lowenfeld, 1975). In 1975, after leading the way in establishing similar standards across agencies for the blind, the NAC was given the status of a recognized accrediting agency by the US Office of Education as “the first such recognition in special education” (Koestler, 1976, p. 144). These teachers, administrators, higher education faculty, and researchers initiated the process of transforming the field from its initial apprenticeship model to a legitimate, recognized field of study and teaching specialty.

Development of teacher training programs. The confluence of the previously highlighted factors, including change of public perception of persons with visual impairments (Goodrich & Lueck, 2010; Lowenfeld, 1975; Sauerburger, 1996; Voorhees, 1962), societal demands for improved services (Crouse & Bina, 1997; Hatlen, 2000; Lowenfeld, 1975; Koestler, 1976; Roberts, 1986), research that advanced practices (Barraga, 1964; Erin et al., 1993; Fraiberg, 1977; Hatlen, 2000; Moor, 1968; Roberts, 1986; Warren, 1984), and the eventual development of basic standards of practice all

facilitated the establishment of programs to train new professionals in the field (Abel, 1959; American Foundation for the Blind, 1954; Hatlen, 2000; Roberts, 1986).

Innovations led to increases in the population of those who received services, additional settings in which the services would be delivered, set standards, and raised expectations. These also led to an increase in the need for trained professionals to meet these new expectations and standards. The development of personnel preparation programs to meet this demand was facilitated by an influx of federal money in the mid-1960s (Lowenfeld, 1975). During these years, a series of grant-funded programs emerged to aid and expedite the development and implantation of university-based programs to train teachers to work with students with visually impairment. By 1966, approximately 25 institutions of higher education offered some form of year-round teacher training program in visual impairment (Barraga, 1981). This infusion of additional funding helped to increase the number of established programs by ten, and raised the number of students enrolled by 50% (Lowenfeld, 1975). The same group of ardent trailblazers who helped to build the field into a profession concurrently established and staffed these burgeoning training programs.

As Lowenfeld (1975) stated, “The years between 1950 and 1970 saw the greatest expansion of teacher training courses in visually handicapped in history” (p. 116). Because of this expansion, the field experienced a large influx of formally educated teachers who were trained by these new programs to meet the unique and diverse needs of persons with visual impairments. However, regardless of the number of specialized teachers generated, the need for trained professionals seemed (and seems) to steadily and

perpetually expand (Dignan, 2014; Mason & Davidson, 2000; Shore, 2017; Smith et al., 2007). Some members of this *first generation* of protégés, teachers, and professionals would later work alongside their mentors as faculty members or as state agency colleagues. Other new teachers would strike off on their own, either to serve individual students or special populations. Regardless of the role played by this group of committed new professionals, this specialized field continued to advance forward (Hatlen, 2010; Sapp & Hatlen, 2010). These more recent experts, who were themselves the “new crop” produced by these early teacher-training programs, have since become the Modern-day Leaders of the field of visual impairment at almost every level. As pioneering innovator Dr. Natalie Barraga stated, this was a time when “a virtual explosion of ideas and knowledge started coming together” (as cited in Erin, Corn, & Bishop, 1993, p. 9).

Current View of the Field of Visual Impairment

The evaluation of the current landscape of the field details expansion of specialized services, ongoing shortages of professionals at all levels, decreases in professional capabilities, and knowledge drain that have all been impacted by the departure of individuals who have held leadership positions in the field. As mentioned above; the work of Barraga (1964), Moor (1968), Fraiberg (1977), and Warren (1984) helped demonstrate the need for the provision of services to individuals who had a visual impairment and who were previously underserved or even wronged by inappropriate educational placement or practices. The Modern-day Leaders have continued to expand the scope, depth, and quality of instruction to students with visual impairment to now include a vast array of visual abilities, conditions, functional levels, and ages.

Leading expansion. These Modern-day Leaders also expanded services to meet the needs of students who were visually impaired and also had multiple disabilities (Hatlen, 2000) and to those individuals born with or who acquired serious neurological impairments that presented with varying levels of vision, and fluctuating vision loss—a condition now called CVI or cortical visual impairment (Ferrell & Spungin, 2007; Silberman & Sacks, 2007). Silberman (2000) estimated that the previously unserved or underserved population of those with visual impairments and additional disabilities now are estimated to make up “75 percent of the total number of children with visual impairments” (p. 174).

The expansion of services to children would now include early intervention training to be provided to infants from birth (now mandated under IDEA part C, 1997). Other early intervention programs (i.e., Head Start) begin at the age of 3 years. The fact that infants who are blind/visually impaired or deaf/hard of hearing experienced a lack of access to learning opportunities gave the rationale for beginning intervention at birth (Ferrell, 1986). The inclusion of infants with visual impairments in training programs from birth is explained by Ferrell (1986) when positing, “It has been estimated that development in the first three years of life determines the future competence of all children” (p. 123). Intervention may not only keep students with visual impairments from being put in a position where they are forced to play *catch-up* in the attainment of developmental milestones, but has also been shown to prevent the development of secondary impairments (Ferrell, 1986).

Modern-day Leaders helped achieve legislative protection and support for the population of persons with visual impairments in schools and in society (American Foundation for the Blind, 2000a; Corn & Hatlen, 1996; Huebner, Merk-Adams, Stryker, & Wolffe, 2004). Hatlen (2010) referred to this modern period as the most exciting time in the history of our field.

Additionally, one of the most significant developments of this group was the identification and delineation of areas of unique instructional need deemed necessary for students with visual impairments not only to access the general curriculum, but also to be successful in life. These unique skill areas are known as the expanded core curriculum, or “ECC” (Hatlen, 1996). The ECC recognizes areas of need in which the student with a visual impairment requires direct instruction beyond what is offered in the general curriculum. These unique aspects require specific intervention so that students can “be successful in school, the community, and the workplace” (Sapp & Hatlen, 2010, p. 338). The most current areas of the ECC are as follows: use of assistive technology, compensatory or access skills, career education, recreation and leisure skills, orientation and mobility, sensory efficiency skills, self-determination, independent living skills, and social interaction skills (Sapp & Hatlen, 2010). The unique need areas identified in the ECC now form the core of instruction for teachers of the visually impaired (Lohmeier, Blankenship, & Hatlen, 2009).

The field was further specialized to meet the unique needs of the variety of persons with visual impairment. This variety may be a result of the person’s age, age of onset, etiology (congenital or acquired), and/or presence of other impairments (physical,

cognitive, etc.) in addition to vision loss. Services also branched out to those with dual sensory loss or deaf-blindness, early childhood services from birth, due to increase in survival of micro-preemies, longer life spans, and the vast increase and identification of brain related visual impairment called cortical visual impairment (CVI). This expansion of provided services and population served further increased the need to infuse trained professionals into the field.

Increases in professional preparation programs. The professionals who make up the current pool of leaders received their training from the modern innovators of the field of visual impairment. Researchers and innovators like Ashcroft, Barraga, Corn, Erin, and Hatlen each played a vital role in the development and expansion of teacher training programs. The programs were largely created by support by federal grants (Lowenfeld, 1975), support that became scarce by the end of the 1970s (Spungin & Huebner, 2017). These professionals, with support of the innovators, brought services directly into the homes and local districts of students with visual impairments. For example, the total number of full and part-time instructors in Texas increased 1731%, from 55 in 1971 (Management Services Associates Inc., 1973) to 952 in 2016 (Shore, 2017). These leaders worked to alter policies and establish standards at the state and national levels to meet the diverse needs of students with visual impairments. These leaders established policies for training of teachers and professionals who wish to work with this diverse and distinctive population. The current leaders have achieved legislative support for a myriad of programs, laws, and initiatives to protect and support persons who are blind or visually impaired. Laws relating to the eligibility, range of

services, access to materials in other formats, assessments in ECC and orientation and mobility, and the requirement of addressing braille as a learning media option were all established. These individuals have earned leadership status and refined leadership roles in areas of policy, curriculum, assessment, advocacy, outreach, and teacher training. They have occupied these leadership positions for long periods, and frequently held concurrent board, network, and committee posts in support of the field and/or their jobs.

Many of these leaders have worked without interruption well beyond traditional retirement age, continued to work as contractors after retirement, or have retired only to return to work (Dignan, 2012). These individuals used their experiences, values, and energies to meet changing needs. In doing so, they developed themselves into *authentic leaders* (George, 2003; Shamir & Eilam, 2005). Their wisdom and experience have indelibly shaped and variegated the specialties of the field (APH Hall of Fame, 2001). These leaders faced, and current leaders continue to face, a new test as federal money that was used to support training programs in visual impairment now were no longer available or became scarce (Hatlen, 2000). Training programs have not been able to keep up with demand for new teachers and specialists. Ambrose-Zaken and Bozeman (2010) state, “The need for university personnel preparation program in visual impairment to address the education and rehabilitation of persons who are visually impaired continues to grow exponentially” (p. 166).

Ongoing personnel shortages. The leadership personnel who have shepherded the field of visual impairment through its immense expansion of services and significant increase in providers have faced serious and significant problems during their tenure.

Many of the professional preparation programs that began in the 1970s were unsustainable once grant monies no longer available (Barraga, 1981; Hatlen 2000). Remaining programs are constantly under threat, and suspensions or closures are still all too common. According to Sweet-Bernard and Brostek (2006), even long-established programs are not exempt from the pressures, and many have been subject to downsizing, furlough, or closure. Rising school tuition rates have also limited productivity of some programs that rely on grant funds to support university students. These trends are even more troublesome when paired with the fact that there is a perennial shortage of trained professionals (Ambrose-Zaken & Bozeman, 2010; Dignan, 2012; Dignan, 2015; Shore, 2016; Swallow, 1990). Many projections and estimates seem to indicate that the gap between needed and available professionals is widening, and that it will be impossible for university programs to ever fill the need (Corn & Spungin, 2002). The pressure on the field to meet individual needs will likely increase as a National Institute of Health study that indicates that the total number of people who are blind or visually impaired in the US will double between 2015 and 2050 (Varma et al., 2016). Ambrose-Zaken and Bozeman (2010) provided an updated profile of personnel preparation program and reviewed findings from four previously conducted studies on the same topic (Corn & Silberman, 1999; Silberman, Ambrose-Zaken, Corn, & Trief, 2004; Silberman, Corn, & Sowell, 1989, 1996). Highlighting an alarming trend, Ambrose-Zaken and Bozeman (2010) state:

To combat the dilemma of the increasing number of persons with visual impairments, coupled with the severe shortage of university-prepared professionals

to work with this population, one may expect to see a recent growth in the number of universities opening programs in visual impairments; however, the opposite is true... fewer universities opened specialization programs in visual impairment in the past 5 years than in the three previous periods (6–9 years, 10–19 years, and 20 years or more). (p. 164, parentheses in original)

The authors found active programs in the US were only available in 31 states, a number far below what is needed to train the variety of education and rehabilitation professionals needed to serve the population of persons with visual impairments (Ambrose-Zaken & Bozeman, 2010).

An additional concern related to personnel shortages is the inevitable impact that will be felt upon the impending retirement of a large number of highly trained, experienced professionals (Dignan, 2015; Shore, 2017). Many current leaders in the field of visual impairment were trained in the late 1960s or the 1970s, placing these individuals at an age approaching, or past, retirement. This delay in retirement could be related to retention factors associated with dedication to the field, job satisfaction, administrative support, or simply a personal economic reason (Shore, 2016). The latter has also been indicated by Dignan (2012) and Eisenbeis (2010), who contend that many professionals may have delayed their exit due to threats from the economy or economic recession. These leaders possess a large amount of knowledge and expertise that may soon be lost. Regardless of the reason some choose to continue working, it is inevitable that they too will one day retire from the field (Collins, 2003).

Decreases in professional capabilities and knowledge drain. Multiple factors

distinctive to the discipline help to differentiate the field of visual impairment from other agencies and industries. The training of teachers in university and other structured programs essentially began only in the 1960s (Hatlen, 2000; Lowenfeld, 1975). This led to an influx, or wave, of instructors into the field. At the same time, more and more jobs became available as educational delivery moved from residential schools to local educational agencies/settings. Although demand for these professionals began a seemingly steady and continual rise, several of these training programs were later closed or came under increased scrutiny (Barraga, 1981). The trend of chronic shortages of professionals, along with the threat of closure to university programs are ongoing problems (Ambrose-Zaken & Bozeman, 2010; Bozeman & Zebehazy, 2014; Corn, 2007; Silberman, Ambrose-Zaken, Corn, & Trief, 2004). These shortages and the closure threats bring compounding pressure on those who currently serve in the field by limiting university faculty research and increasing caseloads of practitioners (Dignan, 2015; Shore, 2016). As reported by Silberman, Ambrose-Zaken, Corn, and Trief (2004), the challenges of keeping programs open, funded, and running are subtracting from efforts related to scholarship and high-quality teaching. Growth of doctoral level leader development is flat, and too few in number of candidates to meet current and future needs. Ambrose-Zaken and Bozeman (2010) add:

The number of doctoral students remained about the same, with 34 reported in 2004 and 35 reported in 2008. Although the number of doctoral students has remained constant, the number is less than the current (and future) need for 49 university faculty members to fill the 25 reported vacancies and 24 faculty

members who may retire or leave within the next five years. (p. 165)

Despite fully funded and cross–university collaborative efforts to train new leaders, the recruiting of qualified leadership remains a top challenge in the field from 1999 through 2014 and beyond.

As the insufficient number of new professionals being trained becomes apparent, current leaders and educators are likely to experience increases in their own responsibilities and caseloads (Hatlen, 2000). Increased caseload size has been found to be a leading cause of burnout for teachers of the visually impaired (Dignan, 2015). In time, burnout accelerates and exacerbates the shortages by driving trained professionals from the field.

The knowledge drain associated with the retirement of baby-boomers is being felt in higher education (Florida Board of Governors, 2005) and in other service fields as well (Hinshaw, 2001). Smith et al. (2011) concluded that “In the coming years the field of special education (SE) will face an unprecedented faculty shortage” (p. 38). Data on teacher trends presented by Ingersoll, Merrill, and Stuckey (2014) show that overall the teaching force is older and retirements have steadily increased. One fear is that as more people retire, workloads and assigned duties for the remaining personnel will continue to intensify (Shore, 2017). Increases in caseloads have been linked to longstanding concerns related to job dissatisfaction and low morale (Bina, 1982; Davis, 2011).

While it may be too late to stem the tide of retirement, there is still time to prepare for the departure of these experienced leaders (Seidman & McCauley, 2005). Plans should be implemented to mine both the explicit and the tacit knowledge that is

embodied in these individuals serving as leaders. It is hoped that some of the knowledge held by the experienced leaders in Texas can be recorded and shared through the reporting of this study.

Theoretical Framework and Related Research

Finally, the conceptual framework used for this study includes a collection of associated research that applies aspects of represented theories as well as research that seeks to mine knowledge from leaders in various specialized fields in response to the impending departure these individuals. In this chapter, the challenges of leadership have been identified, the impact of being a leader in the small but diverse field of visual impairment has been detailed, and advancements and time periods of various stages of this phenomenon have been drawn. What is missing from the literature is how these leaders were able to successfully deal with the challenges, make such an impact, and move the field of visual impairment forward.

Bodies of literature used as frameworks for this study. The following bodies of literature were used in this investigation: (a) Hanson's Integrative Life Planning, (b) Schlossberg's Transition Framework, (c) Various Adult Learning theories including transformational, experiential, and self-directed learning.

Hanson's Integrative Life Planning (ILP) theory of career development will be used to examine this phenomenon. The author details six critical tasks (Hanson 2001; Hanson, 1997): *work that needs doing; attending to our health- physical, mental and emotional; connecting family and work; valuing pluralism and inclusivity; spirituality and life purpose; and managing personal transitions and organizational change.* These

tasks are considered “the heart of ILP” (Hanson, 2011, p. 167), and will provide areas of investigation to this study.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) identifies visual impairment as a disability category. While working in a field that provides assistance and support to this identified population may appear to meet the parameters of some of the crucial tasks identified by Hanson (i.e., work that needs doing, purpose, and inclusivity), without investigation this may be supposition at best and an empty platitude at worst. Helping fields such as special education and nursing, are facing attrition and shortages of professionals (Brownwell & Sindelar, 2016; Guerra, Hernandez, Hector, & Crosby, 2015) and faculty to provide discipline specific training (Brown, 2015; Hoover, Rude, & Taylor, 2016; US Department of Education, 2016). In a low-incidence field like visual impairment, struggles to change perceptions and provide individualized access and opportunity to individuals in the population are frequent (American Foundation for the Blind, 2000b). Even if meeting these critical tasks is identified as an inherent part of the field, these vital aspects of ILP may not be present for those in leadership positions. Additionally, investigation is needed to show how and to what extent selected leaders may have found meaning in their lives through their work while balancing personal needs and adaptation. The identified professional shortages in the field witnessed by current leaders may have adversely affected their remaining health and/or family. Finally, insight into how these leaders dealt with the vast changes and expansions may provide support for professionals stepping into leadership positions.

This study will also use the categories defined in Schlossberg’s Transition

Framework as *4-S System* (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012; Schlossberg, 1981). The defined areas of *Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies* both mirror and expand on the crucial tasks identified by Hanson (2001). By changing the focus from an internal perspective of transition to the critical aspects of life planning and development, the identified leaders may be able to reflect and provide meaning from their evolving career paths. As these leaders were building on the work of the past, they assumed positions of influence that were not previously in existence. How will these current or recently departed leaders describe the prevailing environment/situation, the available supports, strategies used, and their beliefs, efficacies, and perceived competencies of self that made the transitions possible. By examining the reflections of these leaders, those who look to maintain and build upon the advances gained by these individuals, I may be able to identify key factors that will empower other experienced professionals to take on leadership positions.

Finally, the ways in which these leaders learn is highlighted in this investigation. This learning may be centered in the building of experience, the ability to develop knowledge tacitly, and/or the ability to transform their personal understanding and perceptions of themselves while simultaneously seeking to alter the perceptions/expectations of students, administrators, legislators, employers, and the public would benefit from investigation. Were these leaders cognizant of the link between their ability to adapt to transition, and guide and plan for new careers, while also being able to personally transform themselves and their self-image so that they were able to fill and excel in their new roles as leaders while change the field and in turn

society? What Tacit knowledge was needed and what experiences were essential to their development? Threats of program closures (Sweet-Bernard & Brostek, 2006), possible legislatively mandated reduction of services (Miller et al., 2014), and the shortage of trained professionals may portend a suspension or even a countermand of advances made in the field. The collection of reflections from current and recently retired leaders is essential to protect continued ontogeny of the field. As referenced earlier in this text, the ability of the field to maintain progress made by previous leaders is dependent upon retaining knowledge of the past as a means of direction for the future and as a way of avoiding former pitfalls (Santayana, 1905). The pressing desire is that an exploration of the past will set a foundation for the future; to move the field forward without having to retrace, re-do, or repeat history.

Related research. The following provides an additional review of theoretical and empirical literature that addresses methods, theory, concepts, issues, and related studies that can be connected to this investigation. These connections may relate to the use of a) transformation of collective experiences, b) use of theory in investigations of leadership transitions, c) how various disciplines faced the departure of key leaders, and d) field shortages and leadership development.

The overarching goal of this section is to provide a review of related research. When discussing the how an author uses a review, Torracco (2005) states that the lens used by the researcher is not comprehensive, but rather “points the author (and reader) to specific aspects of previous research that are critically examined and evaluated. As a result, the review ‘tells a story’ by critically analyzing the literature and arriving at

specific conclusions about it” (p. 361, quotes and parentheses in original). Whitemore and Knafl (2005) add that reviews show the current state of a field and “have direct applicability to practice and policy” (p. 546). Souza, Silva, and Carvalho (2010) posit that a comprehensive review “allows including experimental and non-experimental studies to fully understand the phenomenon analyzed (p. 103).

Transformation of collective experiences. One aspect of this study that will be elucidated in further chapters is the use of interview narratives as a means of collecting information from selected leaders to make meaning for institutions, communities, or fields of study. It is hoped that the resulting collection of reflective narratives from Modern-day Leaders in this study may add to the institutional memory of the field of visual impairment itself. As Johnson-Bailey (2010) states,

Narratives are seen as intimate expression, a form of revelation, and a way of constructing a bridge of understanding between the narrator and the audience. However, narratives are also a way of understanding the world around us, our communities, and our families. (p. 77)

By assembling a community of individuals that are linked by one characteristic, Johnson-Bailey is able to demonstrate how the expression of personal experiences can develop a shared understanding across a collection of individuals.

Linde (2009) uses narratives as a means as detailing the transformation and history of a large Midwest insurance company to develop an institutional history or memory that is used to build understanding of the current situation and provide a view to the future. This large ethnographic investigation of a company used narratives as a

means to address how individuals and the organization as a whole dealt with challenges of moral and practical principles and were able to transform practices and establish new perspectives. Faced with the dilemma of incongruences, the narratives of individual leaders and agents were joined together to establish a new history and a new outlook and purpose for the future of the company. The study took different perspectives to piece together a useable and meaningful history of the organization.

Bringing together the stories of current leaders, who served in varying positions during a time of extraordinary growth and expansion can provide insight into the collective identity of the field today (Linde, 2009). This identity is transformed and represents newly-recorded perspective which is key to providing direction for the future. This new chapter of field history of visual impairment, told by its current or recently departed leaders is more than a simplistic attempt to retain knowledge. The recorded expression of these reflective leader narratives represents a phenomenological “attempt to uncover and describe the structures, the internal meaning structures, of the lived experience” (van Manen, 1990, p. 10). Linde (2009) states, the individual reflections of a group may join together to reveal a collective life story of the field rather than simply collecting some basic history of facts or theories to explain the experiences of these leaders. It is the stories themselves that are key to this study.

Though Johnson-Bailey (2010) centers her focus of community on a specific cultural group, the definition of the community or even family may be extended to a field of practice. Since, as Foote (2015) posits, the formation of identity in adults begins with experiences, and the use of reflective narratives allow for the reshaping of that

identity (p. 122), then it should also be true that the collection of reflective narratives from a group or community may allow for the reshaping of identity of that group. This is especially true in the small field of visual impairment where leaders in the phenomenon under investigation have seen and shown transformation in practices and in their personal roles. By bringing together a collection of these unique but connected voices, it is hoped this investigation may “produce a symphony of ideas that often lay the groundwork for better understanding” (Johnson-Bailey, 2010, p. 85).

The purpose of collecting this array of professional narratives is to provide perspectives relating to the shared phenomenon of becoming and being a leader during this modern expansion. Linde (2009) states:

Narrative is the discourse unit that presents both what happened, that is, events in the past, and what they mean, that is, the evolution or moral significance of these events. Taken together, this presentation of the past and its meaning make stories one of the primary means for proposing and negotiating identity, both individual and collective identities. (p. 221)

Though each reflection is personalized and situated from a distinctive point of view, as a compilation they will provide insight and perspective strands that form the “tapestry of services and support that [has been] woven together” to support individuals with visual impairments in Texas (Blindness Summit, 2013).

Finally, the situating of the collective narratives, as this investigation does, at a defined point, time, and field represents a dynamic *emplotment* of these narrative reflections. Sparrowe (2005) states, “Emplotment makes use of one’s own remembered

experience as well as the experience of others in literature and in everyday life” (p. 435). By drawing together the voices of leaders from various aspects of the field of visual impairment, this investigation may help compare the individual perceptions to that of the group in areas relating to organizational context, formation of professional identities, and authenticity of leadership (Sparrowe, 2005). Hays (2008) states that collecting memory in context is essential to the transform organizational learning into organizational wisdom. This wisdom provides guidance and commitment to do what is best for the field. Hays (2008) highlights both the purpose and meaning giving of Hanson’s ILP and the change central to transformational theory when defining organizational wisdom as a:

commitment to doing the right thing as opposed to doing things right. Doing the right thing continually while contending with immediate crises – and sometimes in opposition to business logic – requires courage, commitment to core values that include *the greater good*, understanding of the big picture, and a willingness to trade short-term profit or ease with long-term viability. This implies an identification with something bigger than self, and may provide a source of meaning only possible when one’s self interests have been transcended. (p. 2, italics in original)

The joined voices of this investigation may provide insight into the transformation of the leaders and the commitment of the field itself. The following sections will move toward further investigation of how the theories associated with this study have been applied.

Use of theory to investigate transitions into leadership. The following will examine how previous investigations have been based on, and/or used, the theories that

established the frame for this study: Schlossberg's transition theory, Hansens's Integrative Life Planning, and selected Adult Learning Theories. In the selected studies, the above theories have been used to examine the transition to and transformational processes of becoming a leader. Brooks (2015) used both Schlossberg's transition theory and narrative inquiry to investigate the career paths and transition to leadership of four college presidents. The investigation was centered in an identified shortage of leaders to fill positions in the highly specialized role of president at an Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) college. Brooks' study mirrored issues faced in the field of visual impairment as a shortage of qualified individuals to fill leadership positions was exacerbated by the impending departure of a high percentage of current leaders due to retirement. Brooks (2015) expanded beyond the transition focus of Schlossberg and situated the study in his belief that "life journeys are three-pronged, and include personal and professional life and self-identity" (2015, p. 16). By providing additional focus on factors like work/life balance, following a calling, being open, and changing perceived self-identities, the author appeared to align the investigation with key aspects of both Hanson's ILP and Mezirow's transformational learning. By alluding to the vast amounts experiential and tacit knowledge of the current presidents the study also draws on the importance of Experiential and Self-Directed Learning by the participants. As with the intent of this investigation, Brooks (2015) combined the narrative investigation of the career path and transition to leadership in a specialized environment with both reflection on past transformative experiences while seeking to provide guidance for future leaders.

Similarly, Boerner (2011) also used Schlossberg's transition theory to investigate the transition experiences of higher education managers in student affairs who were placed in leadership positions on an interim basis. Though the focus of the study was on interim leaders, several aspects of the investigation made inclusion here relevant. For the investigation, Boerner (2011) used phenomenological interviews to collect the essence of the participant's transition to managerial leadership and as a "means to understand the daily challenges and perceived effectiveness of the experience" (p. 59). Three key findings by Boerner (2011) related to the current investigation. First, participants stated they "often shared that they felt like they were balancing two worlds, one for their previous position, and one with the new" (p. 121). Their expression felt true of my own experience of moving from direct service to students to a leadership position, and the mirrored issues highlighted by Silberman, Ambrose-Zaken, Corn, and Trief (2004) and Dignan (2012), relating to the challenges of adding and combining of roles and using learning through both experience and self-direction. Secondly, Boerner (2011) highlighted the importance of self-confidence and self-efficacy in those taking new positions. In addressing Schlossberg, Boerner (2011) posited that if the leader does not embrace a transformed belief in *self*, no improvements in the other remaining 4S aspects of *situation*, *strategy*, or *support* could translate into perceived success in their new role. This new perception of self can be linked to outcomes of Mezirow's transformational learning theory as the new perceptions will be the result of development, growth, change (Mezirow & Associates, 2000) and result in "seeing of self in a new way" (Cranton, 2009). Third and finally, in stated recommendations, Boerner (2011) called for those

who advanced to leadership in interim positions seek to find a balance between personal and professional lives, develop support networks in and out of their institution, and develop transition plans. These recommendations can be linked back concepts delineated by Hansen's ILP as a means of attending to "physical, mental and emotional health," "connecting family and work lives," and "empowering the individual to manage personal transition and organizational change" (Hansen & Tovar, 2010, p. 376).

Eloff (2016) conducted an auto-ethnographic study using Schlossberg's 4S model to describe leadership transition. Though the author presents the story of one individual, and details the ending of a career in leadership as opposed to a beginning of a career in leadership, the purpose of the investigation may follow some of the same rationales for this study. Eloff (2016) states that one reason for their investigation was to "provide a textural resource to others facing similar career transitions" (p. 11). The author also reflects on the past but maintains a forward-looking stance into transitions. With that look forward, Eloff (2016) identifies supports needed to make such a change. One concept highlighted by the author was the importance of professional communities, key to Self-Directed learning, as a resource in personal transitions. By asking participants in this investigation to look to the future while reflectively identifying supports used in their transition, even a single-subject study like Eloff (2016) may be useful. Other transitions will be discussed in subsequent sections.

Transforming from Practitioner to Leader. Transitioning to leadership is a complex aspect of career development. Literature has helped to identify difficulties faced by teachers/practitioners in their transitions to advanced positions. Those who

initially trained as educators are faced with moving from skills/training in pedagogical approaches to teaching students to now being a teacher of adults (Huber, 2004). Other emerging leaders, who trained as practitioners, face challenges stemming from modifications in roles, empowerment, hierarchy, responsibilities, and influence while seeking to maintain, or even improve, trust, communication, and collaboration with colleagues (Muijs & Harris, 2003; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Simultaneously, new leaders must be able to reorient their self-concept, perspective, and identity as they develop leadership skills and take on tasks of increasing complexity in their new role (Allen & Wergin, 2009; Day & Harrison, 2007).

Brown and Posner (2001) detail the complexity of leading by stating that, “Leaders must establish direction in relation to the complex challenges and changes in their context, shape a culture that is conducive to that vision, and inspire their people, bringing forth their talents, uniqueness, and energies toward a worthy future” (p. 279). Current and former leaders in visual impairment have been able to build, expand, and improve the ability of the field and its capacity to meet new challenges and address the needs of a more diverse population (Corn, 2007). They directed their leaning and development into new areas, they collected experiential knowledge to make them better leaders, and transformed themselves and the field by seizing opportunities and using supports to make transitions.

Literature from nursing, a field also plagued by shortages (American Nursing Association, 2017; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017), also identifies challenges as their professionals move from care positions and into ones related to leadership. Sigel

and Sikma (2015) interviewed 29 nursing directors to study their transitions from staff nurses to the position of directorship. The authors did not directly cite theories studied here, but did address aspects of each. Sigel and Sikma (2015) were able to identify challenges to transition that related to Hanson's principle of personal development in a context; in this case a context related to shortage of possible leaders. Additionally, the authors were able to identify gaps in supports and challenges in the situations associated with the move to leadership that can be tied to two of Schlossberg's 4S system needed for transition. The authors were not able to identify best *supports* or *situation*, but did make recommendations to address issues. This knowledge came from the learning by experience and lack of one best way to make the transition may indicate the need for self-directed learning. Finally, Sigel and Sikma (2015) were able to detail responses that showed how some were able to adopt new roles and transform their personal view while others were limited by lack of knowledge or skill and were unable to truly transform into directors of nursing.

Dela Cruz, Farr, Klakovich, and Esslinger (2013) directly used Scholsberg's transition theory to assess the transition to professional by 242 *second career* or pre-licensure nurses into the field of nursing. The authors focused on the socialization of these non-traditionally trained nurses in the nursing program. Though the study used the concepts of *moving in*, *moving through*, and *moving out* (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012), and allude to the loss of connection to family (a need in ILP), the study failed to identify factors related to the 4S system. The only advice offered by dela Cruz et al. (2013) was a vague offering of proper timing of socialization activities and

the building of experiential learning that may include “an array of collaborative and contextualized teaching/learning methods” (p. 16).

Other studies in nursing also used concepts related to the theories in this investigation. Jobes and Steinbinder (1996) touched on Hanson’s ILP by highlighting change and “relinquishing ourselves to our spirituality” (p. 84) as a key to success in the transition to a leadership role in nursing. Sherman (2016) used Schlossberg and made a general call for resiliency in the face of such transitions. Additionally, Clarke and Dreher (2017) used a basic interview of a dean of nursing and highlighted “transformation in transition” (p. 34) as a key element to success in the move to leadership to nurses.

Returning to the field of education, transformational learning theory and transition to leadership appear to be closely tied to relationships when practitioners shift to positions of leadership. This may have to do with roles, expectations, power, leading former peers, and unclear demarcations of transition to positions of leadership. York-Barr and Duke (2004) provided a review of leadership models offered in schools where teachers are also leaders of other teachers. In my own experiences, even writing about teachers’ roles can become complicated and confusing. This stems from the fact that at times you are trying to describe working teachers who are also in training. This then makes you a teacher of teachers, and the candidate a student who is a teacher and is teaching students. Without clear roles, supports, defined purpose teachers who seek leadership activities may find themselves without adequate supports, strategies, or a healthy situation to become a leader.

Investigations of teacher leaders often focus on leading peers from positions

without clear roles or defined roles. As Raffanti (2008) states, "Teacher leaders employ a range of knowledge, skills, and suppositions in order to earn power and authority from colleagues" (p. 59). In the peer to peer context examined by the author a high amount of self-monitoring, concern with emotions, and timidity to step out and lead was demonstrated by participants. The 10 participants in Raffanti's (2008) study were teachers who were seeking to lead other teachers. The participants sought to build team and gain approval before stepping out to lead others. Concepts related to this investigation included how participants goal was transformational leadership in a manner where they expressed and openly demonstrated a Hansen-like belief in making their work meaningful and important. Their experience as practitioner mattered, The limitations of Raffanti (2008) study related to the apparent inability of the teacher leaders to act unless others shared the vision of the teacher leaders. In such cases where a consensus cannot be reached or where a dilemma may call for change Raffite (2008) advises that teacher develop emotional intelligence as a primary strategy.

Authors like Fleet, Soper, Semann and Madden (2015) assessed 200 early childhood teacher/managers across Australia. The authors used a qualitative survey to identify the characteristics that they find essential in leaders in the specialized area of early education. The fact that about half of the participants performed some leader or directorship roles made the study interesting. As in the field of visual impairment participants identified experience, self-directedness, and ability as key elements in leading others. Additional areas were a willingness to take on the new leadership role followed lastly by educational qualification. The taking on of such a transition to

leadership required the learning of new roles while making use of both experience and wiliness to accept the challenge. Respondents wanted leaders to make an impact on the delivery of services to the students through improved approaches or frameworks. Again these findings may mirror the field of visual impairment where effective practice and experience may be found to be key to the identification candidates for leadership who will be able to garner the supports needed to make the transition to leadership.

Adult education related research. The practice of recording reflective narrative interviews from leaders is conducted in fields related to adult education and disability rights, and has a fully-developed history in the field of visual impairments. In adult education, Maher (2002) used biographical vitas, written responses, and interviews to chronicle the development of the field. The author detailed that one driving aspect of her study was to collect reflections of long time leaders in adult education after the recent passing of pioneers in that field. This experience of loss and pending change is analogous to the current situation in the field of visual impairment. This investigation of the modern field of visual impairment seeks to mirror the purpose Maher (2002) used in defining her study of adult education:

The purpose, therefore, of this study was to add to the understanding of the academic field of Adult Education by examining the reflective wisdom and personal perspectives of those senior members who had developed the foundational theory and practice. This unique lens, through which the past has been examined, can provide a source for adding meaning to the present, and can potentially shape the future...The intent was to compare their perspectives both

between and within generations; and, to examine their perceived impact on the evolution of the field. Beyond simple facts, this study provided an opportunity to engage participants in reflective dialogue regarding their passions, concerns, experiences, and goals in the field. (p. 2)

Past and current leadership in adult education has also been investigated by Risley (2012). In doing so, the author built on past, previously-reviewed first generation leaders, and conducted a “contemporary historical narrative inquiry” (p. 5) of a modern leader. In this same work, Risley (2012) urged researchers to remember contributions of the past and to collect the “unique stories and lasting contributions” of current leaders before the opportunity to do so is lost forever (p. 196). Finally, Bersch (2005-2014) has used a vast collection of leaders from adult learning to develop an extensive video library of interviewees who are asked to detail their careers with some of the early leaders detailing how the field of Adult Learning came into being. The ongoing video series, *Adventures in Adult Education*, presents a past to present history of the field of Adult Education (for examples, see videos on Knowles, Mezirow, and Merriam).

Related research on disability and visual impairment. Similarly, McCarthy (2003) chronicled the history of disability rights by recording and analyzing interviews of eight pioneers in the Disability Rights Movement. The stated purpose of McCarthy’s study was not simply to chronicle the development of the field or to collect life histories of those involved in the movement. Rather, these interviews and narratives would serve both as training materials and as a source of future research related to the modern orientation and focus of the movement (McCarthy, 2003). The practice of collecting

reflections on their experienced-based knowledge allows leaders “to give back to society through their wisdom, power and spirituality” (Merriam, Cafferella, & Baumgartner, 2007, p. 357).

The field of visual impairment also has several examples of reflective interviews and narratives of leaders speaking to the researchers and practitioners of the day. Orlansky and Hatlen (1990) interviewed visual impairment field developer Berthold Lowenfeld seeking not only a reflection on history, but also asking for his commentary on current practices and future directions. Hatlen, an interviewer of Lowenfeld, and himself one of the first Modern-day Leaders in personnel preparation, recorded reflective narratives on several occasions (Hatlen, 2007; Hatlen 2010; Sapp & Hatlen, 2010).

Similarly, Dr. Natalie Barraga, another of the Modern-day Leaders and innovators, also partook in several interviews and reflections (e.g., Barraga, 2007). Barraga (1981) used a historical perspective to discuss innovations relating to the training of teachers of students with visual impairments. Barraga and Bina (2003) detailed and updated a 1985 interview with Barraga as a way of providing members of the field “with a legacy to look up to—and to live” (p. 122). Erin et al. (1993) chronicled both a past reflection and predictions for the future offered by Barraga and many other modern scholars at a symposium celebrating the 25th anniversary of the University of Texas Program to Prepare Teachers of the Visually Handicapped (no longer in operation). This symposium and associated study proffered forecasts in the areas of technology, assessment, family services, and education for students with visual

impairments. The project participants and developers again rallied a call for action, change, and innovation to meet the needs population of students with visual impairments (Erin et al., 1993). Barraga (2004) used a similar format of looking forward, assessing current trends, and predicting the future based on indications as a way of seeking to inform and to guide the field of visual impairment as it moves forward.

Other leaders have also offered reflective views of the past with eyes on the future in various aspects related to visual impairment. Goodrich and Lueck (2010) addressed rehabilitation services, Ponchilla (2007) reflected on a career in vision rehabilitation therapy, and Hatlen (2009) chronicled his role in the formation of the ECC. Additionally, Corn (2007) looked back at teacher preparation, and Welsh and Hudson (2011) challenged us to learn from the archives of the field of orientation and mobility. The interviews and reflections of leaders in education, teacher preparation, orientation and mobility, and other services are clearly valued by present-day practitioners, stakeholders, teachers, and scholars interested in visual impairment. The insight offered by these Modern-day Leaders and other professionals has helped us remember our roots and has guided and shaped the field today.

Though leadership theory is not a cornerstone of this investigation, the overarching topic focuses on how practitioners become leaders. This premise stands apart of the *Great Man Theory* where leaders are essentially heroes. *Great Man Theory*, which contends that leaders are born not made, is attributed to 19th century philosopher Thomas Carlyle (e.g., leadership-central.com, Villanova.edu, Wikipedia). An associated leadership philosophy, *Trait Theory*, contends that leaders share common inherent

qualities that make them better suited for leadership (Amanchukwu, Stanley, & Oloube, 2015). Other theories of leadership are based in situation or are contingency-based beliefs. In these theories, leader behaviors are tied to situations (Stewart, 2006). The core philosophy upon which this study is based veers from these theories to the belief in transformational leadership called *full-range leadership* (Masood, Dani, Burns, & Backhouse, 2006). In this theory, leaders build on school culture and exchanges between leaders and followers, and transform themselves and often their organizations in the process. In discussing the impact of transformational leaders, Stewart (2006) states that:

the result of this leadership is a mutual relationship that converts followers into leaders and leaders into moral agents. The concept of moral leadership is proposed as a means for leaders to take responsibility for their leadership and to aspire to satisfy the needs of the followers. (p. 9)

This leadership theory is not only transformational and experiential at its core, but also aligns with critical aspects of Hanson's ILP in work that is meaningful and needs doing, and Schlossberg's transition theory related to building supports to facilitate change.

Of special concern to this investigation is how the current leaders were able to transform themselves and emerge as leaders and in leadership positions. As stated above, this question is of added interest due to the fact that visual impairment was and is a field that is challenged by a shortage of trained professionals (Ambrose-Zaken & Bozeman, 2010; Bozeman and Zebehazy, 2014; Corn & Spungin, 2002; Corn & Silberman, 1999; Shore, 2016; Silberman, Ambrose-Zaken, Corn, & Trief, 2004; Silberman, Corn, & Sowell, 1989, 1996). As Dignan (2015) states, "Unlike other disciplines...when a VI

professional [professional teacher or specialist trained in visual impairment] is unavailable, no one else can help meet blind students' needs" (p. 29). Dignan's statement may indicate that practitioners are perhaps reluctant to move into leadership positions because of the impact of leaving students they have served and been personally involved with for many years.

While the shortage of teacher/practitioners in the field of visual impairments may have limited the move to leadership for some in the field, the current leaders filled or created more positions of leadership in the field than had ever existed previously, from a significantly smaller overall number of trained professionals. Leaders and practitioners alike demonstrate dedication to the students with visual impairments. For current leaders, the focus is moved/transformed from an individual student or small group focus to a new perspective from which they push for improved services, better training of practitioners, legislative changes, and improved outcomes across the expanding diversity (and increased size/number of individuals identified) in the population of students with visual impairments served today.

Summary

This review of literature began with identification of the nature of the field of visual impairment that has been changing and evolving from the very origin of services provided to persons who were blind. This chapter highlighted the impact made by leaders at various stages, beginning with those who worked as early pioneers, to the progressive innovators, to developers and standard-makers of the profession, and finally to the Modern-day Leaders who have vastly enhanced the depth and breadth of services

provided to individuals of all ages and ability levels who are blind and visually impaired.

The societal demands that influenced and impacted both the field and its leadership were presented. Educational research, recognition and protection of the rights of individuals with visual impairments and their families, along with medical advances and epidemics each called upon leadership to respond to a changing world in which they would continue to move the field forward. In many instances, this could only be done by first developing, improving, and implementing standards, and then creating training programs that would infuse specially-skilled professionals into service as teachers and advocates for persons with visual impairments. As the profession developed, overall services improved, and the field greatly expanded and specialized to meet the individual needs of those receiving services. Specifically, the leadership provided by individuals in the state of Texas was also recognized as point of investigation for this study.

The impending departure of current, long-time leaders in the field highlights the need to collect, store, maintain, and retrieve their knowledge/expertise before these leaders are gone. The practice of conducting interviews and capturing narratives to support such retrieval of knowledge has been documented as a valuable endeavor in past generations of leaders in visual impairment, adult learning, and other disciplines. These collected narratives will encapsulate and help to define the more recent history of the field of visual impairment, as well as document the significant contributions made during this period.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study was designed to collect, analyze, and document the career development and professional contributions of current leaders who hold or have recently held influential positions across the state of Texas in the field of visual impairment. The study functioned as a means to explore the impact made by these leaders, examine how and why these leaders decided to enter the field, and describe supports that facilitated their transitions to leadership positions. Through this process, the participants were asked to critically reflect on their lived experiences and describe how their career choices transformed them as individuals. Through this experienced and reflective lens, these leaders were asked to offer a view for the future and provide advice on how to best facilitate the development of new leaders to carry the field forward. Specifically, this study asks:

1. How did current or newly retired leaders describe their professional career development history from entry to practitioner to leader?
2. How have the identified leaders impacted and contributed to the field of visual impairment in policy, practice, service, and training?
3. What concerns did these leaders have for the field?
4. What vision did these leaders have for the field?
5. What supports could be identified as necessary to help build and develop leaders to meet the future needs of the field?

The findings and data from this study may facilitate the emergence of new leaders by focusing attention on leadership development, showing potential leaders the impact they may have, showing models of how others transformed in to leaders, and finally by identifying supports that may facilitate leadership development.

Methodological Frame

Creswell (2009) posits that the selection of an appropriate research design requires evaluation of three components to help individuals best plan research: (a) the philosophical worldview of the researcher, (b) the strategies of inquiry to be used, and (c) the research methods. In agreement with Creswell (2013), the philosophical assumptions and interpretive frameworks related to this study provided the direction and facilitated the selection of the method chosen to conduct this research.

The infusion of rich descriptions of data was intended to provide insight and meaning into the lived experiences of selected leaders during the development of their careers, their transformational progression, and transitions to leadership positions. These rich and thick descriptions are also provided so that the reader may develop understanding of the phenomenon (transition to leadership) and the themes identified in this research (Clegg & Slife, 2009).

Qualitative orientation and worldview. The general frame from which this study was undertaken was qualitative. My goal was not to determine one answer or one positivistic truth. Rather, I was seeking to improve the understanding of the experience by using participants' own words, providing rich descriptions, employing a clearly defined process, and using inductive reasoning for analysis in order to develop meaning

based on the participant perspective (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I fit the role of what Merriam (2009) refers to as a *qualitative researcher* because I am “interested in how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 5). Simply put, I used qualitative research methods to explore this topic because I am trying to build understanding of the experience of transitioning to positions of leadership in the specialized field of visual impairments. Any understanding developed here will be based on how each of the identified leaders created meaning of his or her role in, and transition to, leadership. I follow the belief offered by Merriam (2009) when stating, “research focused on discovery, insight, and understanding for the perspective of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making a difference in people’s lives” (p. 1).

Paradigmatic principles. This research was naturalistic and inductive, and was primarily defined by a constructivist paradigm. Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba, (2011) detailed the ontology of constructivism as being rooted in relativistic individually constructed realities based on each person’s world. Fenwick (2000) posits that individuals use reflection on their own lived experiences to construct personal understanding and meaning of their place and actions in the world. The axiology of constructivism is described as valuing the individual and his or her experiences, and seeking to uncover meaning in these experiences. The revelation of these experiences represents a way of making meaning of the phenomenon and of the participants’ lives as leaders. The epistemology of constructivism will be used as the participant and the researcher develop his or her own subjective truth, one of many truths, being developed

and constructed through interaction and exchanges between the parties. Lastly, Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba, (2011) posit that research using the constructivist paradigm seeks “To understand and interpret through meaning of phenomena (obtained from the joint construction/reconstruction of meaning of lived experience); such understanding is sought to inform praxis (improved practice)” (p. 106, parenthesis in original). Each of the above descriptors supported and helped to define the general progression of this research arc, and helped guide this study into an exploration of the career development of the identified leaders.

My Roles as Researcher

Creswell (2014) posits that all qualitative research shares certain common aspects including; all data collection being completed in the participant’s natural environment; the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection; multiple sources of data are collected; the goal is to learn the meaning of the phenomenon as described by the participant; and researchers must reflect upon their role and the impact of that role on the study design and direction, data collected, and interpretation of meanings identified in the process.

“When seeking a description of an experience phenomenological researchers minimize their presence because it is the experience of the other that is being investigated, not their own” (Giorgi, 2010, p. 3). The concept of bracketing and/or reduction is commonly noted as a key aspect of phenomenology (Husserl, 1931; Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Schwandt, 2007; van Manen, 1990). Husserl (1931) describes that though the bracketing process, the researcher:

Prevents any judgment from being passed on the perceived reality (i.e., any judgment that has its ground in the unmodified perception, and therefore accepts its thesis as its own). But it does not hinder any judgment to the effect the perception is the consciousness *of* a real world (provided the thesis thereof is not set in action), and it does not hinder any description of the perceptually appearing “real world as such” with the special modes in which we are consciously aware of this reality appearing, e.g. simply as perceived, merely “one-sided”, in this or that orientation, and so forth. (parentheses, quotation marks and italics in original, p. 265)

Bracketing (in varied forms) was used here as a part of the method and as a means to establish validity of certain types of phenomenological research. In other cases, detailing the researcher’s positionality, subjectivity, beliefs, and biases serves to build trust in findings (van Manen, 1990).

In the diversified use of phenomenology, some sort of bracketing is often considered a key concept. I, like others, struggled with the idea of totally removing myself and all that I know and understand completely from the phenomenon. My experiences studying the debates related to the purpose of bracketing (LeVasseur, 2003), its timing/scope (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013), and who should bracket (Giorgi, 2014; LeVasseur, 2003) further deepened my struggle to embrace the concept. Ultimately, arguments related to the effectiveness of the practice presented by Dalberg, Dahlberg, and Nyström (2008), Smith (2004), and van Manen (1990) led me to identify a different practice of controlling my biases.

Instead of strict bracketing, Dalberg, Dahlberg, and Nyström (2008) developed a modified technique, that the authors contend draws on the philosophies of other researchers (e.g., Giorgi, Husserl, Gadamer, Merleau-Ponty) called *bridling* as a key aspect of phenomenological lifeworld research. Dalberg, Dahlberg, and Nyström (2008) state that bridling goes beyond bracketing's need to control pre-understanding and assumptions to allow understanding of a phenomenon. With bridling, researchers may gradually develop understanding through "an open and alert attitude of actively waiting for the phenomenon to show up and display itself with the relationship with the researcher as a hunter of meaning" (Dalberg, Dahlberg, & Nyström, 2008, p. 130). Additionally, bridling allows the researcher to remove the focus on looking back at, and keeping locked away, his or her presuppositions, attitudes, and beliefs, and rather enables the researcher to be contemporaneous and respectfully attend to the presentation of the phenomenon as it happens (Dalberg, Dahlberg, & Nyström, 2008). For a similarly modified application of bracketing in ethnomethodology, see Holstein and Gubrium (2011).

Certain tools and strategies were employed to assist me in the ongoing bridling process. First, I used a reflective journal to monitor my suppositions and assumptions (Clancy, 2013; Hamill & Sinclair 2010; Vagel, 2014). This journal was used in the planning stages of this study to heighten my mindfulness of process and procedures in this investigation. Feedback from my dissertation chair helped me to identify and clarify specific concerns in both writing and planning. I continued to use the journal as a reminder of issues and challenges related to completing research from an insider

position. This journal was used reflectively, as called for by Makela (2011), as a record of first impressions of topics, concepts, and the interview process and/or experience. I also followed the process identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985) and used the journal after each interview to explore possible themes or impressions, and identify needed adjustments to the interviews themselves. The journal was used in each step of the investigation as I continued to move the study forward.

I chose phenomenology as the methodological approach that best fit the defined purpose of this study. Phenomenology is presented as a philosophy that is also a research method (Merriam, 2009), derived from philosophy and psychology (Creswell, 2014). Phenomenology is also a theory of science (Giorgi, 2010), divergent in practice from an American and European perspective (Caelli, 2000; Husserl, 1970). It is confused in meaning (Patton, 1990), and amorphous in form and function (Giorgi, 2000). In the words of Kvale (1996), “Phenomenology attempts to get beyond immediately experienced meanings in order to articulate the prereflective level of lived meanings, to make the invisible visible” (p. 53), and is something that “can only be pursued while surrendering to a state of wonder” (van Manen, 2014, p. 27).

My own position in the field of visual impairment evolved from student to teacher to higher education faculty and eventually to an identified leadership position. The use of a phenomenological approach best served my needs in exploring the phenomenon of moving to leadership in the field by using a hermeneutic lens throughout the process of designing the study, analysis of interview data collected, drawing conclusions, and writing results. Hermeneutics allows the researcher to develop new

understandings of a phenomenon so that prejudgments are corrected and transformed through the collection and study of data (Moustakas, 1994, p. 10). My pre-understanding provided familiarity with the subject that may just “as likely constrain or facilitate understanding” (Dahlberg, Dahlberg, & Nyström, 2008, p. 134). My personal development in the field of visual impairment created the wonder of interest in the topic, but my own perspective was openly checked by a process of:

Reflectively examining and turning over in one’s textual labor the various preunderstandings that seem to impinge on the reflective gaze. This does not mean that one must hope to arrive at some kind of pure vantage point, as if such a pure gaze were possible. But it requires that the various dimensions of lived meaning of a particular human experience are investigated for their various sources and layers of meaning, rather than being overlaid with a particular frame of meaning. Phenomenological inquiry continually is open to questioning assumptions and preunderstanding. (van Manen, 2011b, para. 4)

It is only by examining and explicitly stating my preconceptions about the experiences of these leaders that I opened myself up to discover how the participants made meaning from their experiences, career development, and everyday lives or lifeworlds. According to Schwandt (2007), the lifeworld “is constituted by the thoughts and acts of individuals and the social expressions of those thoughts and acts (e.g., laws, institutions). The lifeworld (and its phenomena) is regarded as the primary object of study by the human sciences” (p. 177, parentheses in original). Suspension of my personal perspective related to leadership transition in the field of visual impairment allowed me to view the

experiences shared by others in a manner outside of my ordinary thinking and do so with a more naïve, pure, and open perspective (Moustakas, 1994).

Any themes that were identified were impacted by my own knowledge and experiences, yet by holding my presuppositions at bay, I was able to explore with wonder the lived careers of those who came before. As detailed by Moustakas (1994), “The challenge facing the human science researcher is to describe things in themselves, to permit what is before one to enter consciousness and be understood in its meanings and essences in the light of intuition and self-reflection” (p. 27). Bridling allowed for active acknowledgement of our world and our consciousness as tools to enhance my ability to develop understanding of reflective narrative texts. Gadamer (2004/2013) states:

It is the historically experienced consciousness that, by renouncing the chimera of perfect enlightenment, is open to the experience of history. We described its realization as the fusion of the horizons of understanding, which is what mediates between the text and its interpreter. (p. 384)

The final product is my own, but represents a product that is essentially co-constructed by the participants and myself (Lincoln, 2009). Retelling the recent history of the field by those who facilitated advances has allowed these stories to become part of the organizational or institutional memory of the field of visual impairment—one that will be shared long after these leaders depart (Linde, 2009). van Manen (1990) contends the process, “is *intersubjective* in that the human science researcher needs the other (for example, the reader) in order to develop a dialogic relation with the phenomenon and

thus validate the phenomenon as described” (p. 11, italics and parenthesis in original).

Collecting the reflections of those who were part of the phenomenon provided more than a basic collection of historical accounts of the field of visual impairment. These narratives make up the institutional memory of the field. The retelling of this history:

...is reflexive, in the sense of continuously recreating the past according to the present, interpretations becoming stories in their own right. It is interactive in the sense that most stories are multi-authored, with organizational members alternating in the roles of teller and listener, adding 'factual' cues or interpretive twists as a story unravels. It is dialogical, in that the truth of the story lies not in any one variant as in the process through which the text emerges. (Gabriel, 2000, p. 19, quotes in original)

In spite (and possibly because) of these issues related to being able to objectively observe a phenomenon, I have chosen to use the self-investigative technique of the epoché as the initial step of bridling my preconceptions. This process was used to open myself up to the reader, to the participants, and to the phenomenon itself.

My Experiences, Understandings, and Beliefs – My Epoché

Prior to initiation of this study, I undertook the process of personal investigation as a means to complete the phenomenological procedure identified as an epoché. This epoché is used to identify my personal experiences, my career development, and my development as a leader in the field of visual impairment. Moustakas (1994) defines epoché as a process used “to refrain from judgment, to abstain from or stay away from the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things” (p. 33). The essential purpose of the

epoché is to keep researchers from imposing their own perceptions and beliefs on the data collected and interpreted during a phenomenological study. This self-reflective process does not wipe from memory or experience any knowledge related to the phenomenon. My interest in the career development of leaders in visual impairment was the basis and reason for this study. Others in the field of visual impairment have expressed concern related to shortages of trained professionals, and emphasized the need to infuse new leaders (Ambrose-Zaken & Boseman, 2010; Dignan, 2015). This concern piqued my interest and led to the development of this investigation. It was because of my interest and subsequent personal career development that bridling (as an extension of bracketing), reflexivity, and declaration of positionality was necessary.

As acknowledged, the purpose of this study was to investigate the leaders that came before and to be open to the expression of their lifeworld and their experience as each participant perceived and expressed it. “Bracketing, which suspends one’s natural assumptions about the world, is done so that what is essential in the phenomena of consciousness can be understood without prejudice” (LeVasseur, 2003, p. 411). Controlling assumptions and reflexivity has been part of every aspect of this investigation—planning, participant selection, data collection, analysis and conclusion. As part of this process, my thoughts, concerns, revelations, and biases were continually being collected and updated through the use of a journal as suggested by researchers (Clancy, 2013; Hamill & Sinclair 2010; Vagel, 2014) and described above. Dalberg, Dahlberg, and Nyström (2008) state, “Neither researchers nor anyone else can cut off one’s pre-understanding, that little vexation that constantly has occupied philosophers as

well as researchers, but it can be ‘bridled’ from having an uncontrolled effect on the understanding” (p. 128) of the leaders’ reflections in this study and of my personal beliefs and attitudes about the experience throughout the research process.

My epoché process involved active detailing of my personal experiences, connection to participants, and background associated with this phenomenon; thoughtful exploration and acknowledgement of my own preconceived understandings, views, or perspectives on the experience; setting aside or releasing these assumptions or preconceptions; and opening myself to reflective narratives of the participants with wonder and newness that allowed me to investigate, openly and carefully, the inherent meanings developed by participants from their perspectives (Merriam & Associates, 2002; Mortari, 2008; Moustakas 1994; van Manen, 2014).

Background in the field under study. I have a business management degree and have had held various restaurant positions including dishwasher, cook, kitchen manager, various service positions (i.e., busboy, waiter, bartender), and restaurant manager. I have also worked in manufacturing, including being a cosmetics chemical compounder, and later plant manager of a leather dye and finish company. None of these jobs fit what I would refer to as my *career*. That transition would not occur until I entered the field of education.

My transition to a career in the field of visual impairment truly began in my first year of teaching special education in a rural public school (1996), when a child with visual impairment was placed in my classroom. My experience working with that student led me to seek knowledge about the field and to advocate for services, attend

workshops and trainings, and eventually to join a university training program in visual impairment from a small university in the southwestern United States where I earned my certification as teacher of students with visual impairments (TVI) in 2000. Once certified, I officially entered the field of visual impairment by taking a full-time job as an itinerant TVI, covering three counties and 21 school districts. I continued working as an instructor with my first student, in the role of a special education teacher or TVI, from her 2nd grade year until she graduated from high school.

While working as a TVI, I continued my educational training, earning a Master's degree in Special Education with an emphasis in visual impairment in 2002. After acquiring a few more years of experience, I accepted an offer to become a part-time adjunct instructor in a university program training future teachers to work with individuals who have visual impairments. After 4 years of intermittent adjunct work while continuing to serve as a full-time TVI in public school, I was asked to join the higher education faculty in a full time, non-tenure track position. I was responsible for developing courses in the program, creating assessment plans, and establishing an annual summer camp for public school students with visual impairments. The university program in which I was employed focused on developing quality professionals in the field who gained skills and experiences to pragmatically meet the various needs of students with visual impairments (Visual Impairment/Orientation & Mobility Program Handbook, 2016). At that time, I was encouraged to obtain a Ph.D. to further my career potential at the university. I was soon formally accepted as a doctoral student in a sizable, well-respected state university in the southwestern United States in an adult

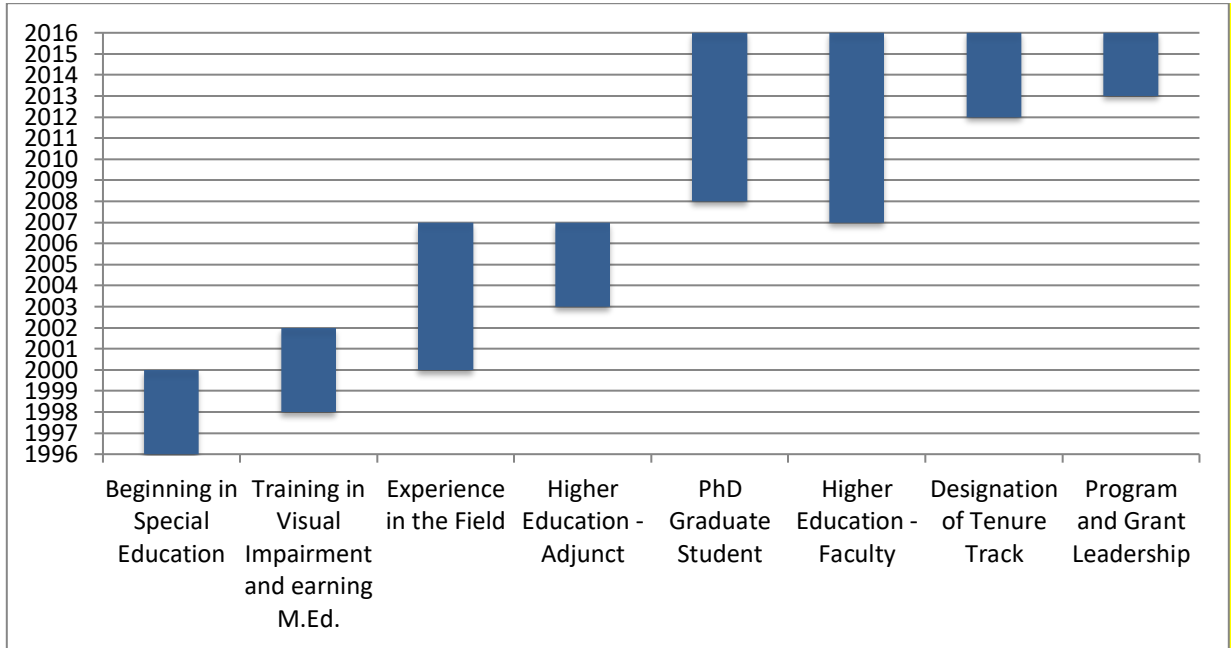
education and human resource development program. I was led to seek that specialty area in my doctoral studies with the goal of learning how to better teach the adults who entered our program for training in visual impairment.

Advancement to Leadership. I currently serve as director of the same visual impairment preparation program in which I myself was initially trained. The director position has expanded since I assumed this role to include an additional, but previously independent, non-educational based visual impairment rehabilitation-related training program (a professional preparation discipline serving individuals with visual impairments called Orientation & Mobility). Although my employer, colleagues, and peers have identified me as a leader, I more comfortably view myself as a product of the work and achievements of the individuals who are part of the phenomenon I am investigating. Their work in the expansion of services, training programs, legislation, and advocacy for persons with visual impairments allowed me and others the opportunity to enter this field. Current or newly retired leaders who held positions of leadership for extended terms established and staffed professional/educational training programs and supported initiatives to meet shortages in the field. These seemingly ever-present shortages have been exacerbated by mandates that raised teacher standards and expanded the identification of, and services provided to, public school students with visual impairments. The advocacy efforts enacted by these leaders helped to increase the breadth and depth of service that were required for this vastly expanded population of students with visual impairments.

I have provided a detailed description of my career path leading into a position of leadership in the field of visual impairment in Texas from my initial entry into the field, transitioning from a special education teacher to specialized visual impairment practitioner, to adjunct professor, to full-time faculty member training new practitioners entering the field, to my selection and acceptance into a doctoral program in adult education, to becoming a tenure-track faculty member, to director of first one and now a second (previously independent) visual impairment related program.

One characteristic of my career and personal life involves the overlapping of roles and practices that present themselves in an often divergent and competing manner. Much of my path has been seemingly out of order or happening concurrently. All too frequently, my journey has been a juxtaposition of progress and setback, advancement and stagnation (Figure 1). My career in teaching overlapped my training and earning of a M.Ed specializing in visual impairment, and later I began working as an adjunct while still serving as a practitioner in the field of vision. My attainment of a faculty position in higher education preceded my acceptance into a doctoral program. These both continued as I became tenure track faculty and director of the training program and various grants.

Figure 1: Competing professional roles and responsibilities



I will explore both the professional and the personal aspects of my career development and transformation that were experienced over the course of this process.

Reflection on transitions. Reflecting on my career in education and visual impairment, I consider many transitions as *falling up* or stumbling into a new career, specialty, or position. My initial entrance into education came after reading a newspaper article on alternative certification programs in which persons with bachelor’s degrees could receive pedagogically-specific training and become teachers. This short-term instruction was provided outside of a traditional training or university system, and was to be completed (and mostly paid for) after employment as a working teacher. I chose the area of special education because I had learned that this was an extreme shortage area

and that my job prospects would be better. I admit, this is not exactly an inspirational story, but at that time, I needed a change to give my life value. Viewing my personal transition through the lens of Hansen's *Integrative Life Planning* (1997), I found work that needed to be done, found meaning in it, was able to support myself and my family, developed a deep commitment to improving lives of others, and became an agent for change.

Becoming a teacher also changed who I was, how I saw myself, how I viewed my world, and completely altered my behavior—fitting the definition provided by Scholssberg (1981). My foray into education reflected mixed assets and liabilities of the 4-S System described by Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2012). The situational aspect of transition was triggered by my reluctance to pursue a business career, and the opportunity came at a time when I was ready to make a change. The short-term training allowed me to control how I managed stressors of income while giving me an opportunity for a new role that I felt I desperately needed. While many aspects of the situation were positive, my perception of self and my support system were mixed assets and liabilities. Although I was able to achieve success in my academic pursuits, I viewed myself as a failure personally and professionally in relation to the usefulness and value of my earned Bachelor of Science in Business Administration with an emphasis in Management. That degree was not useful to me since I had no desire to pursue a career in business, and on some level I felt I had wasted my education. Yet, it was *this* “BS” degree that allowed me to later transition into the alternative training program. I was able

to let go of my negative view of self and my job choice (role), and embrace my new role as a teacher (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012).

My ingress into the field of visual impairment was the result of a personal encounter with one student; a transitioning second grader who joined my class one month into my first teaching position. This young girl came to the class needing relatively simple educational accommodations (e.g., copier enlargements) due to a loss of some of her functional vision. A few months later, an exacerbation of a medical condition resulted in her sudden blindness. The responsibility of providing and advocating for comprehensive services for a child in a remote, rural district became my mission. My repeated telephone calls led regional service providers to recommend that I pursue training to become a TVI myself. At that time, university visual impairment training programs were being developed through a partnership with/between two separate state universities in Texas and the state school for the blind. Distance education was in its infancy, and my didactic courses were a combination of face-to-face delivery, interactive television, and synchronous online courses. Tuition costs were covered by grant funds which necessitated payback by working in the field upon completion of the program and meeting state certification requirements. I took classes at night, on weekends, and in the summer months while working full-time. I was able to immediately apply what I learned to help my student with the vision loss. Eventually, I assumed the regional position as a TVI serving the rural area where my teaching career had begun. In that position, I was able to implement the training I had received across a more diverse population of students with visual impairments. I furthered the search for meaning in my

work while continuing my training in visual impairment, eventually earning a master's degree.

After accumulating inestimable experience, self-directed learning, years of service and practice, and countless stories in the field, I was approached with the opportunity to work intermittently as an adjunct instructor, training new teachers entering the field of visual impairment. This new position involved teaching graduate courses in the evening hours using distance education. My work at the university became increasingly frequent until I eventually accepted a formal offer to join the university faculty.

Transition to higher education. As I stepped into different roles at the university level, I was what Robbins and Finley (2004) called an accidental leader – “Tag You’re It” (p. XV). As others departed, I somehow fell into the next level or position. I began in a grant-funded, non-tenure track position. My experience as an adjunct had enabled me to develop a voice, to gain skills in developing instructional materials, create web content, and use certain online delivery systems. I also traveled extensively around the state of Texas to conduct onsite visits with practicum students, networking with and developing contacts in Houston, Dallas, Corpus Christi, Waco, Denton, Wichita Falls, Victoria, and the Rio Grande Valley.

I worked under and alongside some of the very professors who had trained me. The culture and climate of both the Teacher of the Visually Impaired program and the (then separate) Orientation & Mobility program was one of quiet diligence. Publishing was not encouraged, and visibility of the program and its staff was by practice or design

limited and even overtly discouraged. This unobtrusive stance was likely adopted due to the program's lower enrollment, the intensity of training, the unique nature of the specialty, and being situated in a small, independent state school. This practice did not align with the soon-changing paradigm of the university, as the institution began to actively push to raise its profile. Promotion of the programs and increased prominence of the faculty in the university, in the community, in the field, and in publication and grant funding soon became vital aspects of professional survival for both the program(s) and the faculty.

My entry into a doctoral program was prompted by my desire to maintain this position at the university rather than to achieve or transition to higher education. My motivation increased as I moved from a grant-funded, non-tenured position to a tenure track position. The training I received in my doctoral studies helped me to develop new courses, increase publication and community engagement, and drastically improved the numbers of students completing master's degrees in a program that was, and is, primarily dedicated to developing practitioners who complete certification programs.

With my shift to a tenure track position at the university, attainment of an advanced degree became a time sensitive requirement for maintaining my position rather than a general requirement for entry as a faculty member. The myriad duties of national accreditation, grant reporting, and administrative responsibilities related to my current role as director of the newly combined Visual Impairment/Orientation & Mobility program, regularly pull me away from my pressing obligation to pursue essential, personal achievements related to the completion of my doctoral degree.

Personal transitions and challenges. Before and during the transitions into education, specialization, and later higher education, my personal life was riddled with missteps. Change became a perpetual aspect of my personal life. When I began training to become a special education teacher, I was newly married. It was a time of tremendous adjustment and isolation. We moved to a rural area—something I had never before experienced. I was separated from friends and family, and completely lacked cultural understanding or familiarity of the region. Within one year I had gotten married, moved to an unknown area, and entered training for a new career, all the while scratching out a living by working three different part-time jobs to support my (then) wife as she went to nursing school. I purchased our first home in my introductory year as a teacher, and we soon welcomed a child. I struggled to balance training for and starting a new career with the shifting expectations of marriage and family by continually reframing and restarting my life. Within the next three years, I entered a graduate level training program in visual impairment at a university two hours from home. Through grant funding, my tuition did not place a financial burden on my family, however, despite my previous support of my spouse's career training, I did not receive reciprocal support or encouragement in return. The marriage ended tumultuously as proof (followed by admissions) of her infidelities came to light. I struggled through the challenging, frequently hostile divorce proceedings and the seemingly endless legal battles that continued for 10 years after the divorce, and another four years after I was finally granted primary custody of my son. Success on the job became my way to rebuild my perceived self.

I have since remarried, and am the proud father of a blended family of four children. My wife has blessed me with support, balance, *and* with our youngest daughter. My wife and I share a passion for working with and for individuals with visual impairments, and we met through this profession. Her training and experience differs from my own, reflecting the heterogeneous nature of the field. She is, and has been, a resource for me professionally in areas of weakness, those in which I am not trained/certified, or where I simply need assistance. As changes occurred, shifting my career path, I continually drew her closer and relied upon her knowledge and support. My wife and I now work in the same university program, training professionals in the field of visual impairment. We are enrolled in disparate doctoral programs in separate universities, yet we find our research, presentations, and publications have nevertheless become intertwined.

Over the course of our marriage thus far, I have had four surgical procedures, endured law suits and a custody battle, and we experienced family births and deaths, illnesses, hurricane damage, and seemingly constant procession of stressors in our lives together, but we hold fast with faith and unwavering support and devotion. The chaos of our household and family, with the oldest entering college and the youngest entering kindergarten, has become my *normal*.

Embracing my role as a leader. Almost everything of quality, passion, and commitment in my life—my wife, my family, and my career—are linked to transition into education and specifically my specialization in the field of visual impairment. My personal career path, as described above, has been one of seeming chaos. This

investigation has forced me to evaluate both my personal efficacy and ability to transform from practitioner to recognized leader by my peers. Even at the time of this writing, it is challenging to refer to myself as a leader. My initial response is one of deference to others who came before, and separation from the individuals who trained and mentored me in this field. I view others as having accomplished and contributed so much more. Yet in developing this study and through personal reflection, the question remains: How was I able to transition into leadership? As many others, I too faced the challenges of moving away from students whom I served in the public-school setting. I faced roadblocks and challenges and splintered support. I gained experience, was provided mentorship, and worked in a field about which I possessed a great passion. Others were provided the same opportunities, but either chose not to alter their career paths, or were unable to transform themselves to meet the current needs of the field or of the new position. Additionally, my tenure in a position of leadership has been relatively short. My 10 years in a role beyond a practitioner pale in comparison to the leaders who will be selected for this study. Dedication to this field and the individuals we serve is something I believe I do understand. What I found, as an individual and a researcher, was not only insight from these leaders in the field on how they made the career change and transformed themselves, but also how they maintained their long-term-positions and excelled in advocacy, expansion, and professional development.

This study used phenomenological perspective as a means to “focus on describing the ‘essence’ of a phenomenon from the perspectives of those who have experienced it” (Merriam & Associates, 2002, p. 93, quotes in original).

Phenomenological studies bring together participant perspectives and seek to determine the collective essence of the shared phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). While some researchers posit that the “research paradigm informs the methodology, which in turn informs the research methods to achieve the study’s purpose and answer the research questions” (Cherristrom, 2015, p. 69), the impact of the paradigm may actually be less linear and more infused in, and directly connected to, the research process itself from conceptualization to completion. Phenomenology is an act of caring used to develop an understanding of the meaning assigned by participants to an experience while being in the lived world (van Manen, 1990). The author continues, “Phenomenology is *self-critical* in the sense that it continually examines its own goal and methods in an attempt to come to terms with the strengths and shortcomings of its approach and achievements” (van Manen, 1990, p. 11, italics in original). A strong belief in the importance of experience, life-story, and multiple truths has guided my interest in the topic of leadership and directed my study and understanding of how experiences are conceptualized, understood, and probed. LeVasseur (2003) states, “phenomenology is well-suited to holistic questions of meaning that spring from experience” (p. 409). It is because I was situated in the world where this phenomenon happened that the reflections of current or recently departed leaders can be developed with context and meaning (Dahlberg, Dahlberg, & Nyström, 2008).

Method

Methods primarily detail the practices used for (a) site selection, (b) participant selection, (c) data collection, and (d) data analysis. This section details how many of

these decisions were dependent on the context of the study (Patton, 2015). Each of the sections below include the actual process that I undertook to complete this investigation. This is provided for transparency in both the actions and procedures that I utilized to complete this study. Each section below follows the actions in which I engaged to provide detail of the special or potentially troublesome situations and circumstances that were considered and that were used to help inform decisions on methods.

Site Selection

The following section will detail the many parameters of site selection used for collection of the interview data that served as the primary source for this investigation. I will offer a clear and direct description of the sites selected, followed by the research that supported the selection. For this investigation, I chose to identify leaders in Texas. As stated previously, this was not a geographic restriction but rather a deliberate investigation of a group of individuals bound by the state who have helped advance the field forward. To optimally reflect the size of the state, I wanted to select participants from different settings. I sought both the rural and urban perspectives. Austin is the capital of the state of Texas and is also the location of the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI), the Texas Education Agency, the Texas Legislature, and is the home and/or focus of several advocacy groups in the field of visual impairment. Because Austin serves as the epicenter of the field, most of the interviews (7 out of 11) were conducted in that city, and TSBVI was an officially IRB-approved data collection site.

I live in the east Texas town of Nacogdoches, and work at the small state

university located there. This study also gained IRB approval from the university at which I am employed. This location was my home base, and the starting point for any travel to face-to-face interviews. Interviews were conducted across the state, in Nacogdoches, the Dallas suburb of Richardson (300 mi r/t), San Angelo (684 mi r/t), El Paso (1394 mi r/t), and during two separate visits to Austin (412 mi r/t each). Four interviews were conducted in the homes of participants, four in participants' offices, and the three remaining in private conference rooms (one at the university site in Nacogdoches and two at TSBVI in Austin). Each of the interview sites and times was selected by the participant, and as stated, each was done face-to-face.

The following will provide detailed information on site selection, with special identification of issues which relate to being part of the visual impairment community and my position as insider and outsider of the phenomenon under investigation. These topics were addressed to ensure that though Texas leaders experienced the phenomenon under investigation, that I, with my position inside the field in the state, would be able to appropriately investigate this site.

Background on site selection. Research is weighed and facilitated by the time and place in which it is conducted. These aspects contribute to the understanding of relationships between participants and the individual conducting the research (Starks & Taylor-Leech, 2016). While my career has been unmistakably affiliated with the practices in the state of Texas, convenience was not a driving force in site selection. During the time of the defined phenomenon, Texas has used collaboration among leaders and stakeholders across entities to improve services and protect the rights of persons

who are blind or visually impaired. This state has a history of advocacy and establishment of legislation that is a model for other states across the country (Spungin & Huebner, 2017). As reads the stated purpose of a leading advocacy group, the Alliance of and for Visually Impaired Texans (AVIT, n.d.), “Experience has shown that working together on common goals is effective and necessary to advance the interest of people who are blind or have low vision” (para. 1). These alliances have fostered advancements like the 1991 Texas Braille Bill (Texas Educational Code, 1991); the first in the nation to require textbook manufacturers to “produce material in electronic media in a form readily translatable into Braille” (Schroeder, 1992, p. 310). Other initiatives included increased awareness of the population, improvement of services (e.g., job training, telecommunications access) in 1995, teacher training and certification in 2011, improved services to specific populations (i.e., deafblind interveners, access to Medicaid for children who have dual sensory loss) in 2009, the requirement of an orientation and mobility (O&M) evaluation for all students identified as visually impaired in 2013 (Texas Education Administrative Code, 2014), and becoming the first state to add all areas of the expanded core curriculum for students with visual impairments (the ECC) to educational code as a requirement for assessment and instruction in 2013 (Miller et al., 2014; Texas Educational Code, 2014). The coordination of advocacy initiatives and programs helped push Texas to a position of leadership and authority in the field of visual impairment. As Miller, Pogrud, Allan, Welch, & Toelle, (2014) quote, and Pogrud, Ryan & Starleaf-Tayek (1991) state, “In a big world where an organization serving a low-incidence disability has a small voice, joint action works.” For these

reasons, Texas was the site selected for this study.

Advancement of the field of visual impairment in Texas, facilitated through collaboration among professionals, led me to identify participants in this study who have personally borne witness to these state-level improvements which have often had national impact. Organizational systems and services that are coordinated across Texas make this state ideal for collection of leaders' reflections. Admittedly, my history in the field of visual impairment and knowledge of some of these systems in place has informed the study. During this pursuit, my positionality in the community of visual impairment in Texas and as a researcher has transformed on both personal and professional levels, as has the belief of and in my own abilities. Starks and Taylor-Leech (2016) state, "As researchers work with communities their work and their relationship with the communities evolve and mature" (p. 164). By acknowledging my preconceptions and being open to the reflections of identified leaders, I was able to enjoy ready access to participants while following standards associated with the functions and practices of collecting meaningful and ethical research. To meet recognized professional standards, I employed strategies and practices to best serve this investigation, its participants, and my positions/roles in collection of these leader's reflections.

Conducting research outside an experience but inside a community. As a researcher (and as stated above), I must identify my position and openly disclose and examine any biases in my perception that could potentially impact the findings, analyzing of data, or reception of final reporting. My peers have recognized me as a leader in the field through award selection, but this does not make me part of the

phenomenon as described above. Though I too have made a transition to leadership, I did not witness the expansion of the field or the creation of positions for which we currently face a shortage of specially trained professionals. The leaders who participated in this study were part of a different era, with a different experience than that of my lifeworld. My connection to the participating leaders varied across the spectrum, from individuals who were essentially unknown to me, to those with whom I may have close professional association. I essentially am filling the shoes of those who grew the field to its current level of expansion and influence. The way I view the achievements of these leaders provides me the wonder needed for this investigation (van Manen, 2014), but is also an area in which I must closely monitor my preconceptions and personal bias. Without open acknowledgment and disclosure of my unique standpoint, this study may have risked becoming a piece of hero worship or deification of the participants. Rather, my true goal was to identify the meanings expressed by the participants about their time and experiences in the phenomenon, and to richly describe these experiences, determining the presence of any common themes in their supports, career transitions and professional transformation. Moustakas (1994) posits:

Phenomenology is rooted in questions that give a direction and focus to meaning, and in themes that sustain an inquiry, awaken further interest and concern, and account for our passionate involvement with whatever is being experienced. In a phenomenological investigation, the researcher has a personal interest in whatever she or he seeks to know, the researcher is intimately connected with the phenomenon. The puzzlement is autobiographical, making memory and history

essential to the dimensions of discovery, in the present and extensions into the future. (p. 59)

The histories of these leaders made the field what it is today.

Position—Insider and outsider. Various authors have highlighted the possible benefits and detractions related to the investigation of a group in which researchers themselves are involved either as members or by association. Creswell (2009) warns that studying those to whom a researcher is directly connected may limit the researcher's ability to address difficult issues, or potentially lead to incomplete reporting of problematic data, thereby the research may itself be perceived as biased due to the relationship. Others state that being too close to a phenomenon may inhibit a researcher's ability to see or perceive the phenomenon as they live in it (Vagel, 2014). Conversely, many contend that being part of a group may yield valuable insight by providing the researcher knowledge of shared experiences related to specific disciplines (Creswell, 2013), or provide credibility, openness, and assent that could not be attained by an outsider (Dalberg, Dahlberg, & Nyström, 2008; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). In discussing the benefits insider status, Kearney (2016) writes, "An obvious privilege is access and acceptance by group members, which creates situations for learning about, with and through them" (p. 147). According to Taylor-Leech and Starks (2016), the researcher's position as an insider and outsider is complex, fluid, and lies along a spectrum as opposed to a binary positionality. The authors add that these complex characteristics "show how both insider and outsider status can be an advantage" (Taylor-Leech & Starks, 2016, p. 5).

I, through declaration above and by standards detailed below, positioned myself outside of the phenomenon being studied. Because of this, my personal transition to leadership was not included as part of the data and subsequent analysis provided. This study was not designed to provide a map of my progression, but rather to describe the situated experiences that facilitated each participant's personal/professional transformation as a leader—often into positions or specialties that did not previously exist—or as an advocate for populations who did not receive necessary services. This goal could be achieved if this study, as its purpose stated, was able to identify essential supports that could be provided to assist in developing future leaders in the field. This narrow focus however, could have missed the point of investigating the phenomenon and achievements of these participants. By reflexively examining my own position and openly sharing the experiences and rich descriptions provided by the participants, readers will be able to construct their own understanding, knowledge, and *truth*. “The stories themselves are examples or topics of practical theorizing...[and] are important for pedagogy in that they function as experiential material on which pedagogic reflection is possible” (van Manen, 1990, p. 121). Shining a light on these leaders and documenting their lifeworld is important so that others might better understand the experience of transitioning to leadership in a small and diverse field such as visual impairment.

My personal examination (as detailed and collected in my reflexive journal) also highlighted my need to be open to the possibility that my experiences and those of the selected participants may have shared in some ways. I was diligent in maintaining an

openness to the experiences as shared by the participants, even *if* these experiences seemed to mirror my own. As van Manen (1990) states, “It is to the extent that my experience could be *our* experiences that the phenomenologist wants to be reflectively aware of certain experiential meanings” (p. 57, italics in original). The loosening and tightening of the bridling process allowed me to consider and continually scrutinize my perceptions through reflexivity. In discussing the practice of phenomenological research, Vagel (2014) asserts:

It is important to then be skeptical of our seeing, but it is equally important to be mindful of phenomenology’s interest in the meaning of the lived experience. In this respect, the ordinary lived experience is the very thing the phenomenological crafts-person should aim to explore and not something to aim to move beyond.
(p. 69)

Monitoring preconceptions from the inside. Through the continued the use of bridling, my reflexive journal, and frequent conversations with my dissertation chair about my role as a researcher, I was able to develop and enhance my mindfulness. Certain areas of caution were identified, including how I perceived and demonstrated respect for the selected participants, my perception of the impact these individuals had on the field of visual impairment, and even how I wrote about or referred to the group using comments of praise.

I have conducted research from inside the web of professionals and agencies that serve the heterogeneous population of persons with visual impairment. It was essential that I monitor any preconceptions that may have resulted from close contact and working

relationships with many of these leaders. My view of the work done by Current Leaders generated the interest in this phenomenon as a research topic. I regard the accomplishments of these leaders with esteem and respect, however, this appreciation in no way interfered with my openness to the information collected through interview, and conclusions drawn from analysis. The goal of this research was to examine how the selected leaders viewed, and derived meaning from, their career development; not a preferential analysis of a series of biographies blinded by reverence or commendation. It was my contention that my connection to these Current Leaders allowed me better access (Darst, 2014) and facilitated more open discussion of how these leaders perceived their career development and impact (Creswell, 2013; Dalberg, Dahlberg, & Nyström, 2008; Kearney, 2016). Through continual bridling, balanced by ongoing openness and reflection, I was able to best collect and compile the individual and shared meanings associated with the phenomenon. The strategies of bridling and reflexivity provided the tools to select appropriate participants, richly detail narrative reflections, and to analyze data effectively and ethically.

Participant Selection

As expounded in the earlier section on site selection, the selection of participants for this study required prudent research and justification. This section will provide a simple description of the process used for selection, and the research-based support for the choices made. Eleven participants were selected from the 25 respondents to the initial online screening survey that was sent to past winners of three selected awards given by the state professional organization in visual impairment. From that pool of

respondents, I was able to determine name, position (or most recent position), accomplishments, years of service, thoughts about the field, and willingness to participate in follow-up interviews.

My selection from the respondents first ensured that these leaders met the requirements of this study. One past winner did not meet the years of service requirement of the study. Others were separated first by positions held, and then, in cases of repetition, by location. These separations by position also helped address the various professions in the field; teacher of the visually impaired, orientation and mobility specialist, rehabilitation specialist, residential school service provider, university faculty, etc.

To ensure diversity, I chose one superintendent, one outreach director, two university faculty program directors (one in O&M and one in TVI; one from each of the two universities in the state), one rehabilitation professional, one mentor coordinator, one current teacher and former national advocacy organization representative, and two education service center specialists in visual impairments. Four of the participants had separated themselves from the field and seven remained working. Three of those still working were doing so post-official retirement. All had well beyond the minimum number of service years selected as a criterion. All participants in the survey were contacted by phone and/or email to confirm participation and arrange meeting details.

I then collected vitae from the 11 participants and wrote a brief biographical sketch of each person to be interviewed, which is included in this document. The purpose of that activity was to show the divergent backgrounds and professional

experiences, and detail the long tenures held by these leaders. Examination of the vitae and writing of these chronicles helped me to get a better understanding of each individual's history. The variation revealed in these profiles led me to believe that I had made suitable selections of professionals from career paths diverse enough to meet the needs of the study.

Because visual impairment is a small and connected field of study in the state of Texas, I was familiar with many of the participants on the list. The final participants were not the first 11 that I had initially chosen to contact for interview. The three individuals who were recognized by award on two separate occasions were given additional focus, provided they met the stated criteria and demonstrated a willingness to participate in interview(s). Two of the three two-time winners agreed to be included in the participant pool. I precluded three professionals who had directly supported me in my entry into the field as a university instructor. Two of those three excluded persons had also been directly responsible for my entry into higher education. The remainder of individuals I had known, with varying degrees of personal or professional familiarity. I began looking for a definitive 8-10 participants. As I reviewed responses, my list swelled to an eventual 11 participants for interview. I felt fortunate to be able to secure interviews with these leaders, and quickly moved to the collection of data from the direct interviews. The following will detail ideological reasoning behind the selections I made, including the type of sampling, how leadership was defined, criteria for selection, and desire for diversification

Background on participant selection. The selection of leaders to interview for this study was based on purposeful sampling. “The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting *information-rich cases* for study in depth” (Patton, 1990, p. 169, italics in original). It is understood that the participants had rich stories and knowledge of the phenomenon, and this was not intended to be a case study investigation. In my planning, I deliberately chose to veer from snowballing as a selection technique, which asks/uses key participants to refer researchers to others who fit the criteria and become part of the research (Merriam, 2009), because I wanted to set parameters that produced a more open participant pool.

Though I may now be perceived as a leader in the field of visual impairment in Texas, the participant selection process utilized in this study was intended to avoid some of the pitfalls of what Glense and Peshkin (1992) identified as *backyard research* (as cited and detailed in Creswell, 2009). I was at the time almost a full generation removed from this group of participants, and saw myself as a benefactor of the supports, legislation, and systems put into place by Current and Modern-day Leaders. That separation is evidenced by the fact that I myself did not meet certain qualifications used for participation in this study (e.g., experience beyond 20 years). Of special concern in this investigation was determining a manner in which to identify leaders which was not driven by or limited to my personal experiences or relationships in the field of visual impairment. The task, according to Englander (2012), “will be to find and select participants who report having had a specific experience(s) of the phenomenon” (p. 19, parentheses in original).

Defining leaders and leadership. Leadership is determined in different ways across various literature. Leadership is directly tied to commitment and morals (Sergiovanni, 1996), driven by passion (Bennis, 2009; George, 2003), a major influence on personal behavior and the quality of lives (Jackson & Parry, 2011), an identity without which nothing of value will be achieved or passed on in life (Loritts, 2009), and can be defined “as a trait, ability, skill, or relationship” (Northouse, 2009, p. 5). Warren Bennis, a writer who has spent his career studying leadership, presents the following postulations about leaders:

Leaders are people who are able to express themselves fully. By this I mean they know who they are, what their strengths and weaknesses are, and how to fully deploy their strengths to compensate for their weaknesses. They also know what they want, why they want it, and how to communicate what they want to others, in order to achieve their goals. Finally, they know how to achieve their goal(s). The key to full self-expression is understanding one’s self and the world, and the key to understanding is learning – from one’s own life and experience. (Bennis, 2009, xxxi)

To address the challenge of determining who was identified as a leader in the education of persons who are blind and visually impaired, criteria had to be established. Because this study was based on leaders in the state of Texas, recognition by the *only* professional organization that serves the field of visual impairment was used to identify participants for this study. The Texas Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (TAER) identifies leaders across facets of the field

through annual awards which recognize and detail significant contributions and leadership in support of persons with visual impairments in the state (TAER, 2017).

Leaders identified by award. In an effort to narrow the pool of the possible participants, selections were made from honored recipients of three specific awards. The chosen awards have distinguishing criteria that is established in the bylaws of the organization and detailed on the member group's website (TAER, 2017). The awards are; the *Texas Chapter Award* - "presented to the individual or organization, not responsible for direct delivery of services to persons who are blind or visually impaired, but who has, in one form or another, made an outstanding contribution to work for these persons" (TAER, 2017); the *Sammie K. Rankin Memorial Outstanding Member Award* - "presented in her honor and memory to an individual or organization who has made an outstanding contribution to services for persons who are blind or visually impaired in Texas" (TAER, 2017); and the *Phil Hatlen Award* - which "recognizes excellence in leadership and innovative changes in the field of Visual Impairment...[and] for exemplary and dedicated service to our field" (TAER, 2017). There have been 31 winners of the Texas Chapter Award since its inception in 1986, 14 winners of the Phil Hatlen Award which was started in 2003, and 26 winners of the Sammie K. Rankin Award since its inception in 1986 (see Appendix 1 for honoree data).

From this pool of 74 honorees, several factors assisted in the selection of case-rich participant leaders in the field of visual impairment in Texas who would be considered for this investigation. To begin, the qualitative nature of this study necessitates the diminution of possible participants (Creswell, 2009). Certain

characteristics of honorees precluded their inclusion in this study. Exclusion criteria incorporated factors of availability (or inability) for interview, lack of connection to educational services, or lack of identification of a singular individual honoree (detailed below). Reasons for lack of availability may range from an unwillingness to participate in an interview and/or provide documentation of their contribution to the field (detailed below), to (unfortunately) the death of the individual honored. Lack of connection to educational services is specifically related to eliminating award winners who are medical personnel (doctors), legislators, or others who, though they may have provided outstanding service and support to our population, are not related to education in the field. In some cases, the winners of the selected awards were service groups. These cases were also excluded from possible participant selection due to the inability to record the reflections of a collective organization or entity through interview. Through this tightening process, 30 award winners were also removed from the pool of perspective candidates (Appendix 2). The three individuals who were recognized with awards on two separate occasions brought the total number of possible participants to 41 leaders.

Criteria for selection. Upon approval of the Institutional Review Board, all 41 winners of the three designated awards (Texas Chapter, Hatlen, and Rankin) who met the stringent selection criteria (see Appendix 3) were contacted by email to confirm they meet the parameters for selection as a participant. After describing the purpose of the study, the research questions, and selection criteria, each of these award winners were asked whether they would like to participate in the study. In an effort to draw participants from various parts of the field, winners were asked to respond to a set of

initial questions which were used to identify their involvement in the phenomenon, variation of roles, and identify qualification for additional investigation (see Appendix 4). Documentation of service to the field as detailed in vitae, resumé, or other data was requested from those willing to be interviewed. Each of the final 11 participants provided a resumé or vitae. The collection of documentation served as a trust building preliminary meeting with participants (Englander, 2012) and as one of two means to record or make available leaders' interactions with the identified phenomenon (Georgi, 2009).

The following were used as a means to determine if participants meet the specific parameters associated with the phenomenon:

- Recognition by peers in the field of visual impairment for meritorious service and leadership through special designation of awards selected for this study
- Minimum of 20 years of service to the field to ensure witnessing of the transformation of the field that defines the phenomenon under study
- Willingness to detail personal career development through this period by reflecting upon career development, accomplishments, movement to leadership, while also being willing to project future needs of the field
- Holding, or having held an office or position of leadership in the field. This leadership position may reflect the diversity of the field and may include regional or state-wide planning, standard development, advocacy, active committee membership, training, publication, having played a key role in development of legislation, educational codes, and standards implementation and/or leadership

and/or development of programs to train teachers and/or specialists to meet the needs of persons with visual impairments in Texas

Each participant was willing to take part in interviews associated with the preliminary collection of data related with this study, and all were accommodating in the scheduling of time, place, and location of the face-to-face interviews.

Selection to represent diversification of the field. The number of leaders interviewed here required initial selection of enough participants to attempt to address the diversity of their roles. When addressing participants, Dalberg, Dahlberg and Nyström (2008) contend, “The question of variation is more important than the question of number” (p. 175). Though variation is highlighted, the goal was not saturation of perspectives related to the experience of becoming a leader in the field of visual impairment. van Manen states (in van Manen, Higgins, & van der Riet, 2016):

Phenomenological understanding is not a matter of filling up some kind of qualitative container until it is full or of excavating a data site of meaning until there is nothing left to excavate. The idea that you keep looking until you have saturated your material, until your data are saturated, does not make sense because there is no saturation point with respect to phenomenological meaning. (p. 5)

By seeking separate perspectives of the same phenomenon, this study was able to build understanding regardless of the identification of common themes found in interviews through the presentation and analysis of collected surveys and narratives. This use of an additional purposeful sampling technique selection, maximal variation

sampling (Creswell, 2002), helped identify participants who reflected the diversity of leadership roles and positions within the previously selected/awarded group. This technique allowed for the collection of differing leadership perspectives that crossed positions, organizations, and specialties associated with the field of visual impairments. As described by Patton (1990):

For small samples a great deal of heterogeneity can be a problem because individual cases are so different from each other. The maximum variation sampling strategy turns that apparent weakness in to a strength by applying the following logic: Any common patterns that emerge from the great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared aspects of a program. (p. 172)

The differentiated positions held by the selected leaders become a defining characteristic that yielded differing views and enhanced this study by “providing a complex picture of the phenomenon” (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011, p. 174).

Certain additive measures were used to determine the overall amalgamation of participants interviewed. Information collected in the initial screening allowed me to select leaders representing different fields of study, different roles, different geographic histories, and different scopes of services. These measures added a maximum amount of perspectives within this group of leaders. This process was similar to what Creswell (2014) identified as the multistage clustering process. The different facets and disciplines in the field of visual impairment were represented as characteristics of the individual’s role(s), and helped to determine clusters. Selection of the participant

population clusters reflected those who served in differing positions with regional or state-wide scope, agency affiliation (legislative entities; educational agencies; university training programs; state, regional, or specialized school positions; and specific population of specialty including deaf-blindness, multiple impairments, etc.), and disciplines (teacher of the visually impaired, orientation and mobility specialists, or other related specialties).

The initial screening tool was distributed to 41 individual winners of awards given at the Texas Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (TAER) annual conference. Details of the awards and winners are provided in appendices 1-3, and the list of winners and description of awards are also publically available at <http://www.txaer.org>, the website of the professional organization. The initial survey was completed by 61% of the leaders (n=25). The average term of service to the field from the respondents of the survey was 35.8 years. The final 11 participants were selected to represent the various roles, positions, and specialties that are associated with the field of visual impairment.

Data Collection

Again, a simple description of the data collection will be provided, followed by presentation of supporting material. While the screening tool above was used as a data source, direct interviews served as the primary source of data for this study. Vitae and/or résumés of the participants were also collected (these were provided upon request) and used as data. The interviews were pre-arranged with the participants, and each individual was provided the consent form via email at least 3 days prior to his or her interview. All

participants signed the consent form prior to conducting the interview.

Interviews were recorded using a digital recording device as well as my corresponding field notes. Audio recordings were mentioned in the consent form, and each participant was given the option to not have his or her interview recorded. All, however, agreed to the use of the digital recorder. The interviews commenced with me reading an opening script which detailed the study, and questions followed the established and pre-approved interview protocol. Although some participants seemed initially nervous, all who were not already at ease appeared to relax quickly, and were very forthcoming with thoughts and ideas. My goal, as recorded in my research journal, was to stay as quiet as possible and allow the participant to respond to each question fully. Established probes were used to further investigate answers or to draw more from the participant. Most interviews lasted at or above 90 minutes, with three going beyond two hours. Transcripts ranged from 29 to 48 pages and averaged 36 pages long.

The best way to achieve the goal of this investigation was to conduct face-to-face interviews, collecting individual narratives from varying perspectives to be analyzed, unpacked, and explored. This method was driven by the research question (van Manen, 2011b). The interviews used a semi-structured format which employed an interview guide (Appendix 5) that focused on the intended research, detailing possible open-ended questions and probes, and providing a general sequence for the interview (Kvale, 1996; Smith & Osborne, 2008). This format allowed participants to share their experiences and associated meanings, and provided an opportunity for the researcher to further explore and clarify responses. The interviews were designed “to understand the themes of the

lived daily world from the subject's [participant's] own perspectives" (Kvale, 1996, p. 27). Each interview was conducted at a location of the participant's choosing. Four interviews were conducted in homes, 3 in private offices, 3 in designated conference rooms, and one in a central workspace at an office after normal working hours. The questions and the style of the interview allowed the participants to openly share their thoughts about the inquiries without interruption. One interview was stopped briefly as a water department worker informed us that the water would be shut off. Another was paused so the participant could briefly answer a call on her home telephone. Recordings were stopped and restarted as directed by the participants. Once the interviews were transcribed and investigated, each participant was contacted via email with findings. The editing process will be recounted further in the analysis section. Follow-up interviews were conducted by phone and email. The following section will detail research supporting the selection of interviewing as the method for data collection—how it met the needs of the study, including use of the semi-structured interview.

Background for data collection. Interviews are a major data collection technique used in qualitative research in general (Creswell, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Englander, 2012; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2008; Merriam & Associates, 2002), and are of particular importance to researchers conducting phenomenological research (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; van Manen, 2011b). Evidence for phenomenological research is derived from first-person reports of life-experience (Moustakas, 1994, p. 84). Simply stated, the goal of the interviews, here and in other phenomenological studies, is to listen to participants as they express their life experiences and resultant meanings in

their own words and situated in their own world. As Kvale (1996) rhetorically asks, “If you want to know how people understand their world and their life, why not talk to them?” (p. 1). In detailing the benchmarks of the phenomenological interview, Giorgi (2009) states, “What one seeks from a research interview in phenomenological research is as complete a description as possible of the experience that the participant has lived through” (p. 122). Interviews (and resulting narrative texts) are a way to continue to share and increase understanding of these perspectives. For this study, the understanding and truths authored by participants were constructed based on their own knowledge, experiences, and the manner by which they have developed meaning from their world.

The interview was used to discover the essence of the common experience with the phenomenon itself, as opposed to learning about each unique individual (Englander, 2012). “In phenomenological human science, the interview first of all serves the very specific purpose of exploring and gathering experiential narrative material, stories or anecdotes, that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon” (van Manen, 2011b, para.1). Reissman (2008) adds, “Narratives invite us as listeners, readers, and viewers to enter the perspective of the narrator” (p. 9). The interview provided both a narrative text that was used to develop a deeper understanding of the experience and also a conversational technique in which the participants provided a description of the meaning of the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). I was the sole collector of all interview data. The goal of the guide was not to drive the conversation in an orderly fashion, but rather was used as a means of providing general focus on topics associated with the phenomenon being explored (Kvale, 1986;

van Manen, 2011b). Vagel (2014) contends, “All interviews are treated as exciting opportunities to learn something about the phenomenon” (p. 79).

The overall goal of this study was to better understand the experience shared by these participants and to gain insight into the meaning assigned to the phenomenon by each individual (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). My role was to bring a *phenomenological gaze or attitude* as a way of shedding light on the complexity and importance of the everyday, lived experiences of these leaders (van Manen, 2014). Each participant gave consent for a follow-up interview if further clarification was needed. This process of following up was used as a means of member-checking and for checking the accuracy of the narrative text. All participants were provided copies of the product developed from the interviews (included later in this text as Chapter 4).

Analysis of Data

The analysis section offers a more detailed description of the steps taken for this process. For the 11 selected participants, each transcription was reviewed, and meaningful passages or stanzas were highlighted by hand using a variety of colored pens and adhesive passage marking flags. These passages were copied and listed in a separate document for each interview (in line with horizontalization). Over 1100 data points were selected as meaningful for this study. Using cutting and pasting of the document, the relevant phrases were categorized by highlighting or changing font color and placed alongside comparable passages (similar to the use of note cards). These meaning statements were organized into categories. The categories were reviewed to develop general subjects and later refined into themes. This process was repeated for each

individual narrative and its associated review, and was influenced by the field notes that were taken at the time of the interview to bring out passages identified during the real-time interview process as important in that moment. The themes identified in each transcript were compared across interviews to develop final themes and sub themes.

Special attention was given to responses that stood out during the interviews, in notes, repeated listenings, or during review of the transcriptions. All identified and listed passages were reduced to derivative words or phrases that encapsulated their meanings. For example, research question 3 asked for hopes for the future, and later, research question 4 asked about fears. Hopes and fears naturally formed initial clusters of meaning. From that point, the specifics offered about the hopes or fears (loss or maintaining of services, legal issues, funding, or population-centered concerns) allowed for groupings to become themes and subthemes. Commonalities or similarities in encapsulated meaning led to grouping of comments to form meaning clusters. The passages' emerging meaning clusters were eventually reduced into themes.

Additionally, attention was given to responses which spoke directly to the research questions. This did not close the investigation to a narrow focus, which would have limited open coding and horizontalization. It did however follow the interview guide and allow me to respond to the initial research questions (as needed for the investigation) while still being open to the discovery of new items of wonder. For instance, in spite of the separation of research questions three (hopes) and four (fears) for the future of the field, previously identified meaning clusters tended to pair these together as opposite sides of the same coin. In another example, the hope of maintaining

services and funding was paired with the fear of loss of funding and/or the decrease in services offered to the population.

The final research question invited opinions of what could be done to develop future leaders. The meaningful statements around this question were often reduced to simply advice for the future. By being open, I was able to identify how respondents felt about future planning. Returning to the research questions allowed for focus and new discovery. Re-reading of, and re-listening to the transcripts, and the flagging and highlighting of meaningful statements or stanzas assisted in their identification as I compared the highlighted material across interviews. Themes that presented themselves were investigated in later interviews as allowed by the loose interview schedule and ongoing analysis of the meaningful statements. Immersion in the interviews assisted greatly in documentation of themes and identification of specific meaningful passages. These passages specifically spoke to the identified themes and were used as thick, rich descriptions.

The analysis of the data was done concurrently with the collection of each sequential interview. This ongoing analysis was used to modify future interviews through focus and attention (Merriam, 2002). Each interview with the selected participants was transcribed and coded individually. Themes were first identified within each narrative and then compared across participants. The personal reflections of each participant's experience with the phenomenon of career development from entry into the field to a position of identified leadership was examined.

Each of the recordings was transcribed, with special attention placed on all utterances, pauses, or changes in tone. Narrative analysis techniques were used as an additional means to analyze the transcribed texts of the presented stories for purpose, meaning, and themes (Holstein & Gubrium, 2011). Riessman (1993) adds, “Narrative analysis takes as its object of investigation the story itself” (p. 1). The participants told their stories in different ways, and the manner in which the stories were told helped provide insight and meaning. One participant was very open, but very ordered; another very heartfelt but also direct; another almost philosophical in his reflection; and two others repeatedly circled back to the question after making a meaningful point on a topic that was either related or a thinly connected point. Through this process, both the reflective story and how the participant told the story were analyzed. The shared relevance of, and interaction with, the phenomenon lends itself to what Linde (1993) calls *extended reportability*, because of both the participant’s recognition as a leader and his or her long-term work and leadership in the field of visual impairment. By examining the structures and the means used in the telling of the stories, an additional insight was provided into how these leaders understood and gave their experiences meaning (Riessman, 1993).

Each respondent appeared willing and eager to share the story of his or her career history. The manner in which these stories were shared varied greatly. Most of their ruminations reflected what is called a *fully formed narrative*, and followed the six structural aspects identified by Labov (as cited in Riessman, 1993). These structural aspects are: an initial *abstract*, followed by the provision of *context*, a *complicating*

action, evaluation, a resolution, and coda or epilogue which concludes the story (Riessman, 1993, p. 18). These aspects served to help clearly identify themes and segments of a narrative that followed an orderly sequence and provided a clear beginning and ending.

Several of the reflective stories did not follow such a linear format, and instead used what is called lyrical or poetic stanza structures associated with Gee (Riessman, 1993). These respondents used various spoken asides, tone changes, and/or detours, in the telling of their stories. The identification of these asides as stanzas of meaning allowed for increased unpacking of the data and identification of themes. These disjointed responses frequently revealed pieces that were not connected to the discussion or query but were in fact very personal or meaningful. These narratives provided incredible richness that would have been missed had the passages only been analyzed with a structural approach. An example of a raw passage of one of the transcripts is provided below with identified stanzas alternately italicized and underlined, with subsequent stanzas presented in traditional print.

I am already in principal training and then I started to go to school at night. See
why I'm a crazy person, I've been doing this for years. But I didn't have any kids
then. I was just married at the time and my husband was in law school and he
was busy. We were both just busy people but we were still doing the Joint Action
Committee every night. I had a—people used to joke to me about it—but I got a
copy machine at the time they were this big. It was donated by somebody and we
didn't have anywhere to put it. We were in a one bedroom condo, so my bar

counter had the copy machine and we ran copies every night for mailings. We stayed up and he ran the copies and addressed the envelopes and we mailed out flyers about whatever was the crisis of the day. And we did a master calendar for the whole state every month and everybody's things were listed. I typed the flyers and that was when I wasn't studying and wasn't doing my principal thing with the copier. You know, so I'm a lunatic. You almost have to be. So, part of being a leader is you have to be a crazy person who can work 24/7. I mean you know you're not going to be at the level of leadership that you might want to be [unless you do]. It takes work. It does, it takes commitment. And of course, for me, it was always about the kids, it was always about the passion. That was what drove me; it drove me in the volunteer world, it drove me in my jobs, it drove me in school. I got to do something for the kids. That has just always been my banner that keeps me going. Knowing the work is this going to make someone's life better.

By breaking up the passage into meaningful stanzas, I was able to learn about (a) family life and balance: *But I didn't have any kids then. I was just married at the time and my husband was in law school and he was busy,* (b) commitment: *I am already in principal training and then I started to go to school at night,* (c) early leadership roles: *We stayed up and he ran the copies and addressed the envelopes and we mailed out flyers about whatever was the crisis of the day. And we did a master calendar for the whole state every month and everybody's things were listed,* (d) views on leadership: *You know, so I'm a lunatic. You almost have to be. So, part of being a leader is you have to be a crazy person who can work 24/7. I mean you know you're not going to be at the level of*

leadership that you might want to be [unless you do]. It takes work. It does, it takes commitment, (e) passion for the field: And of course, for me, it was always about the kids, it was always about the passion. That was what drove me it drove me in the volunteer world, it drove me in my jobs, it drove me in school. I got to do something for the kid, and (f) life purpose: That has just always been my banner that keeps me going. Knowing the work is this going to make someone's life better.

Background on data analysis and locating essence (Thematic data analysis).

Before, during, and after the transcription, the recordings were repeatedly listened to and the interview transcripts were repeatedly read as a way to immerse myself in the narrative in same way as the initial collection, and in a manner supported by Merriam (2009) and Riessman (1993).

A thematic analysis of the text was completed to identify meaningful statements or data points that could be used to unpack the meaning of the text. These data points were examined and compared to ensure highlighting of text that may be meaningful. These meaningful data points were collected and contracted using *horizontalization*, a process where all identified data passages are listed together and considered equally important, and then refined using *phenomenological reduction* (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2011a). Phenomenological reduction uses our ability to control our assumptions and look at the data with openness or wonder in an attempt to locate meaning (van Manen 2011a). Passages were first identified individually, then compared to demonstrate horizontalization of data. For example, as participants were asked to describe their careers, several offered how they entered the field with surprisingly few of these leaders

entering the field with a plan. The overwhelming theme revolved around the fact that these leaders discovered the field almost by chance. Codes were developed holistically and through identification of words or short phrases that conveyed salient meanings (Saldana, 2009). Examples of these codes included learning experiences, hopes, impact, accomplishments, fears, and advice. Passages that represented repetitions or centered on a similar topic were grouped together. These groups then formed clusters of meaning (Creswell, 2013). This grouping and meaning-making was evident in the responses to questions about what the field has given back to these leaders. The themes of this query revolved not only around shared passion to help others, but even more strongly centered on the connections and bonds built between professionals across the field.

As with bracketing, there is some variation between perceptions of how to perform phenomenological research and reduction. Some detail a step-by-step process (e.g., Moustakas), and others call for an open and adaptable process (e.g., van Manen). Most researchers share the call for accurate transcription and reduction of data into clusters or themes. Giorgi (2009) provides the following three steps to generally describe the method:

- 1 – Read for sense of the whole
- 2 – Determination of meaning units
- 3 – Transformation of participants’ natural attitude expressions into phenomenologically psychologically sensitive expressions

In this investigation, themes were identified without the aid of a computer program or analysis tool. The first data source analyzed was the screening tool. Once the

tool had been used to select participants, investigation of meaning statements written by respondents was undertaken. These responses were (by design) grouped around questions related to the research study. The open-ended nature of many of the screening questions allowed for identification of themes that were themselves already associated with various research questions.

Rigor and Trustworthiness

This project followed criteria identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985) for establishing trustworthiness. These identified criteria are: credibility (truthfulness); transferability (usefulness in other contexts); dependability (consistency); and conformability (freedom from bias). For this project, participants were selected from a collection of individuals who had been identified as leaders in the field of visual impairment in Texas by the only professional organization in the state. From these identified leaders, individual participants were chosen who shared the phenomenon of experiencing the transition to leadership in the past 20+ years, during a time in which the field of visual impairment underwent significant evolution and expansion. The meanings created in the reflections of these leaders on their entrance and eventual transitions into leadership in the field of visual impairment were explored from the participants' perspectives. The description of the participants' lifeworld and the essences of their narratives provided a frame to show how "lived experience is revealed to us in such a fashion that we are now able to grasp the nature and significance of this experience in a hitherto unseen way" (van Manen, 1990, p. 39).

Credibility was developed in two ways. Although the individually recorded interviews served as the primary data source of this study, each participant met the criteria for recognition as a leader over the decades of vast expansion in educational services and populations served. Data collected also documented the past contributions and/or continued leadership roles managed by the selected participants. Initial contact, through the use of survey, with a more broadly defined list of possible participants introduced the study to interview participants. The initial survey data was used in analysis and findings. This antecedent collection of data from recognized award winners helped me to highlight, explore, and develop parts of follow-up face-to-face interviews with the selected 11 participants. The presentation of initial themes at gatherings of various committees and advocacy groups served as another form of member checking and as a source triangulation, as findings were discussed in private, public, and professional settings. Additionally, my personal investigation and epoché were provided to detail my positionality, background, qualifications, and experience with this topic.

The second criterion, *transferability*, was satisfied through thick descriptions of experiences. Data was presented using the participants' own words of how they experienced and gave meaning to the phenomenon. Rich descriptions are provided so that others may gain some understanding of the participant's reflective lifeworld. Though I may be knowledgeable about the field of visual impairment, and even knowledgeable about leadership in the field, I do not have the experience of living through the growth and expansion of the field as it is today. The interview narratives were collected in an effort to gain understanding of each of these leaders' unique

experiences and perspectives. It is through this sharing of narratives that others may see aspects of their own situations and utilize the information accordingly. In this way, the transferability of data gleaned from the narratives about these leaders' experiences falls to the reader and the practitioner. The narrative product presented here gives a description of both context and phenomenon, from which the practitioner may be able to draw comparisons to his or her personal situation (Shenton, 2004). The goal is to build understanding through a rich description, and to provide insight that others may choose to apply to their own settings or circumstances.

Transcripts of audio recordings were further reviewed by the participants to provide *dependability*. Follow up interviews and sharing of content were used as verification of transcriptions, and member checks were used to share narrative descriptions and identified themes of the phenomenon across the participants. Each participant was contacted and/or met with after being provided a copy of the interview transcripts, quotations, and descriptions (for follow-up interview see Appendix 6).

Each participant was given an early version of Chapter 4 so that they could see their words and the words of others joined together around themes. Several edits were made in response to this member checking review. Ten of the 11 participants provided direct commentary on the product, leading to minor corrections. These mostly related to timing, location, or revision of quotations to complete sentences or ideas. The delicate nature of some of the topics led to re-writes and repeated correspondences to effectively collaborate with three of the participants. The follow-up interviews were done in an array of methods which were initiated via email. The most attention was paid to the

written material of the chapter presented. This overall study was not designed to be exactly replicated in the desire to achieve the same outcome, since it represents the presentation of unique perspectives, in unique contexts, involving a specific phenomenon. In-depth reporting of how the data was collected, and how both narrative and phenomenological methods were used to analyze the data provides a model of how similar research could be dependably undertaken (Shenton, 2004).

Finally, *confirmability* was supported through the use of an outside auditor. The outside auditor is a university faculty member and a well-trained, highly-skilled practitioner in the field of visual impairment. She holds a Ph.D. in Special Education, is a trained TVI, and is completing both her principal certification and her orientation and mobility certification. She is well-published, an experienced teacher, an active committee member, and has worked in personnel preparation of future professionals in the field of visual impairment. This outside auditor is experienced in both qualitative and quantitative research, and completed her dissertation using qualitative methodology relating to the population of students with deaf-blindness. As stated, this auditor assisted in the review of identified meaningful statements and confirmation of the primary themes or essences I identified. The review included both the reading of all 11 transcripts and the themes I identified from the interviews (a narrative approach) and themes selected across the selected narratives (a phenomenological reduction approach). Her response to my selection of identified themes was that these were solid and accurately reflected the data in the interviews. In her final comment, she suggested that collaboration might be examined as a possible additional theme. The area of

collaboration was added to the findings and even more fully explored in the final chapter of this document.

Confirmability was further reinforced by allowing the data to speak for itself. Findings were presented in context, and connected to, but not guided by, the myriad of influences that were laid out in the personal reflection and epoché. Data was neither coerced nor directed to support any preconceptions. My familiarity with the collecting of narratives and experiences is essential, since I am the instrument being used to collect this data (Kvale, 1996). Although a general interview guide was developed, the maximum flexibility and openness of the conversational approach was infused in the interview process (Patton, 1990). The pre-interview questions allowed each leader to self-identify as meeting the parameters of the phenomenon and openly express his or her willingness to be a participant. The narratives were free-flowing and rarely interrupted by me as a researcher as a means of showing respect for and empathy with the participant (Patton, 1990). By limiting my questions, I was also able to remain open to new aspects of the phenomenon, and reserve my probes for lulls in the shared conversation or to obtain clarification of specific reflective experiences of the leaders. It was both the rich description *and* the expression of how these leaders have made sense of life during this distinct point in time that is being collected. The sharing of these experiences provides access to what soon could be lost knowledge and that may be formed into a usable and formerly-undeveloped piece of history of the field of visual impairment.

The detailed positionality statement, specifically speaking to my role as both an insider and outsider, was used to examine and explore my role as a participant-interviewer and a participant-researcher. My judgments and choices were seated in my values and beliefs, and my interest in learning about how each individual experienced the phenomenon from his or her own personal lived perspective. As a safeguard, I chose to perform an ongoing bridling of predetermined and identified areas of potential bias or preconception. Rather than trying to discount or bracket the impact of these values, experiences, and interests, I chose to describe how they impacted the study and the conclusion (Creswell, 2013).

Summary

This chapter provided a summary of the research design of this investigation. It began with a description of the methodical frame used, with special attention paid to my qualitative world view, paradigmatic principles, and my role as a researcher. My epoché detailed my own background in the field of visual impairment and my advancement to a position of leadership as a means of grounding the study. This chapter continued with a description of the methods used in this investigation including site selection, positionality, and participant selection criteria. Next, the chapter offered descriptions of data collection and priorities. The chapter continued by detailing how the data would be analyzed and how themes would be identified. Finally, the chapter closed with a discussion of how rigor and trust would be established in the presentation of findings and data. The following chapter will examine the findings that were uncovered using these strategies.

CHAPTER IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore the career development and contributions of leaders in the field of visual impairment who hold or have held influential positions across the state of Texas. This study also sought to draw from these leaders a reflection on their legacies and shared mission while examining their vision for the field and for growth of future leadership. Five research questions guided this study:

(a) How did current or newly-retired leaders describe their professional career development history in the field of visual impairment? (b) How have the identified leaders impacted and contributed to the field of visual impairment in policy, practice, service, and training? (c) What concerns did these leaders have for the field? (d) What vision did these leaders have for the field? and (e) What supports could be identified as necessary to help build and develop leaders to meet the future needs of the field?

This chapter presents data collected through individual interviews with the selected participants, and is combined with data collected via the initial screening survey of eligible participants. The participant pool was drawn from past award winners recognized by the Texas statewide professional organization. Eleven leaders were chosen from the initial responses to the survey, and subsequent one-on-one interviews were conducted. This study called for compilation of reflections from leaders across the field of visual impairment who held 20 or more years of experience in the field, but who also may have had diverse experiences related to the period under investigation. This

chapter integrates findings from the initial survey with the themes identified in the longer interviews with the 11 selected participants.

Leaders in the field of visual impairment cover a vast array of positions and perspectives in service to the population of students and persons with visual impairments. The initial survey was used to identify individuals who held diverse positions and may have varied perspectives about the field. Data collected from the initial surveys will be presented in an aggregate form, with no personal attributes, to allow those who took part in the screening process to retain anonymity and confidentiality. This data will be folded into the interview data where appropriate.

Data Sources

Screening tool. Beyond basic determination that each respondent met the qualifications for this study, each was asked several questions related to his or her experiences over the course of their careers. The questions asked in the initial survey did not mirror the questions on the interview guide for participants, but did touch on some items related to the research questions. The alignment of several survey questions to the study's research questions allowed for collection of additional data related to the phenomenon through the use of survey rather than interview.

Face-to-face interview of participants. The 11 selected leaders who took part in face-to-face interviews were drawn from leadership positions which reflect the diversity of the field. The participants' backgrounds include regional or state-wide planning, standard development, advocacy, active committee membership, training, publication, having played a key role in the development of legislation, educational codes, and

standards implementation, and/or leadership and/or development of programs to train teachers and/or specialists to meet the needs of persons with visual impairments in Texas.

The leaders have all provided written consent (through the signed consent given prior to the individual interview portion of the study itself) to be identified using personal information, including their names. Since visual impairment is such a close-knit profession, and the participant selection criteria was itself based on known award information, those who read the reports of these interviews may easily identify certain leaders based on data such as the participants' roles, employer(s), work experiences, and scope of service to the field. After thoughtful consideration, the use of real names was deemed necessary so that the rich descriptions of each participant's career development need not be masked or watered down in an effort to retain (perhaps futile) anonymity. The descriptions offered will be associated directly with the individual selected for face-to-face interview, and the respective comments/quotes will be attributed directly to that person. Each of the interviews was recorded in person in the following Texas cities: Austin, Dallas, El Paso, Nacogdoches, and San Angelo.

Seven women and four men were selected for participation. Three of the identified leaders had earned a Ph.D., and the others held at least a Master's degree. Though this study is centered in Texas, four of the participants had worked professionally in the field of visual impairment in other states. Three are or have been certified orientation and mobility (O&M) specialists, and 10 are or have been certified as a teacher of students with visual impairments (TVI). One participant self-identifies as

blind. Four of the participants are working full time, three are working post-retirement (half or three quarters time), two are retired but are still active in volunteer or consulting work, and two others are fully retired. The average tenure of service across the 11 selected participants was 39.7 years (including both full or part time years of service).

Following personal descriptions of the participants, this chapter will progress to elaborate on themes that were identified across the participant interviews.

Horizontalization along with some narrative analysis tools (e.g., Labov as described in Mishler, 1986; Riessman, 2008; Gee, 1991) were used to draw out and code specific meaning clusters/stanzas in and across interviews. The identified themes are presented with support of the actual words of the individuals themselves to provide depth, richness, and verifiability of the findings.

In the interest of providing the reader a more open/informed understanding of interview data, participant's career transitions, and subsequent findings, the following sections will begin with a brief biography of each participant, detailing some of the positions and roles held the individual.

Brief Profile of Study Participants

This section serves to detail the roles and careers of the participants, describing the entry of these leaders into the small yet diverse field of visual impairment, and describing the expressed values shared by the participants. This section is intended to provide the basic answer to how Current Leaders describe their professional career development history from entry to practitioner to leader. Since the individual was asked

to describe his or her own history, both the participants' words and their provided vitas were used to recount the career histories.

This discussion begins with a brief summary of the participants, then moves to answer questions relating to entry into the field and values shared by those surveyed. While entry into the field is explored as an individual process, the values shared across participant interviews represent an initial look at the themes identified in the investigation. Pairing the personalized processes of entering the participants' varied career roles with the identification of shared themes may at first appear to be a juxtaposition, however, the linking here is intended to show that regardless of how different their origins and how different their roles may have been, certain qualities appear to bind these leaders (and others) together.

Participants and their roles. The participants involved in this study began their careers in either public education or rehabilitation, and then transitioned into roles of leadership in the field of visual impairment. Many of these leaders began as TVIs or O&M specialists in the itinerant model. Meador (2015) states, "This means that they often work at multiple sites within a district or districts responding to the unique students while navigating several different political structures and establishing their position within the culture of each individual school and team" (p. 57). Each of the diverse roles carried out by the selected participants focused on the needs of individuals with visual impairments, and participants were deliberately selected to illustrate the depth and breadth of services provided for this population. This study includes participants who were employed in key agencies/entities that served the field of visual impairment in

Texas. These agencies included: Texas Education Agency (TEA), Regional Education Service Centers (ESCs), the state-run rehabilitation agency serving blindness, the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI), and the only two training programs in visual impairment still operating in Texas—Texas Tech University in Lubbock and Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches. These leaders also filled roles in state and national advocacy groups including the Hadley School for the Blind, the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER), the American Council of the Blind (ACB), the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB), the Council of Schools and Services for the Blind (COSB), and the Alliance of and for Visually Impaired Texans (AVIT). The following pages will present a brief profile of each of the participants with occasional quotations from his or her interview.

Jim Allan. Dr. Allan is a two-time winner of the selected awards used as parameters in this study. He began his career in the field as a volunteer in the deaf-blind annex, a residential facility in Austin near the current location of the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI). He was initially trained by Dr. Natalie Barraga at the University of Texas, and worked for 10 years as an itinerant TVI in Round Rock ISD. During this time, Dr. Allan held many regional and national trainings on technology. He was eventually hired as technology specialist (he notes, “in the Information Technology Department”) at TSBVI. His work helped make the Texas Braille Bill a reality, requiring publishers to provide on-time electronic versions of textbooks in order to facilitate access by students with visual impairments. Dr. Allan is a

published author of articles and book chapters related to accessibility. His crowning achievement is the TSBVI website, of which he was creator and webmaster. The site is an incredible resource and archive for the field, for users both in and out of the state of Texas. Dr. Allan has served and continues to serve on committees in Texas and on the national level related to information technology; in particular, his passion for accessibility of published electronic materials for persons who are blind or who have low vision. He has received numerous awards, both in the state and from national organizations, recognizing his leadership in field of visual impairment.

Billy Brookshire. Mr. Billy Brookshire is an engaging, energetic individual, intensely devoted to the field of visual impairment. Mr. Brookshire describes himself as a “cheerleader” for the field. His career began in the state agency providing children’s rehabilitation services for students who were blind and visually impaired. He was a strong advocate for individuals who were blind and for the professionals who served them. Mr. Brookshire believed that without honoring both perspectives, we could never meet the needs of the individual in the long term. He became the trainer of all new staff in the state blindness agency, personally developing all the training materials. He is passionate about bringing attention to the critical psychosocial aspects of blindness. Mr. Brookshire served on many committees, where he worked to listen to the voices of individuals, educators, and rehabilitation professionals. He has held influential positions including President of the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired, Executive Chair of the Intergovernmental Training Council, and he is the Immediate Past Chair of the Governing Committee of the Hall of Fame for Leaders

and Legends of the Blindness Field. In addition, Mr. Brookshire serves on the board of All Blind Children of Texas. He has received awards from national organizations, AER, and American Printing House for the Blind; a regional award from South Central AER; and state awards from Arkansas, Texas, and from Texas AER—where he has been honored on 3 separate occasions. Mr. Brookshire worked two years for the Hadley School for the Blind after retiring from the State of Texas. He now volunteers as a narrator for The Talking Book Program of the Texas State Library, a fund-raising board member of All Blind Children of Texas, a Hadley Institute Advisory Board member, occasional canvasser for the Alliance of and for Visually Impaired Texans, and as a participating board member in the Hall of Fame for Leaders and Legends of the Blindness Field. He estimates his time in the field to be “over 40 years.”

Bob Bryant. Mr. Bob Bryant is a career-long orientation and mobility (O&M) specialist. He has been a part of, and witness to, significant changes in how services and training are provided in the field. Mr. Bryant was involved in the first studies, and was himself one of the first practitioners, proving that children could be taught O&M skills. Prior to that era, O&M was taught to (primarily able-bodied adventitiously blinded) adults. Mr. Bryant also helped move the field away from training O&M specialists in an apprenticeship model toward broader, deeper training provided in a university setting. He helped to establish the first university-based O&M training program in the state of Texas. He discloses repeated struggles with university administration and higher education bureaucracies to maintain the program and its signature delivery model of one-on-one training for university students beginning their initial instruction under

blindfold. Mr. Bryant served on interest groups in national organizations before and after the field united professionally under AER. He has written numerous state and federal grants, innovatively embraced distance education, and established both undergraduate and graduate level training for future certified orientation and mobility specialists (COMS). That program, still in existence today, is the only one in the US to offer O&M training at the undergraduate level. Mr. Bryant worked in O&M instruction and/or training for 48 years until his retirement.

Olivia Chavez. Ms. Olivia Chavez has worked in the field of visual impairment for 42 years. She began her career in the Texas state blindness agency in Fort Worth, where she served almost two years. She also worked for a short time with the Lighthouse for the Blind in El Paso. The bulk of her career (40 years) was spent as the Visual Impairment Consultant at Education Service Center (ESC) Region 19 in El Paso, TX. The state of Texas is divided into 20 ESC regions, in effort to provide adequate support to school districts across the state. Each of these 20 regions is required to have one individual serve as a consultant in the field of visual impairment (TEC 30.002). Ms. Chavez is the only individual to ever hold that position in El Paso, though she is now filling that role part-time, post-retirement. In spite of the extremely remote location of El Paso, Ms. Chavez is highly active in a variety of agencies and committees across the state. She is a member of the Texas Action Committee for the Education of Students with Visual Impairments, has been a consultant for the American Council of the Blind (ACB), and served in Texas governor-appointed positions as a board member at the Texas School for the Blind, and a board member of Texas Governor's Committee of

People with Disabilities. Ms. Chavez is also a past president of Texas AER. She currently serves on the Advisory Committee for Para Transportation for the city of El Paso, is the President of the Visually Impaired Persons of El Paso advisory group, and a board member for the American Council for the Blind. Ms. Chavez has held numerous trainings in Texas and in Mexico for professionals in the field of visual impairment and other disabilities. She is a former student of the summer program and the residential school at the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. In fact, Ms. Chavez was the first high school student who was blind to earn a diploma from El Paso public schools. She has been a keynote speaker at several conferences, and recognized by award in the El Paso area as a Woman of Influence, received the Medal of Merit for Education, and as was honored as Professional Handicapped Woman of the Year.

Chrissy Cowan. Ms. Chrissy Cowan has been working in the field of visual impairment in and around the Austin area since 1976. She served 15 years as an itinerant TVI for the Austin Independent School District before moving to the position of Education Consultant in Visual Impairment at ESC Region 13 in Austin. She remained in that position for 16 years, providing training and workshops regionally and across the state. Ms. Cowan worked as a lecturer in the Visual Impairment training program (now defunct) at the University of Texas at Austin. She has authored book chapters and articles, and helped to craft legislative changes improving services for students who are blind and visually impaired. Ms. Cowan has been honored by awards from national blindness organizations, the American Foundation for the Blind, and the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired. She currently serves

the field as the Statewide Mentor Coordinator for TSBVI, where she trains and matches mentor teachers and specialists across the state with new professionals entering the field. Ms. Cowan's work as mentor coordinator has led to the development of numerous training and support materials that are now available to mentors and protégés. As is the case with others in this study, Ms. Cowan serves or has served on numerous committees advocating for improvements in the field of visual impairments. She has worked in the field of visual impairments for 41 years.

William Daugherty. Mr. William Daugherty is what is referred to in the field as *dually certified*. In the area of visual impairment, this term describes a professional who is certified as both a TVI and an O&M specialist. He received his visual impairment training at the University of Texas at Austin and earned his M.A. in Special Education concurrent with his O&M training at San Francisco State University. Mr. Daugherty served as the TVI/O&M consultant for ESC Region 17 in Lubbock, TX, where for 5 years he “served approximately 100 students over a 20,000 square-mile area of rural Texas.” He has worked as an independent contractor providing O&M services and has been an adjunct lecturer in the O&M training program at Texas Tech University (TTU). Mr. Daugherty later served as a Career Education Supervisor, assisting in grant writing at TSBVI. He went on to earn certifications in Mid Management and Supervision, and District Level Leadership, serving as a director and assistant principal at TSBVI. This combination of training and experience helped Mr. Daugherty to develop the necessary skills that would lead to his eventual career as a superintendent of residential schools for the blind and visually impaired. His first position was at the Kansas State School for the

Blind in Kansas City, where he remained for 14 years. Mr. Daugherty moved back to Austin, TX to assume his current position as Superintendent of the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired in 2007. In his eleven years at TSBVI, he has overseen a successful rebuild of the entire campus—a construction project estimated at approximately \$100 million. In both the Kansas and the Texas residential school settings, Mr. Daugherty’s duties as superintendent involved traditional school leader duties as well as director of activities, which impacted students in each of the schools’ respective states. Mr. Daugherty has served and continues to serve on numerous committees, including being an ex-officio trustee for the American Printing House for the Blind, a past president of the national Council of Schools for the Blind (COSB), and the visual impairment training-centered Professional Preparation Advisory Group in Texas. He has been honored by state-level AER organizations in both Kansas and Texas, and has been recognized with a national leadership award from COSB. Mr. Daugherty has dedicated 37 years to the field of visual impairment.

Kathleen (KC) Dignan. Dr. Kathleen Dignan, known as KC, began her career in the field of visual impairment at Michigan State University. After initial career entry in Lansing, MI, she picked between “55 job offers” and made her first major transition by taking a full-time teaching position in St. Charles, LA. After working approximately 6 years in Louisiana, she moved to pursue her Master’s degree, attending the University of Texas at Austin. Following this move, she was “convinced” to obtain her doctorate degree. Dr. Dignan’s first position after earning her degree was with the Texas Education Agency (TEA) as a vision consultant, where she oversaw “large format

projects and some amazing professional development opportunities.” She left TEA due to an agency-wide reduction in force (RIF) in response to a Texas Legislative Budget Board edict. Dr. Dignan was able to essentially transfer into a newly-created position at TSBVI, concentrating on teacher preparation. The creation of this position was not without controversy, as the staff at the school “did not want her coming” as Dr. Dignan recalls. Despite her unorthodox entry, she remained at TSBVI for 20 years, primarily on the statewide project of providing training to ensure an adequate supply of professionals (in TVI and O&M) for children with visual impairments. Dr. Dignan’s efforts tracking the number of professionals in the field and the numbers of students served provide a wealth of data germane to the field in Texas that is not available in any other state. She worked on recruitment in the state and with the national organization (AER), developing innovative projects and leading committees that helped foster the development of new teachers in Texas. She holds advanced trainings in distance education, mediation, and strategic planning for program development. Dr. Dignan served the field of visual impairment for 35 years until her recent retirement.

Deborah Louder. Ms. Deborah (Debbie) Louder started as a special education teacher working with students with learning disabilities and the population we now refer to as those with multiple disabilities. She states that she “wanted to be a teacher [her] whole life.” She began her career in College Station, TX, and followed with a job in the Texas Rio Grande Valley in a city called Weslaco. Ms. Louder recalls a career-long series of battles with various administrators and administrations in efforts to garner more services for students who (in her opinion) were under-served. After 7 years as a teacher,

Ms. Louder applied and was hired at ESC Region 1 in Edinburg, TX as an Education Specialist for Early Childhood, Visual Impairment, Deaf-blindness and other low-incidence disabilities. After 12 years and many of the aforementioned battles, she moved her family to West Texas to become the Education Specialist for Visual Impairment, Deaf-blindness, Assistive Technology, and Autism at ESC Region 15 in San Angelo. Ms. Louder formally retired from that position in 2012, but remains active in the field. She works as a part-time visual impairment service provider, has served as an adjunct faculty member in the Stephen F. Austin State University graduate school program in visual impairments since 2010, and also works supporting and monitoring new teachers in the Visual Impairment Program for TTU. Ms. Louder remains a member of the national professional organization, AER, and the state organization, TAER, and has held several key offices. She served as host committee chair for the AER international conference in 2014, is on the planning committee for the 2018 international conference in Reno, and is a past president, committee chairperson, and 3-time board member of Texas AER. Ms. Louder served 12 years on the TSBVI school board, overseeing the rebuild of the campus and pushing for improved academic outcomes for students served at/by the school. She has directly served the field during her career and post (what she calls) retirement, for 42 years as a consistently powerful advocate.

Cyral Miller. Ms. Cyral Miller began her career first as an itinerant TVI, and later as teacher of a resource room for students with visual impairments in ESC Region 20 (San Antonio) and ESC Region 13 in Austin. She exited the field of visual impairment for four years to earn a Master of Public Affairs degree from the University

of Texas at Austin. Ms. Miller then worked as a consultant with Texas Health and Human Services in Austin, as teacher in London, England, UK, and even as an assistant to a member of the British Parliament. She returned to the field of visual impairment in 1987 as an Executive Assistant to the Superintendent of TSBVI (Bill Miller), where she worked to develop the outreach plan for the school. Ms. Miller transitioned into her current position as the first Director of Outreach at TSBVI in 1990, which under her leadership has developed into a model for other programs across the country. In addition to coordinating the many outreach activities and staff, Ms. Miller leads, chairs, and facilitates a myriad of committee endeavors. She serves in leadership on the Alliance of and for Visually Impaired Texans (AVIT), the Texas Action Committee for the Education of Students with Visual Impairments, and the PPAG. Each year, Ms. Miller is involved in event planning committees for regional and statewide conferences in visual impairment, and is consistently involved in advocacy activities, development of guidelines and standards for practice and service delivery, and advocacy for changes in education rules—with Texas Education Agency and in law—with the Texas legislature, to meet the needs of persons who are blind or visually impaired. Ms. Miller has conducted numerous presentations and published several articles in the field. She is a founding member of the Outreach Forum, a national conference in which residential school outreach directors across the nation meet, collaborate, and share ideas. Ms. Miller is also a two-time winner of the state awards selected as a qualifying requirement of this study. She has served the field for 35 years.

Rona Pogrund. Dr. Rona Pogrund regularly moves at a frenetic pace. She is an accomplished researcher and author in the field of visual impairments, having published (to date) 24 peer-reviewed journal articles, five books, nineteen book chapters, and 30 funded grant proposals. In addition, Dr. Pogrund has completed 101 local, state, national, or international presentations. Dr. Pogrund's career began as a TVI at the Arkansas School for the Blind, after which she worked for 10 years in California public schools as a TVI, an O&M specialist, and as a special education administrator. She worked as an adjunct professor at the University of Southern California, and later joined the O&M and TVI training faculty at California State University, Los Angeles. Dr. Pogrund moved back to Texas in 1991, where she continued to write books while working part-time as a consultant and raising her children. In 2005, she joined the faculty at Texas Tech University (TTU), where she currently serves as Professor of Education and Coordinator of the Program for Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments. Dr. Pogrund has received national awards recognizing her work, from the Council for Exceptional Children Division on Visual Impairment and the American Foundation for the Blind, and she has received state awards from Southwest Regional AER, Southern California AER, and Texas AER. She has furthermore received numerous awards at TTU, served on or chaired 10 successful doctoral committees, and guided 66 candidates to completion of their Master's degrees. Dr. Pogrund works tirelessly, serving as Associate Editor of Practice for the *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, on statewide braille committees, on behalf of AVIT (of which she was a founding member), in State Leadership for the Blind and Visually Impaired, and with the

Texas Action Committee for Students with Visual Impairments. She also has served as a reviewer for 4 different journals in the field of visual impairment. Dr. Pogrund is a strong advocate for legal issues, having assisted in the passage of several key pieces of legislation which enhance services and secure provision of high-quality professional preparation to students in the field. She presently has 44 years of service in the field of visual impairment.

Mary Ann Siller. Ms. Mary Ann Siller began her career as a TVI at ESC Region 2 in Corpus Christi, TX. Even in her early career, she began doing trainings for professionals in and out of the field of vision, as well as for families of students with visual impairments. Those experiences led her to attain a position with the Texas Education Agency (TEA) Division of Special Education Funding and Programming. Ms. Siller's specialty area at the state level remained visual impairment. During her tenure at TEA, Ms. Siller worked on grants, managed state school oversight teams, led the development of early childhood intervention (ECI) programming, and managed state funds sent to the 20 ESC regions in support of instruction for students with unique needs in the over 1000 school districts in Texas. As part of this role, she led state teams in developing fiscal management for State Visually Handicapped Discretionary Funds, which amounted to six million dollars of state funds annually. Ms. Siller next accepted a national position with the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) as the Program Manager for the Professional Development Department and Director of Education. She continued to write federal, corporate, and foundation grants and provided training for stakeholders in the field of visual impairment. These trainings included organizing

national events for families of persons with visual impairments and professionals in the field. After 19 years at AFB, Ms. Siller decided it was time to return to direct teaching at the district level. She currently works full-time serving students in a North Texas school district where she continues to provide trainings for local, state, and national groups. Ms. Siller holds a concurrent position as National Education Specialist for the World Alliance for Visual Empowerment, a collaborative initiative that provides training and support to schools and organizations who serve persons who are blind and visually impaired. Ms. Siller has authored several published journal articles, and has been recognized by awards from AFB, national literacy organizations, and TAER. She serves or has served on numerous committees including AVIT, the Texas Action Committee for the Education of Students with Visual Impairments, the National Agenda for the Education of Children and Youths with Visual Impairments, Including Those with Multiple Disabilities, a national descriptive video organization, national board memberships on the Braille Challenge, a national program of the Braille Institute, and the Braille Authority of North America (BANA). Ms. Siller has a major interest in providing access to museums and cultural organizations for persons who are blind and visually impaired. She has served the field of visual impairment for 38 years.

The following (Table 5) will be used to briefly list some of the leadership roles to which participants have transitioned.

Table 5. Current Employment Status and Career Transition Highlights of Participants*Career transitions and highlights*

Participant Name	Employment Status	Beginning Role	Role Ultimately Transitioned	Other Leadership Highlights
Jim Allan	Consulting post retirement	TVI	Webmaster, Technology Specialist TSBVI	Developer of TSBVI website and archivist Ph.D.
Billy Brookshire	Retired, volunteering post retirement	Teacher, Social Worker	Statewide trainer of Vision rehabilitation professionals	President AER, Hadley School consultant
Bob Bryant	Retired	Teacher/ Coach, O&M specialist	O&M University Program Director	University program founder, author, researcher
Olivia Chavez	Working post retirement	Rehabilitation Teacher/ TVI	Visual Impairment Regional Consultant in El Paso (ESC 19)	ACB consultant, trainer, consultant, board member
Chrissy Cowan	Working post retirement	TVI	Statewide Mentor Coordinator- TSBVI Outreach Staff	Author, Mentor Coordinator, committee chair
William Daugherty	Full time	TVI/ O&M specialist	Superintendent TSBVI	Outreach, author, principal, Superintendent Kansas School for the Blind, adjunct faculty
Dr. KC Dignan	Retired	TVI	Outreach researcher	Author, committee service, board member, TEA

Table 5 continued

Participant Name	Employment Status	Beginning Role	Role Ultimately Transitioned	Other Leadership Highlights
Deborah Louder	Working post retirement	Teacher in SPED, TVI	Visual Impairment Regional Consultant in McAllen (ESC 1) & San Angelo (ESC 15)	President TSBVI school board, university adjunct faculty
Cyral Miller	Full time	TVI	Outreach Director TSBVI	Author, founder of National Outreach Conference, committees
Dr. Rona Pogrund	Full time	TVI	University Visual Impairment Program Director	University faculty, AVIT founder, author
Mary Ann Siller	Full Time	TVI	Returned to direct teaching in North Dallas	AVIT co-founder, AFB regional and then national director, TEA

Presentation of Findings

This section will begin to detail some of the major findings of this investigation, including major themes and corresponding sub themes. Data collected from the initial survey sent to all winners of the selected state awards, along with interview data from the selected participants will be integrated. It was felt that the initial survey data provided more insight than simply a screening tool for the selection of candidates for face-to-face interviews. The data drawn from the initial survey was also found to be rich,

supporting themes identified across the participant interviews. The initial offering of findings presented here represents leaders' discussions of their common, seemingly happenstance entry into the field, and moves on toward shared values. These shared values are divided into sub themes that detail the importance of experience as a practitioner, interpersonal connections, and collaborative shared passions. The following table is provided as an outline of the themes identified in this investigation.

Table 6. Outline of Themes and Subthemes.

Each associated with the identified research questions.

Research question 1 – **Career Paths of Selected Leaders**

- ❖ *Theme* – Participant roles, career entry, shared values
 - Participant roles
 - Entry into the field of visual impairment
 - Shared values
 - Value of experience
 - Value of interpersonal connections and shared passion

- ❖ *Theme* – Leadership Views
 - Personal perception as a leader
 - Actions and adaptations that facilitated leadership transition
 - Grabbing opportunities
 - Enhancing leadership skills
 - Engagement in the field and impact on personal lives
 - Advancement without support
 - Relationship rule for support and balance
 - Being out of balance as the norm

Research question 2 – **Contributions of Selected Leaders – Advancements and Accomplishments**

- ❖ *Theme* – Focus on the state of Texas
- ❖ *Theme* - Important changes witnessed and fostered by these leaders' tenure
 - Changes in training and professional standards
 - Law and policy changes
 - Expansion of services
 - Expansion of technology services
 - Expansion of advocacy and support
 - Expansion of services to new populations

Research questions 3 & 4 – **View Forward: Hopes and Fears for the Future of the Field**

- ❖ Theme – Building and protecting the profession
 - Field wide professional development
 - Building quantity of professionals
 - Maintaining current level of professional services

Research question 5 – **Advice for Future Leaders**

- ❖ Theme – Advocacy
 - Passion and self-reflection
 - Service and action

Entry into the field of visual impairment. On the surface, many of these selected leaders entered into the field of visual impairment randomly or almost by chance. Many began their college studies without thought of becoming a teacher/specialist in the field of blindness. In fact, several entered college with a focus outside of education. Allan was seeking a degree in engineering; Brookshire studied Spanish; Miller studied at Cornell as an undecided major; Chavez took French, seeking a career as an interpreter, and then took business classes before entering a teaching focus; and Dignan was seeking a career in hotel and restaurant management. Even those who originally had a focus on teaching (Louder, Bryant, Pogrund, Cowan, and Daugherty) did not begin their college careers with an emphasis on visual impairment. Rather, many among this group seemed to find the field fortuitously. As Bryant details:

My career started out of necessity of needing summer work. I was coaching and needed a summer job, and there was an instructor or physical education position open at a rehab center. So, my intent was to do that for three months and then go back to coaching at the end of September. Just prior to the September date, I was

offered a position as a O&M teacher, and that was when O&M teachers were agency-trained so you go through agency training instead of university training.

So that is how it started.

As evidenced in his participant profile above, Bryant ended up in the field for almost 50 years.

Some of the pathways which led other participants to the field are detailed here. Dignan speaks of waking up and having an epiphany after contemplating changing her field of study, saying “I thought...well what I really like is teaching. Well what do you want to teach? Well, I just decided blindness, I don't know why.” Brookshire had a roommate in his undergraduate period who was blind, and who, after telling Brookshire about problems with the state rehabilitation agency, said to him “Billy, you need to go work for the Commission for the Blind [the name of the state agency at that time] and straighten those people out.” Louder, who self-reports always having wanted to be a teacher, sought specialized training and additional teacher certification as a means to make a difference in lives of students whom she felt were being underserved.

As it turned out, over half of the respondents (54%, n=6) had direct connections to Dr. Natalie Barraga at the beginning of their careers. Dr. Barraga was previously identified in this study as a Modern-day Leader; an innovator in both research and personnel preparation. Persons who graduated from her (now defunct) visual impairment personnel preparation program at the University of Texas at Austin frequently refer to themselves as *Barraga Babies*.

The means by which these leaders found Dr. Barraga’s program—and subsequently the field of visual impairment—are diverse. Pogrund sought out the program at UT Austin after seeing a flyer about (and later volunteering at) the Texas School for the Blind. Siller wanted to gain additional specialization in her undergraduate teaching degree, and since such an opportunity was not available in her area, she transferred in from University of Kansas. After being recruited over the phone by Dr. Barraga, Siller’s parents made the trip to Austin and negotiated a promise from Dr. Barraga, saying “You will take care of my daughter and support her.” And, according to Siller, Dr. Barraga indeed did just that. Allan and Cowan were both directly recruited by Dr. Barraga from other jobs and/or majors in and around UT Austin to join the visual impairment program. Daugherty was randomly assigned Dr. Barraga as an advisor, which opened the door for his eventual recruitment. Miller, who was essentially seeking to be only a visiting student at UT Austin, taking one class one single semester, happened to one day pass through the education building. Within an hour of meeting Dr. Barraga, she was signed up for the entire program. As Miller states:

So, I walk into the Education Building; [I did not have] a plan. I told the person I went up to that I had to take a class, and he sent me to Dr. Barraga. Within an hour I was signed up for classes—not just one class [but a whole program]. I don’t know exactly what she did, but there I was. So that’s how I got into the field. I mean it was completely without planning. Isn’t that funny? I went into VI because it was great, it was wonderful, and I had Natalie Barraga.

Finally, Chavez, who was determined to complete schooling without running out of funding from the state agency for the blind sought out Dr. Barraga's program. Chavez states that she had to argue her way into the visual impairment program with Dr. Barraga. Upon being begrudgingly accepted, Chavez fought challenges and opposition from both the general education and visual impairment faculty, but resolved "I really want to stay here, this is not driving me away. I am going to keep on. I am going to show them a thing or two."

Shared values. The following section will detail some of the values shared by the leaders interviewed in this investigation, regardless of the positions they held. The actual words of the respondents will be used to magnify the importance of the beliefs commonly held in and among the group. Two values were identified as themes across the selected participants: (a) the value of experience held by professionals in the field of visual impairment, and (b) the value of the interpersonal connection and passion, which is identified and highlighted as a belief of high importance and uniqueness.

Value of experience. Each of the participants identified the importance of his or her experience as a direct service provider as vital component of future growth. The knowledge they gained from *doing the job* helped them in both career development and credibility as they progressed in the field. Siller, after a life of state and national advocacy, returned to the role of TVI so she could continue her desire to do training that was impactful to professionals in the field. She did not want to "be in the ivory tower," but rather, she "wanted to get back to the classroom and really get a sense of where things were and how it's working." Siller says that returning to the classroom enabled

her to develop insights into needed changes in in-service, training, and programming for children with visual impairments (with which she is still involved). Miller stated that her experience as a TVI meant “Everything! I think it made a big difference” in the success of her role as TSBVI Outreach Director, giving her credibility with the staff and shared understanding with those whom she serves in outreach and training. Chavez drew upon her personal experiences as a rehabilitation teacher and of growing up as an individual who is blind as invaluable resources in her work with teachers and in advocating for families of persons who are blind or visually impaired.

Even Allan, the eventual creator and webmaster of the TSBVI website, states the development of that resource was influenced by his prior experience as a teacher. He remarks, “The thing that made the website what it is was that I was a teacher first and then I was the webmaster. I had the content expertise.” Daugherty cited the strength of his teacher and specialist training as key components in attainment of his later school administration positions. Having the combination of university training and experience with children and adults helped Bryant to move into a supervisory role with an Arkansas agency and eventually led to his founding of the first orientation and mobility training program in the state of Texas, housed at Stephen F. Austin State University.

The need for high-quality, transformative training experiences also was identified by these participants. One of the leaders interviewed relayed concerns about the experiences and training of new professionals, stating:

My biggest concern is the current approach of the university programs with on-line classes. I see a wide range of knowledge coming out of programs, but not

very deep. The students don't seem to know "why" they are teaching some of the skills that they are. It seems that there is so much information available that they are not stopping to think (problem-solve) what is needed to be assessed and why; and what the end goal is. I feel extremely blessed to have worked in rehab for my first job. It taught me what skills were important and which ones were not. I feel *all* students would benefit from a rehab experience to see how individuals with a visual impairment live their lives, what they face, where they work, etc.

Many of the skills related to practice in the field cannot be taught from the university programs in face-to-face or online models. Much of the skill and performance involved in visual impairment professions crosses boundaries of teaching, rehabilitation, and O&M; they are infused with advocacy and collaboration, and must be performed across a vast array of students with varying abilities and conditions.

The field of orientation and mobility (O&M) initially provided few experiences, and required a relatively short training period for professionals. Most early specialists were trained at agencies in an internship model. This lack of extended training led Bryant to help establish a university-based program in O&M. He states:

We ended up with a lot of agencies training people, and I didn't think that was the best way to do it because you miss so much of the academic content – the classes on blindness. That was one of the primary reasons I came to the university. University training seemed like a better way to train specialists instead of having them come for 2-4 months and only learn skills.

Bryant, having had the experience of both agency training and university training, understood that both were needed in order to ensure that future O&M specialists received adequate training.

Value of interpersonal connections, collaboration, and shared passion. The experiences of these professionals also helped them to make valuable connections with others in the field. Repeatedly, interviewees used words like ‘love,’ ‘commitment,’ ‘passion,’ ‘heart,’ ‘desire to help others,’ and ‘lifelong friendships’ when discussing the field and those with whom they worked in their different roles. As Pogrund stated:

Almost all—not all, but most—of my really, really good friends over the years, and those who continue to be my friends, are my former colleagues or current colleagues. I mean, I like the people in this field and I find most of them are really good, good down-to-earth, kind, smart, people that I like to hang out with. We are cut from the same cloth. If you are going to go to work every day, why not be with people you like, and that you connect to, and I mean that—that is one of the benefits of the field, and I tell that to my students coming in new or people calling about it, it is a great field to work in.

When asked what she drew from the field, Louder stated that it “has given me purpose... It truly has given me the mission of my life, it truly is a mission. It is a gift, it is a calling from God. It is the missionary work that has been provided me. It is a voice for those who don’t have a voice.” In responding to what the field has given her, Miller remarked:

Selfishly, [the field has given me] a professional identity, and a feeling I can change the world. That is something which this field allows you to do because

it's such a small population and a little change makes a big change. That's kind of all I've ever wanted to do. Wherever I am, I want to make the world a better place. That's what I wanted to do when I grow up. I've been able to do that here [as Outreach Director at TSBVI]. You can do that on that individual level as a teacher, and that's amazing. I don't know if I've ever been as fulfilled as when I was a teacher [working] directly with kids. But something made me want to look at policy and systems and [make] bigger changes. And to be able to come here and do it all—impact individual kids and families, *and* change systems—it's amazing.

Cowan adds, “I have never wanted to be out of visual impairment, ever... I have to say there has never been a dull moment, there has never been a slow day. It's all very stimulating to me.” Repeatedly, respondents drew upon their deep-rooted commitment to the field and to the populations served as means to bond personally and professionally. The word cloud (Figure 2) shown below is representative of some of the terms used by participants as they reflected upon their view of the field and what it brought to their lives. Brookshire adds, “the field, the reason it draws people and keeps people is that there's a comradery, it's the closeness, [and] it's the willingness to pitch in if there is a need.”

affirmative (if certain considerations are met), to an additionally qualified partial affirmative, to a clear and strongly-held belief that they were *not* leaders. Though this range/spectrum of responses could in part be a product of humility, it became clear that most often, the differing personal identification of self as a leader could be attributed to the differing definitions of leadership held by both the individual participants and by society at large.

When asked whether she considered herself a leader, Pogrund responded “Yeah, I do, I mean I have been and I am I think.” She explained that an essential part of a university faculty position is leadership and advocacy, adding “I get really frustrated when people get hired into positions [as university faculty] and they don’t realize that’s part of the job; that they’re just going to go and they’re going to teach their students—I’m like no, you can’t do that in this job.” Pogrund describes the duties of advocacy and collaboration as vital and essential aspects of the role of a university professional who is involved in personnel preparation, to the point that a faculty must be willing to step outside of his or her classes and take on a bigger role in the field.

Siller and Miller also indicated that they considered themselves leaders. Both offered support for their self-evaluations as leaders in that both filled important positions and helped bring about advancements in the field. Miller lightheartedly stated that she considers herself a leader “partly [because] you hang around long enough, you know lot, I mean honestly, you know” referencing her long tenure. Miller later provides a more insightful view of her personal perception as a leader:

I know I have made a difference because people tell me that I have, and that's great. I don't have more experience than other people, but that's not the leadership part. You don't have to [know more than everyone else], you just have to know who does, and make sure they are the ones giving the information. I don't pretend to know what I don't know—which is a good thing I think.

The focus on being out front or supporting others as they step up is a sentiment shared by Siller. In her affirmative response to the perception of self as leader, she states:

Well, if a leader is someone [who] wants to help make change, positive change, then I do consider myself a leader. I think I am. I want to see positive change happen for kids with visual impairments. And so, in a sense, I think that would—I am a leader. But I am also happy to be part of the process too. I don't feel like I have to lead [the group], but I definitely like to see change happen, you know, I think I like to definitely do that.

Both of these women clearly want what is best for the field, and show a willingness to be part of the process of improving services or solving problems.

Other participants responded that they perceived themselves as leaders—but—only when based on one aspect or role. In several cases, the response was based on a question of 'if;' if this or that makes you a leader, then I am a leader. Dignan states that if a leader is someone who questions practices and seeks answers, *then* she was a leader. She explains:

You know [if] there was something that I saw that needed to be done, or that I had said "why are we doing it this way;" I mean everyone was complaining

[about an issue] and I would say, “What are you doing about it—besides whining about it? What are you doing about that?” That really was an unpopular question to ask, and it got me into a lot of trouble for a long, long time.

Cowan and Allan both indicated that they considered themselves leaders, but again, within a specific area. Cowan states, “I do, I do [consider myself a leader]. I consider myself a mentor for new people coming into the field, even though I am not their assigned mentor. I make it clear that I am here for anyone to talk to.” Her leadership is clearly centered on being a resource and supporter. Allan offered himself as a leader because he saw a need for training teachers about technology, and “had a passion about information access” that helped lead training of instructors and support changes in legislation to facilitate students’ electronic access to materials.

Other participants quantified their *degree of leadership* by amount, frequency, or uncertainty. Daugherty, who had been recognized by both the Texas statewide professional organization and the Council of Schools and Services for the Blind (COSB), considers himself a leader in a lesser sense of the term, stating “I do in a small way, but I am not a visionary. I am not what you would call a ‘change agent.’ I am much more incremental, and a pragmatist I think, than those things.” This was not presented as humility, but more a measured self-assessment, and a direct comparison to his predecessor, Dr. Phil Hatlen, who is widely considered one of the foremost visionaries ever produced in the field. Daugherty’s own career developed as he “was surrounded by iconic figures in the field, and had many remarkable opportunities to be at the table when some of the great leaders in the field were working through some of the most

important issues of the day.” He was able to observe and to learn from these experiences, and apply what he learned to his own leadership development. Other respondents gave even more moderated responses to the leadership question. Chavez sees herself as a leader “sometimes,” adding, “I don't feel that I am the all-knowing or the most informed. But I am a talker, and I have a voice, and I share my opinion.” Brookshire offers an even more tempered response of “maybe” when asked whether he perceives himself as a leader. He elaborates:

Do I consider myself a leader? I think I have some of the traits. I like working with people. I am very passionate. And if I feel something's wrong or somebody is being wronged, or we're moving in a bad direction, then I'm going to speak up... It's not a role I take to easily, I'm a good cheerleader and I'm a good researcher. I understand the issues.

Both Chavez and Brookshire highlight the importance using their voices to advocate for people and positions that support persons who are blind and visually impaired and/or that help direct the field. Both have held leadership positions in a variety of professional organizations at state and national levels, using those platforms to advocate for change.

Two respondents replied emphatically that they were *not* leaders, despite what others have said or in view of their accomplishments in the field. Bryant's response was:

No, not at all. I don't think so. I was just there at the time [and had] the longevity. I think if you stay in the field long enough, especially when the field is evolving and there wasn't a lot going on—and you happen to live long enough, and work in a program that had some effect [people will call you a leader]. I can see a big

change in the services for the blind, and a lot of people who are new in the field still think it is not that good, but compared to 40 years ago, it's a big improvement.

Louder also gave an emphatic 'no' when asked if she perceived herself as a leader, stating:

I am not a leader. I am just doing what you are supposed to do. Making a difference. No, I really don't, I never thought of myself as a leader. I've just considered myself as someone who tried to do things right. I know people say that all the time [that I am a leader]. No, I don't consider myself a leader. As the quote goes, "Doing for others is the rent we pay for being on earth," and that is how I hope I have lived my life—not as a leader, but as someone who has done for others.

While both Louder and Bryant clearly concede that they have made significant contributions to the field, and have fought for changes that greatly impacted the lives of those with visual impairments, each shuns the label of leader. In both cases, this possibly downplays the recognition they've received from the field and the professional advancements they made over the course of their careers.

Actions and adaptations that facilitated leadership transition. Regardless of how these leaders perceived themselves, several were able to identify actions and/or adaptations they made which allowed for their advancement in the field of visual impairment. The participants have previously demonstrated the perceived value of their work in the field on both a relationship and professional level. As their careers advanced,

needed changes became evident—how they should act, abilities they needed to develop, and what they had to do to make the most of their career advancements. Themes identified in the interviews centered on the following—seizing opportunities presented in the form of opened doors or guided support, and learning and enhancing leadership skills to facilitate successful transitions to various positions.

Grabbing opportunities. A key piece of advancement identified in the interviews of these selected participants involved taking advantage of opportunities for which they had been chosen, or which were presented to them by mentors in the field. The closeness of the field, especially during the period of these phenomena, allowed for supporters or mentors to guide these individuals into various positions along their career paths.

Daugherty was guided by Dr. Barraga into the program at San Francisco State for his O&M degree with identified Modern-day Leader Dr. Pete Wurzbarger. Wurtzbarger later guided Daugherty into a regional position in Lubbock, TX. Pogrund had a similar path when her career was guided by Barraga, Dr. Bob Eisenberg, and later by another identified Modern-day Leader, Dr. Phil Hatlen. Chavez describes how Dr. Barraga directed her toward her position at the Education Service Center (ESC) in El Paso, TX:

Dr. Barraga actually called me up and told me there was a position opening at Education Service Center Region 19 and they were looking for consultants in the area of visual impairment. She said to just tell them what I know and how I can teach others and work with administrators. So, I applied and I was hired.

Bryant joined with Western Michigan University instructor Bob LaDuke to open the first O&M university program in Texas. Bryant added, “Something appealed to me about

training people in a setting where I had more control, because I had taught people how to teach O&M in the [Arkansas] rehab center.” His overarching desire was to move from the short-term apprenticeship model used in rehabilitation center training and “go to Texas and do it [the training] the right way,” using the university-based approach.

Others found doors opened to them by colleagues or employers. Miller followed a friend to her first teaching position, and was later hired as an assistant to the superintendent of TSBVI, where she designed the very outreach program she would later lead. Allan stepped into a training and IT position at TSBVI to enhance the computer capabilities of the students and staff, after 10 years of teaching and a long, ongoing association with the school. Even with the support of leaders, friends, and others, the participants in this study had to step forward and seize the opportunities before them. According to Siller, it comes down to “finding that next opportunity to make a difference.”

Enhancing leadership skills. Several of the participants identified skills they had to change, develop, or enhance in order to be successful. Most of these skills centered around communication, collaboration, and discernment. To enhance her presentation skills, Dignan simply described how “I was teaching classes on eliminating self-defeating behavior and I was noticing I was too embarrassed to do the stuff I wanted to do, so I decided to practice being less shy.” Chavez developed what she referred to as a combination of stubbornness and quiet willpower, where she listens, learns, and is polite in the face of those who doubt her, and then takes the “opportunity to prove yourself. Since I wasn't going to get anywhere telling someone how stupid he/she is sounding

talking about how I cannot do anything.” In these cases, reflection and restraint were essential to success.

Several of the participants’ responses related to a need to improve their ability to collaborate, and focus on what is truly important. Louder “battled” various public-school authority figures, and learned to “ask for the moon,” yet know how to compromise.

Cowan shared a similar learning curve when she stated:

So, I just learned along the way that if I wanted to gain things for my students, I had to really learn some strategies that were more collaborative, and I had to use—I had to install—a very strong frontal cortex filter. I would listen to what I was about to say, and gauge how it would affect the listener before I would say it. I still do that.

Highlighting the same dynamic, Siller learned to “finesse” her exchanges with teachers while she was working for Texas Education Agency (TEA) as a means of garnering or developing cooperation. Pogrund focused on what she called “negotiation and conflict resolution skills,” stating:

I can get very adamant that I know I’m right. And I find that is something I work on all the time in my life because I do think I’m *so* right sometimes. It is because of how clearly that I think I am so right that I don’t hear other opinions and viewpoints. To be effective, you have to meet people part way.

Working collaboratively was clearly identified as a skill valued across a variety of positions and careers in the field of blindness.

Finally, participants identified the need to discern what is most important to best accomplish their varied career tasks. Brookshire actively engaged practitioners and clients of the state agency (individuals who were visually impaired) as a way to develop quality trainings for case managers by talking to “every blind person I can find, everybody. And I said we are doing this training—what do we want these people [case managers] to come away with?” Miller learned what she referenced as “facilitation skills,” and finding her way to what was crucial. Both Miller and Daugherty discussed the development and skill of managing key elements of their respective positions, and leaving out what is not important. Daugherty cited an unattributed quote – ‘overlook much, make small improvements everyday’ – as an outline for his work, stating:

So that has been my approach to things. The ‘overlooking’ really comes down to trying to figure out what’s important, what you need to chase after, and what you don’t need to chase after. How many fires you can deal with at one time, how many hornets’ nests you want to kick at one time, and deal with. So, try to sort out and prioritize.

Each participant enhances his or her ability to communicate and collaborate across professional roles as a way to *make a difference*—a mantra heard in one version or another repeatedly throughout the interviews.

Engagement in the field and impact on personal lives. This section is provided as a means of understanding the career development trajectory of those who took part in this investigation. Inclusion of these themes not only addresses participants’ career histories, but also the importance of support and family identified by Hanson (1997) and

Schlossberg (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012). All 11 of these participants have been or were married, and eight of those selected had children. Six were divorced, and five have remarried. Two participants are currently single, and one of those who was remarried is now widowed. Each was very open about how his or her career positions and passion for the field of visual impairment impacted and was influenced by the support offered by their spouse or family. This included early and subsequent relationships for those who were remarried. Discussion of how families were impacted, and if/how they provided support during the participants' career transitions were discussed and explored under the area of work life and home life balance.

The participants' commitment to the field led directly to conversations about how this career, about which they held such consuming passion, impacted their home lives. These discussions centered on the concept of career support, and development of a work/home balance. In several cases, relationships ended (or nearly did) as the participants fell into their work life. Some developed unique plans for keeping home and work lives separated. Others received supports even though their work and personal lives were not balanced. The themes identified in this section were advancement without support, relationship rules for support and balance, and being out of balance as the norm.

Advancement without support. This heading directly relates to the level of support each participant received from his or her spouse. In each case within this category, these leaders found outside support and/or strength inside themselves to press onward and achieve. The same passion that they held for the field enabled them to make

career leaps and to develop into new positions. Daugherty discussed his former relationship in the following portrayal:

My first marriage did seem to suffer some because I was so focused on my work. I know in those early days there was a tension, because my focus was on the school and that's the way they [my family] saw it.

Daugherty's focus on his role and duty in the field may have influenced the support he received for his career at that point.

Louder was able to continue building her knowledge, advance in schooling, and grow into positions with the support of her parents and sisters, but most of these gains came in spite of her (then) husband. She states that her ex-husband was a roadblock to her success, explaining, "Although it didn't stop me, it was a battle a lot of the time, but it didn't stop me from doing it." When speaking of her focus on her career in visual impairment, Louder adds, "I was all in. I was all in from then until now. I never doubted, I never questioned, I was in from the get-go."

Dignan tells of her first husband's reluctance to move with her to a new state as she began her career in visual impairment, and describes the support she received from that marriage during her career change as minimal:

While the marriage didn't last, I can't really say it was the result of my career change, nor that it would have turned out any differently if I had had another career. Really, I don't think VI had anything to do with it. I was going to move. Period. I needed another career. Period. We weren't fated to stay together.

Period. I did want him to move down prior to the marriage, but only because I knew we had issues.

Whether due to her independence or the lack of marital support, Dignan became increasingly focused on the field and on her work. Other participants, especially those who experienced divorce, attributed their dissolution to growing apart from their spouse, being “too busy,” or not making time or sharing interests with their partners. As one participant stated, “we just didn't have much time for each other anymore.”

Relationship rules for support and balance. Several participants shared unique strategies that helped them maintain support in their family lives. Pogrund paints a picture that may be challenging to some family units when she says:

So, part of being a leader is you have to be a crazy person who can work 24/7.

[Otherwise] you are not going to be at the level of leadership you might want to be. It takes work, it does, it takes commitment.

Pogrund was able to find such support from her 2nd husband and their children, since she limited her involvement in the field and her work during the time that her children were younger. This was essentially a trade-off between her personal career aspirations and her family. “I feel like I gave them a lot of time [when they were young]. As they have gotten older, they have been supportive; I mean they never liked it when I had to go out of town, but the kids get used to it and [my current husband] was always supportive.”

Miller was also able to compromise to find a balance with her husband and children. For this process to work for her family, there had to be good timing. When she first began working at TSBVI, she was able to develop a daycare for employees on the

campus in response to a piece of legislation which called for the establishment of such centers in state-run agency facilities. The presence of this daycare allowed Miller the opportunity to remain close to her children. “I work long hours, but my kids were right here, so that’s priceless. Also, my husband was a teacher, and he went to work early and got off early [to get the kids].” Miller reflects on the impact of her choices stating:

I remember coming back from a conference in tears because I had missed something that had happened with the kids. It was always a plus/minus. I think ultimately, it’s good for my kids because they have a great relationship with their dad who is a very involved parent, and he wouldn’t have been because I am assertive and probably would have been one of those parents to say *you didn’t diaper them right*.

Miller expressed that her husband was always supportive of her career choices, and encouraged her to embrace advancement opportunities.

Cowan firmly established boundaries between work and home life. She describes these boundaries saying, “early on in our relationship, [she and her husband] had an understanding that we would not talk about work life at home, so he was not my go-to person for problem solving.” This clear boundary also carried over to her work and social life, despite the fact that her social life was filled with friends from the field. She iterates, “There again, when we were out of work, we didn’t talk about work, and we still don’t.” Regarding her colleagues in visual impairment, she adds:

We are still very, very close friends, but we don’t talk about work when we go jogging or to a restaurant or anything like that. We would have dinners every

Friday night for years, our children were born and raised together, we vacation together, and so here I am surrounded by people I respect supremely, and they are part of my culture—not just part of my work life, but part of my [separate] social life as well.

Cowan admits that she so enjoyed her work—that it felt more important to her than a typical job—that her dedication resulted in more time away from her family at the time, saying “I still have a problem with this, if you want to call it a problem.”

Different relationships and different roles inside the field can cause a myriad of challenges. Dignan and Allan left their first marriages, and eventually fell in love and married each other. This relationship led to an even stricter set of rules at one point in their marriage. During the period in which Dignan worked at TEA, she was often involved in awarding funds to TSBVI, where Allan worked in I.T. When both partners in a relationship work in the same field and are involved in large-format projects, finding a way to separate work and home life can present unique challenges. As Dignan states:

It was a bit tricky for us, as I was involved in funding projects that Jim worked on. We are strong believers in, except for those random periods of intense project/dead-lines, etc., keeping work separate from home. And having fun together.

When faced with several initiatives that would cause their paths to cross, Dignan and Allan jointly established a metaphoric barrier within their relationship, agreeing to not discuss any specific content of their work with one another. Dignan recalls:

We had to build a cement wall between us about work... We could talk about how frustrated I was with somebody at work, or this thing or the other thing, so it's not that talk never happened. But not content stuff – it was really nothing real.

The pair even maintained this amicable division when both applied for the same teaching position at a northern US university.

I mean, really, [at one point] we both applied for the same job, we both wanted it and we *knew* it wouldn't affect our relationship. If we had *any* doubt, we *never* would have considered it. We talked about it... a lot... [but only] about our individual strengths and weaknesses in the application... In my world, no job is worth putting a solid relationship at risk. We knew we were both applying, but we didn't talk about our individual interview experiences until after Jim turned it down. No, it just didn't happen.

For Dignan and Allan, the rules did not *make* the relationship, but they did help preserve their professionalism and integrity.

Being out of balance as the norm. For some participants, their dedication to the field was simply the norm in their lives. As with both earlier group themes, these leaders were extremely dedicated. And, as with the previous, they also enjoyed some level of support from their spouses and families. What separates this group is the fact that there were no set rules which allowed them to garner that support. These individuals either managed to find support while their work/home life was out of balance, or found ways to make adjustments and hold on to their support. Looking back on his early career, and all

of the travel and relocation that was forced on his family, Bryant states, “You do things like that when you are young. You don't think about it. You do what you have to do.”

Bryant reflects on his career, “I think that anything you do for that long a time has some effect [on your family]. You probably don't realize it, the changes.” Making the move to Texas to start the university-based O&M program, he recalls:

You decide what you need to do. When we moved here, it was with the promise that we would go back to Arkansas. So, she counted the days—and eventually the months and the years until we would go back. And by that time, we had three kids and she didn't want to go back. We had young kids and they seemed to enjoy the travel so we made the most of it.

Chavez recalls the passion for the field that she and her second husband both shared, recollecting, “He was quite an advocate. He was an attorney and he was very concerned with disability issues, so he went along with all these things we did.” She further describes her husband protecting her from the field, stating “he would guide me, counsel me, sometimes tell me to back off [of work]. You have to go on a trip now, let's go have some fun.” Reflecting on her balance and support:

I've always been able to do everything I wanted to do—the fun, the work—and I don't mind staying up all night, if that needs to happen. I can go a couple of nights sometimes, and by the third night I'm thinking—my brain is not working anymore. So, it has not been really a struggle, and I am still doing this job [and] the year after next I will be 69 [years old].

Brookshire and his wife both maintained active working lives throughout his career transitions. Early in their marriage, he would bring her along to conferences, board meetings, or speaking engagements in which he was involved. Though she still supported his passion, over time, they found that these activities were not enjoyable for her, so they made different plans. Their relationship depended upon what Brookshire calls “negotiation, renegotiation, and renegotiation, ... and when the renegotiation stops, the relationship starts to end.” During a time in which the couple experienced a series of personal losses and depression, they threw themselves into their respective jobs as an escape. This escape took its toll on their relationship:

So, she was way up in management, and her job was eating her alive because that’s how she was dealing with it. She was dealing with depression by taking on more and more work. I was dealing with it by getting more involved with professional groups and fighting battles in that direction. So, in a way we did have to salvage something there; we were both being pulled apart by our jobs [and] the depression.

Brookshire again renegotiated, as he and his spouse began “letting loose of some of that responsibility. That helped, but it was also we just started hanging out together, spending more time with each other, away from these things, [and] letting those things slide.”

Brookshire was able to maintain his support by finding a place where he and his wife were “liking each other’s passion, liking each other’s integrity,” while allowing the time needed to maintain and grow their relationship.

Siller praises her husband for always being supportive of her ostensibly frenzied meeting and travel schedule, stating “I don't have any siblings, and we don't have any children, so [my husband] was very supportive of letting me do that.” Siller maintained that support, and found her ‘normal’ in spite of travelling often and living a life that others may consider to be out of balance:

He was very supportive of what I did. You can't do all these things and get it all done in a 9-to-5 kind of job. You just can't, and I didn't. I worked more and more all the time in the evenings and that's very hard. It's very hard to do and you have to balance that, and I think when you are in an area of your interest—I don't think I have ever waned in my interest—you see a different bit of balance later on. You had a goal you wanted to finish, and I think that was the right time for me to do that because I did get a lot finished. He allowed me to do that and was very supportive.

Though her passion and drive bled over into what would traditionally be considered *family time*, she and her husband remained able to support one another's drives, passions, and families. Daugherty echoes this type of support in his marriage today, saying of his wife, “She is really good at her job, and I was pretty good at my job, and this mutual respect developed... There is no kind of feeling of jealousy or being short-changed there whatsoever.” Finding and maintaining relationships and supports has helped many of these leaders succeed despite the fact that they may dedicate more time to their jobs than most. The support of family has enabled them to follow their passion and advance in their careers.

Impact on the field. These leaders have seen specific advancements and changes in the field of visual impairment over the span of their careers. This section specifically targets research question two: How have the identified leaders impacted and contributed to the field of visual impairment in policy, practice, service, and training? They have been actively involved in advances in systems, legislation, and cooperation which transformed the field itself, to encompass a greater depth and breadth of services over an increasingly diverse population of individuals. This section begins by highlighting and justifying the focus of this study on the state of Texas, and then moves to detail some of the contributions of these participants to the field.

Focus on the State of Texas. Nearly every participant indicated that Texas was a leader in the field. As Miller states:

In Texas, we are living in heaven. We've got real rules. You *have* to have a VI teacher, and O&M evaluations are *required*—and that's kind of magical. And when I talk to people in other states, their jaws just drop. I think we have a much stronger foundation now legally; I think we are a leader in the country. Really that is what I am told and I think it's true.

The one quasi-dissenting comment came from Allan, who voiced concern that the state had fallen back to a position where “Texas is not the leader that it used to be.” Pogrund added that while we may be ahead of other states, we are not perfect:

I think we're amazing. You talk to people from other states [and] they're blown away that we have PPAG, and that we have the State Action Committee... that stakeholders meet regularly throughout the year and we come up with projects

and we take them on... We are models in many ways, but I know we have many things to work on.

Pogrund goes on to highlight the need for improvements in the quality of early childhood services, post high school transitions, and services to students with visual impairments and multiple disabilities.

The focus on leaders from one state is not intended to be a hegemonic view of the field, or worse, a reinforcement of the stereotypical view attributed to Texans in general (e.g., being the biggest and best). These leaders are truly making a difference at the state level. The move away from a national perspective is supported by initiatives from agencies like the American Foundation for the Blind. As Siller states, despite centralization of that agency, changes *were happening* at the individual *state level*:

I think what was really interesting though is the fact that there was so much programming going on, and opportunities to really make a difference in getting legislation through, or [even] systems through; helping states make a difference for their own students.

Each state would work its own bureaucracy, and call together its own stakeholders to bring about change for the students inside of that particular state. In response to the leadership position in which Texas finds itself, Miller warns that in today's political climate, where even legislation like IDEA is being questioned, "We need to *keep* those rules that are protecting our kids. Federally, it's not even quite as strong as Texas, and if the federal gets to be less than [what we have in place], then Texas will, too."

Important changes witnessed and fostered by leaders. Each of the participants in this study was asked to reflect upon the most significant change(s) they had witnessed and/or helped to bring about during the development and progression of their careers. These changes, all centered around a central meta theme (Saldana, 2009) of improvement and advocacy, and focused on three separate subthemes; (a) improvements in standards and training, (b) establishment of new legislation, and (c) enhancement of services.

These three themes are on many levels correlated with the availability of trained professionals, which allow for increased services, including services to new populations. Additionally, legislation has led to changes in professional preparation training and improved/expanded services. Finally, advocacy has led to initiatives which assist in supporting and recruiting professionals to the field, and pushing forward initiatives to change legislative rules and policies. This interconnectedness demonstrates how the field is virtually a web of professionals and stakeholders advocating for change to improve the lives of persons with visual impairments.

Changes in professional preparation and standards. As with the previous generation of leaders, Current Leaders focused on the improvement of professional preparation. Bryant helped push the field of O&M in Texas away from the long-standing apprenticeship model to one of university-based training. This was in the face of what Bryant referred to as “opposition to doing through educational means as opposed to just learning it [the professional skills] on the street.” One survey respondent added that

change was evident in the roles of the professionals who travel between schools to provide services:

The change in the sophistication of itinerant services for our students [who are blind or visually impaired] has been important. This is especially true [relating to increased] standards for conducting evaluations [like] functional vision evaluations, learning media assessments, and expanded core curriculum evaluations.

Brookshire helped to revolutionize training for professionals entering the field of rehabilitation of persons who were blind by providing a focus on teaching the importance of both the psychosocial aspects of blindness for the client and promoting a team approach between the individual, his or her case manager, and the vision professional. As Brookshire conveyed:

A whole lot of my job was bolstering the people who did the job; I was helping them get the skills they needed to do a job, and convincing them they were worthwhile folks—that they were doing a good thing—and I think I was very successful at that.

Members of this group also sought ways to challenge the perennial shortages that exist nationally in the field (see earlier chapters for discussion of this issue). As Dignan stated, “Everybody was complaining about there’s not enough teachers, there’s not enough teachers. [So I asked], ‘What are you doing about that? Let’s do something or let’s see what we can do.’”

Increasing the number of professionals available to serve students with visual impairments in the state of Texas became an absolute, outright focus. TEA guided TSBVI to seek a plan to work with universities and/or ESCs to increase the supply of teachers and specialists in the field. Miller reflects on the many changes that have occurred during her tenure:

You know, when you get right down to it, probably the most impressive thing is having teachers get good training. So, I guess I would be proudest of that. The Expanded Core Curriculum is great, but if you have a teacher who doesn't know, or doesn't care, or hasn't been trained to advocate like that, then that rule would never be followed. I think ultimately its always going to be the *local*; it's always going to be—*do we have good teachers?*

By seeking a collaborative and innovative plan to build instructor capacity, the state of Texas was able to prepare itself for a growing and expanding population, and to have the professional personnel available to push for change.

Laws and public policy changes. The first piece of legislation highlighted by these participants was the Texas Braille Bill (1991). The braille bill required that braille be considered for any student who was visually impaired, and required that a trained teacher make the decision about the student's best medium for learning. This led to the required administration of a Learning Media Assessment (LMA) to determine the medium/media by which an individual student would best learn. The Texas Braille Bill also ventured into the arena of textbook publication by requiring manufacturers to provide on-time electronic copies of texts. In the words of Allan, "The Texas bill was

unique because they had the *teaching braille* part, but also had the *publishing* part. It was the model for all the other [state] bills in the country, and we had to convince them that it [digital versions of text] could be done.” To make that possible, Allan created a new form of html to facilitate the process.

Another landmark policy change was the development of the National Agenda for the Education of Children and Youths with Visual Impairments, Including Those with Multiple Disabilities (1993, aka *The National Agenda*). This was essentially a “plan of action for the future of the education of children who are blind or visually impaired” (National Agenda Flyer, 1993, para. 1). The National Agenda established 10 goals for the education of children with visual impairments, addressing assessment by trained professionals, rights of parents, personnel preparation programs, transition services, and a focus on instruction in the expanded core curriculum (ECC). Though the National Agenda is a national document, identified Modern-day Leader, Phil Hatlen and current participant, Mary Ann Siller, were members of the steering committee (notably, four of the 12 committee members had ties to Texas). As Siller states:

A big reason the National Agenda made it so big and for so long was the coordinated efforts of the steering committee. In the 15 years of getting the National Agenda up and running, I co-coordinated 35 initiatives with committees that led to the federal legislation in IDEA related to visual impairment.

The National Agenda was a huge game changer for us in the field.

Three additional pieces of Texas legislation were highlighted by the study participants. First was the passage of educational code which prohibited teachers from

becoming TVIs without the completion of *all* of the designated coursework and internship required for this specialty. Previously, as with many teacher certifications, an instructor could *challenge* the state examination in vision and manage to earn full certification as a TVI without support or training from a university program. This protection further advanced Texas from other states who still allow test passage for TVI certification, or allow special education teachers to provide the specialized services of a TVI. Pogrund, who along with the Alliance of and for Visually Impaired Texans (AVIT) was a champion of this bill, posits, “I think [the bill] has probably had one of the biggest impacts on the quality of teachers in our state, because at least they are going through a program now.”

The next two pieces of legislation that were most often mentioned were those most recently passed by the Texas legislature, referred to as *the ECC bill* (Texas Education Code, 2014) and *the O&M bill* (Texas Education Administrative Code, 2014). The ECC bill “states that each eligible student who is blind or visually impaired is entitled to receive educational programs that reflect **evaluation and instruction** in the expanded core curriculum” (Texas Action Committee, 2015, p. 24, bold in original). As one survey respondent reported:

The biggest advancement has been the development and implementation of [the now mandated assessment and teaching of] the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC). The advances in technology for people with visual impairments, and the legislation that has been passed to support instruction for students with visual impairments [have also been important].

The O&M bill requires a certified orientation and mobility specialist (COMS) to conduct an O&M evaluation for *initial eligibility* of a student under the IDEA category of visual impairment (TEC §30.002 [c-1]) and to be a member of the multidisciplinary team involved in scheduled reevaluations (Texas Action Committee, 2015, p. 33). The ECC bill is the first in the nation to require instruction and assessment in all nine areas of the ECC, and the O&M bill is the first nationally to require active participation of a COMS in the evaluation of students with (or suspected of having) visual impairments. These initiatives and statutes have helped to move the field forward as a profession. According to Daugherty:

The biggest change I have seen in the field in general is the professionalism among TVIs and COMS that's happened [in my tenure]. The body of knowledge has grown exponentially. The expectations for the TVIs and COMS—it's a much more technical, accountable job than when I started in it. Now people have a whole new set of expectations, which is great. So, I really think that's been a big change. I think in just a short amount of time, our field is moving from folk art to professional field of practice.

Daugherty goes on to detail how, particularly in Texas, both parents and professionals have joined forces to improve available opportunities for students with visual impairments. The influx of new professionals, along with infusion of higher expectations and standards has further promoted the improvement and broadening of services which enhance the lives of the population served.

Expansion of services. The expansion of services as a subtheme was of sufficient importance to have three separate delineated topics/meaning clusters enveloped under this category. These three topics center on (a) expansion of technology training, (b) expansion of advocacy and supports, and (c) expansion of services to meet the needs of newly served or identified populations.

Expansion of technology services. Technology, and training in the use of technology, can provide access and independence for students/clients with visual impairments. Similarly, it provides connections to information, collaboration, and assistance for the professionals in the field. For the student, this means access to instructional materials, either in recorded or digital format, that can be used to produce brailled materials. Books that were originally on tape were moved to compact disc, and made available for direct download. The textbook battle continues, according to Allan:

If you want it to be accessible, you don't just need a text file. Not with today's textbooks where you have got interactive science classes. Getting a bunch of words and not doing it is way different than actually doing it. You need to make the interactive part accessible, and that's a different battle.

Technology for students crosses over from educational materials to aids for mobility, including global positioning satellite and other travel applications. Portability of devices has also increased a person's ability to access assistance from others, and these devices may be used to obtain directions or to get help identifying an item or situation. New technologies such as descriptive video are also being implemented, which continue to bring new and innovative ways of learning to persons with visual impairments. Each

new advancement in technology requires that the professionals in the field be aware, knowledgeable, able to assist in procurement, and provided training in the use, functionality, and maintenance of the devices.

For the professional, ‘technology’ primarily means being able to stay connected while oftentimes being the only visual impairment service provider in a given area. Isolation has long been identified as a problem for itinerant teachers, particularly those in rural areas (Bina, 1987). Another benefit of technology is being able to immediately access information when needed. “The most significant change of course is all the technology that we all have,” says Chavez. The adjustment made by this generation of leaders is incredible. Over the period of their tenures, phones became portable, and then became ‘smart.’ Computers became practical, powerful, portable, and essential for communication and personal connection. In the careers of these participants, the internet began, and became an incredible resource for both expression and information. Cowan cites the internet, with its ready access to information, as a big change, stating “it’s all on the internet and its relatively easy to find.” Cowan also discusses how cell phones became an incredible resource for teachers working under the itinerant (traveling) model. “I’m not talking about critical information about kids. It’s just people getting to get back in touch with you... ‘I need this information now’ kind of thing.” She also describes how connections can help with efficiency for an itinerant practitioner. A simple text message or phone call can be used to prevent this teacher from making a long (and on this particular day, unnecessary) trip to visit a campus because that TVI (or O&M specialist) is now able to find out that the student he or she is scheduled to work

with on that day is not available, for a number of reasons ranging from illness to snow days. While the individuals in this study did not *invent* such technologies, they were among the first to integrate them into professional practice, and to provide training to individuals who are blind or visually impaired on the effective use of the various technologies.

Expansion of advocacy and supports. Advocacy for persons who are blind and visually impaired is a key aspect of the role of every professional in the field of visual impairment. Participation in and service to various committees and organizations which serve persons who are blind and visually impaired is clearly demonstrated as part of the lives of these participants, both as an element of and an addition to their career paths. Pogrund contends one cannot perform the role of an instructor in a personnel preparation program unless he or she is also an advocate. Bryant lived the same experience as an advocate, training O&M specialists at a university. Dignan and Miller both worked at jobs in which advocacy was at the core of their responsibilities. Others, like Brookshire and Allan, used advocacy as a way of learning or sharing what they had learned. Every participant in this study urged others to join their professional organizations and to get involved in the field. The importance of groups like AVIT or committees like the Texas Action Committee or PPAG are essential in providing focus, attention, and direction for issues that impact persons in Texas who have visual impairments.

One element that makes Texas unique is the support provided to students, teachers, and specialists across the state by the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. The development of the Outreach Program (or simply *Outreach*) under the

directorship of Cyral Miller has grown to be a national model, expanding well beyond the initial plans established for the program. Outreach provides advice to stakeholders and makes onsite visits to assist professionals and families of students with planning and problem-solving. This department is essential in development, support, and planning of various conferences and retreats that address specific stakeholder needs. As expected, Outreach also hosts many of the advocacy meetings previously mentioned. In doing so, TSBVI has managed to maintain a close, collaborative working relationship with the Texas Education Agency. The school partners with the two university programs in Texas in recruitment, funding, and mentoring of new professionals entering the field. Miller referred to the programs and the partners as being “very closely knit, [and] that allowed for things to happen that didn't happen elsewhere [in other states].” TSBVI has become what Daugherty refers to as a year-round facility, by offering summer programs for students who do not regularly attend the residential school, and by providing a series of short-term programs during the school year, during semester breaks, and over the summer months so that districts can send certain students to the TSBVI campus for short-term, intensive instruction in areas including adapted math, technology, travel, grooming, optical device usage, and many more. The school offers curriculum for students and training for teachers, which can be accessed through their distance learning site. TSBVI also has a publication arm that provides training materials and a newsletter to share individual stories and current issues. In addition, the school serves as a repository for federally-allocated equipment and materials to help train students across the state of Texas. The comprehensive programming provided by TSBVI is an extensive

resource with an incredible reach of support for the field and for professionals across the state.

Expansion of services for new populations. One of the most meaningful expansions of services witnessed during the period under investigation related to the provision of an expansion of instruction to individual populations that had either been underserved or not served at all. These changes dramatically impacted the field and the lives of these individuals. In the area of O&M, these changes were dramatically witnessed. Bryant personally helped to move the field toward providing O&M services to children. He recalls:

During 74-75, I remember we had a conference, a legislative meeting in Austin, and we went over by invitation... Their emphasis was looking into providing O&M for [individuals] younger than 18 in the school system, and that's the first time they had ever done that.

Bryant reports this meeting resulted in new legislation to provide O&M services to students in their least restrictive environment, opening up local schools as a place where students could learn O&M skills and techniques. This trend continued as current training calls for services from a COMS to be provided from birth (Pogrund & Fazzi, 2002). The ages of the population served is not the only factor that has changed in the field of O&M. This speciality area originated in Veteran's Administration hospitals, and originally trained only men to become O&M specialists. Bryant brought women into his program, in spite of the fact that others "were debating whether or not they should take women, because they didn't think [women] were durable enough to teach." Now, male

and female COMS provide training to students with visual impairments, beginning as early as the child's birth, and provides quality services to students who use wheelchairs, have limited mobility, and/or have multiple disabilities in addition to visual impairment.

Another transformation in the field of visual impairment, witnessed by the participants of this study, relates issue touched on in the previous paragraph—the provision of educational services to students with multiple disabilities. Early in Louder's career, she worked as one of only two TVIs, serving an area of 28,000 square miles. The population of students receiving services at that time does not match the population that is seen today. As she states:

The kids with multiple impairments most definitely weren't being seen [by visual impairment professionals]. They were just beginning to be included in about 94-95; we were just beginning to pick those kids out more and more. So yeah, the kids with low vision got left out and the kids with multiple impairments got left out.

Today, students who have multiple disabilities make up an estimated 60% of the student population served by the field. The leading cause of visual impairment in children in the US is a condition called Cortical Visual Impairment (Kong, Fry, Al-Samarraie, Gilbert, & Steinkuller, 2012). This condition affects “approximately 30-40% of children with visual impairments” (Roman et al., 2008). This change—the expansion of services to multiple disabilities—was considered one of the biggest in the field by Cowan:

The growth of services to those [students] who are medically fragile and with Cortical Visual Impairment has been the most significant change. That just did

not exist when I started. So, all of a sudden there was a lot more information on what to do with kids who have significant cognitive impairments. So that has been a big change in the field.

Other conditions, like Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP), have added to the increasing population of children with visual impairments due to improved survival rates for premature babies and *micro-preemies* (infants weighing < 800 grams or born younger than 26 weeks' gestation). Individuals diagnosed with syndromes such as CHARGE, and those with deaf-blindness have created new challenges for instructors in the field, as these children present a wide variety and combination of disabilities conditions. The presence of additional disabilities requires teachers to sharpen their existing skills or develop additional ones. Pogrund remarks:

Our student population has changed over the years—the causes of visual impairments, the causes of blindness. It's more CVI, it's more multiple impairments, more premature babies living. Those demographic things for education, I think, will potentially drive services. Teachers need to know all of those things; we already see that happening somewhat.

As Louder reflects, "I think the best teacher should be with the children that have the most disabilities, because that's your biggest challenge. That's where you are going to use your skills." The uniqueness and variety of students served by a TVI is best described by Cowan as she illustrates her mentorship role:

Every other day of the week, I was in with another teacher, and I was helping problem-solve a student, teaching them how to do an assessment. And these were

not necessarily *new* teachers. You know, you can be in this field for 10 years, and then get a student like this, or that, and all of a sudden you don't know what's going on.

It is the differences in, and combinations of, visual, cognitive, sensory, motor, and other disabilities which create unique needs for unique learners who previously had not received services at all. The specialized nature of the field and the population served by the varied professional positions of these study participants led to discussion of their (the participants') projected vision for the field of visual impairment in the coming years.

View forward: Hopes and fears for the future of the field. Though hopes and fear were presented separately in the interviews and as two separate research questions, the responses offered by the participants tended to consolidate around the same issue(s) or in some cases the same term(s). For instance, one leader hoped “we can hold on to our gains” or “hold on to our funding,” and others stated they were afraid of backsliding, or loss of services, and loss of monetary supports for programming currently provided. Responses clustered around the theme of building and protecting the profession. Three connected areas were identified as subthemes for this section: (a) Field-wide professional development, (b) Increasing the number of professionals, and (c) Maintaining current levels of professional services.

Field-wide professional development. Most of the professional development issues the participants identified were based on calls for increased attention to specific aspects of the job of teacher or specialist, and/or to specific populations in the field of visual impairment. These appeals ranged from improved literacy training for all, to

Cowan's specific demand for improved literacy and listening training to be provided to students with low vision. Siller called for "improved assessments," encompassing evaluations of students' functional vision, learning media, and expanded core curriculum needs. Chavez urged improved employment for persons who are blind or visually impaired, and warned of students being underserved or "falling through the cracks." Pogrund added a similar concern when highlighting the needs of students who are exiting the school system when she posited, "We don't have anything in place for students with multiple impairments once they leave school." Siller, Miller, and Louder all pressed for better services for families of students with visual impairments, with Miller commenting:

I hope we can help get parents *informed* and [to] self-advocate. We do a lot of that here (in the TSBVI Outreach Program), but it doesn't touch enough families. In local districts it is really hard for local teachers to spend the time and give the informational support to families. It's just hard.

Increasing the number of professionals. Another multifaceted subtheme relates to the number of professionals recruited, trained, and developed in the field. As established repeatedly, the shortage of trained teachers and specialists has plagued the field nationwide. These leaders use the backdrop of personnel shortages in Texas to highlight specific concerns. Two of the leaders interviewed, Bryant and Pogrund, either previously or currently work in personnel preparation at the university level. Both emphasized the need to continue adding additional recruits to satisfy university administrations that may not understand the higher cost of one-on-one training or not

understand the rationale for smaller class sizes mandated by accreditation bodies. Louder and Chavez emphasized the importance of new recruits having passion for the field.

Chavez states, “I guess we just need to select, or make sure that we have a better way to bring people in that have a real heart to do this.” Siller adds:

The one thing I would hope is that they, the people coming out or going into [the field] have an interest to stick with it, and have a network. I really do feel that somehow there is this community of learning that has to continue to make these people coming into the field stick around and enjoy what they are doing.

Dignan worries that the slow growth rate of professionals in the field (a number alternately improved by recruitment and slowed by retirement) will lead to decreased services for the population.

Several leaders interviewed brought up a vital concern related to the number of professionals in the field and the sizes of the caseloads they serve. Caseload size, according to Shore (2017) and Dignan (2016), is a leading factor in burnout among professionals. Cowan relayed her concerns about caseloads, stating, “I would hope that we can have some legislation in Texas on caseload size, because I think that’s the only way that it’s going to be controlled.” Dignan adds her fears on the issue:

I think the fact that there was/are these monstrous caseloads all the time, and the fact that the number of teachers hasn't gone up [is a serious problem]. It’s like you look at the number and you think—what does that mean on the ground?

Dignan goes on to offer, “if you have 30-40 students, what good are you doing?” Louder describes her vision, “I would like to see many more teachers, I would like to see our children receiving more intensive services.”

The final aspect of personnel shortages mentioned by this group was the need for new leadership and for new leaders to step up in the field. Both Pogrund and Miller called for additional processes to identify leaders, with Pogrund contemplating how each of us can play a part in identifying new leaders. Daugherty discussed “the influx of new talent” into positions where long-time teachers have departed.

Maintaining current levels of professional services. The most repeated response relating to hopes and fears for the future of the field converged around the issue of maintaining the current level and quality of services. Comments from Daugherty call for “holding on to gains,” and voicing hope that we avoid “backsliding.” Chavez, Miller, and Louder all report a loss or rollback of certain services, especially those provided by the state blindness agency. All three of these leaders spoke of that change in state services, and the effect of the dissolution/reorganization of the previous agency under new departments in the state government. One survey respondent detailed the need for center based rehabilitation training to facilitate participation in society for persons who are blind or visually impaired:

We seem to have fallen off, and the separation [of blindness agencies] and combination of services [under Health and Human Services] has resulted in a decrease in services. The loss of rehabilitation centers and limiting training opportunities would be a *great loss*. Training centers need to be maintained.

Rehab centers are essential for client development of independence. If other agencies took over centers, it would be an incredible loss. The world is a merry-go-round; either you get on and go around like everyone else or [you are] left behind. It is a sighted world.

The fear of losses of programming was highlighted by another response to the initial survey:

I am afraid that the backsliding [of services] will continue. I want it to go back to the way it was before. There was a lot of specific expertise in blindness rehab and the teaching field, but now professionals [at state agencies] have to work with different conditions and disabilities [instead of focusing on blindness]. We need to go back to being *specialists* so we can meet the needs of specific students and clients. [We need to] continue to make improvements on accessibility so that individuals can live their lives independently.

In both state and national politics, other actions have led participants to fear loss of funding that will directly impact the ability to provide services to individuals who are blind or visually impaired in the public schools, and limit training for new professionals at the university level. Miller references the changes being considered to the landmark special education law, IDEA, and cautions against the option of privatization of special education services, as it poses a threat to funding that currently supports services. Others cited the loss of funding available from federal grants. As Daugherty stated:

It's something we need to pay attention to. There has been the loss of so many university programs. There are things that come and go, and if things change on

the federal level, to where money starts to get sucked out of the deaf and the blind grants and things like that where you have expertise—then you start tearing that expertise down, you cannot gain that capacity back very well at all, and I would hate to see that... us unable to hold onto those kinds of gains.

Chavez claims entities that are needed for support are now “nickel and diming us” as providers attempt to meet needs. Brookshire even goes as far as wondering:

Will rehab survive? Will the blindness field survive in general? There is a lot of jeopardy. There always has been from the moment that I joined the agency.

Every year we did some kind of lobbying to let people know what blind services were and why there was a need for separate services for a person that was blind.

Brookshire also worries about the professional organization for education and rehabilitation of persons who are blind, stating “That's my concern, I'd like AER to survive. I fear there's people drawn in many different directions.”

Daugherty and Miller both expressed the need to maintain, and continually explain, the uniqueness of the field of visual impairment. As Daugherty put it:

There is and always will be so many unique factors about working with students who are blind or visually impaired, deaf-blind, [or have] multiple disabilities, that I hope the field is able to hold on to its identity and continue to progress in the way it has.

Pogrund adds:

I think what happens in our field is that movements happen for larger groups of students or teachers in education without consideration of the impact on us [the field of visual impairment], because we are unique in multiple ways.

Miller adds a somber note, after stating how much harder it is to be a service provider today due to micromanagement of teachers, imposition of stricter rules, and the increased difficulty in making a difference in lives, because we have almost gotten to the point “where the creativity unique kids need” is not as possible.

Advice for future leaders. In the interviews, participants were directly asked how teachers could transition into leaders, or what advice the participants had for those who may be considering making the leap from practitioner to leader. The resulting theme of this area centered upon the future leaders working on understanding how to better advocate for their students and for the field. Two strong subthemes emerged to provide guidance for future leaders in developing skills and stepping up into leadership in visual impairment. The first subtheme involved personal reflection and change. Several interviewed leaders focused on finding *your* place and *your* passion. Some of this personal reflection may be directly linked to the next theme of service and action. This subtheme involved the strong call to make connections, build networks, and join others in acts of advocacy. This subtheme focused on service and action as the means to develop leadership experiences and perspective, and is directly linked to work in professional organizations, on committees, and the acts of networking and volunteering.

Passion and self-reflection. The initial subtheme relates to new leaders taking the time and effort to understand their own beliefs, interests, and psychological make-up.

Sometimes, according to Miller, that comes down to simply believing that you can make a difference—that you can “change the world.” The changing nature of the work, and the world of visual impairment, makes it a journey of discovery. As Dignan states,

If you sometimes feel like you want to break out, you want to try new things, you relish when you have something new to think about—because every year you will—this could be the perfect job for you. It is a job made for explorers.

The need for personal investigation and continued learning is also cited by Louder when she declares, “Keep on learning, you have to keep on learning.” She adds, “The only way you can help others is to know the principles that guide you, because you are going to have to battle for what you believe in to keep moving forward with services.” Chavez believes those in the field can help identify certain leadership characteristics in younger professionals, and joins with Miller in a push to encourage and equip new leaders.

Chavez details some of these characteristics (which should be encouraged) when discussing a newly-trained teacher whom she was mentoring as a protégé:

You can put that seed [of leadership] in him [and other protégés]. Making that seed grow. I told him he would be great because you have energy, and skills, and you think out of the box. He says he is liking what he is doing, and I say keep doing it. So that's what we need, people like that, because I tell him you have the heart and you have the skills and the stick-to-itiveness.

By shining a light on someone, the participants hoped to help others find their passion, experience something they may never have tried, and grow into something that they may have previously thought was beyond their capabilities.

Several of the leaders in this investigation identified self-exploration as a way of determining what was important, and the need to ground and/or define your beliefs before looking to fill a position of leadership. As Daugherty posits:

Never do it for the money, it won't be worth it. It absolutely won't be worth it to you. Know why it is that you want to do it. Really do a lot of soul searching. If you want to be in a position like that, why do you want to do it? It could be you know a person wants to do it because they feel like they can make a better contribution there [in that position]. Just know why you are doing it. Because the leadership roles, or all of these jobs we do, have stress related to them, but the leadership roles can kind of kick that up several notches because you are no longer responsible for just your own, what's in your basket—you are responsible for what's in everyone else's basket.

Poggrund states that a start to leadership is presenting ideas to others. “Pick something you are passionate about. Find a co-presenter; you don't have to do it by yourself because that is hard to do.” Discussing leaders, Siller claims, “They go further wherever their interests are, and that's the thing, [following interests].” Bryant applies the concept of following your passion and interests as he addressed the idea of leadership itself, adding:

There are some people that say they have a natural passion to be in a leadership position, and some who don't really want that challenge... I guess that's what it is. I don't know if you need to tell them anything except do what they think they

need to do to prove that [challenge of leadership]... I think leadership positions just kind of happen, you assume or you don't assume [the roles].

Whether the individual is following his or her passions to leadership, or as Bryant said, leadership *is* their passion, leadership in the field of visual impairment is best based in a deeply-rooted belief or a cherished ideal. This is apparent Daugherty's warning:

The thing that I would hate to see for anyone, and one that I have seen before, is the notion of going up. Rising up into a leadership position just because you think it's the thing to do. There has got to be a reason to go do it, and you really have to look at it [the reason] if you are in that role.

By exploring her own beliefs, a problem she sees and wants to solve, or the needs with which she identifies, Miller uses her passions to guide her professional life, explaining that "it's different every—almost every day, but certainly every year; it's very self-directed."

Service and action. The second subtheme, and its central theme of advocacy, revolved around developing as a leader through service in or to the field. Repeatedly, participants spoke to the importance of professional organizations in leadership development. It is troubling that this call from current leaders comes at a time when professional organizations are struggling for membership, and particularly lacking participation from younger or newer professionals. Siller ponders on this problem faced by the professional organizations, saying:

It is very interesting. The law profession, when you think about it, not joining the Bar, the Texas State Bar, I mean no one in those professions or the medical side

would even *consider* not joining it [their professional organization]. And the art people, they are part of their association(s) for museum groups. They think it's part of their professional focus, because they want to have more knowledge of what is out there.

Membership in the field's professional organization was an act of being part of, or involved in, the field in a bigger way, and helped make to Brookshire a leader:

I was happy sitting on the back row and doing my thing. But once I got involved, all of a sudden, I began to understand how things worked, and what good it could do as an organization, and what needs it could meet... The one thing you get from a leadership position, especially in an organization like AER (Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired), is you learn appreciation for all the parts, for all the people, for all the different jobs, for all the different services they offer, and you develop resources.

Being involved at the organizational level led Cowan to new opportunities, including writing book chapters, an act which helped her in developing a new professional identity. In her words, she was "able to reach more people; running with the big dogs. It made me feel important, and I loved it."

Several participants highlighted volunteering on committees and in other activities as a way to build leadership skills. Pogrund advises, "Volunteer [and] do whatever you are asked to do." The act of volunteering serves multiple purposes, including getting oneself noticed, and it demonstrates the active role of expanding one's understanding of the field. As Pogrund stated:

I think you *have* to start thinking that way if you are going to be leader.

Otherwise, you are just saying we're in a little bubble. *'I go and I teach.'* And I see people in our field like that, and I guess that's ok but that is not leadership. If you are going to be a leader, you're going to have to get outside of your little niche and look at the big world and say, "Wow! Where do we fit into that?" and "Wow! That's going to impact [this and] that, and I need to think about that."

Pogrund goes on to cite the importance of acting on these connections, and how essential it is for leaders to be "getting involved with advocacy."

Daugherty echoes some of these thoughts when he urges professionals to volunteer and get involved:

Getting involved in anything that is outside of your normal job, that you can just go up and volunteer to be a part of in some way—a writing project, a special summer program somewhere. You have got to step out of whatever you do for eight hours a day and do something a little bit different, that puts you in with a different circle of people who are doing something that is related to what you do on a day-to-day basis, but is different.

New leaders must build experiences that will expand and transform their perspectives of what it means to work in the field of visual impairment.

Miller used the same 'bubble' metaphor when she called for involvement in committees as a means for professionals to learn and advance in the field, stating:

So, I think again it comes down to—go be part of committees, and find out, and meet people, and be able to understand the perspectives of the whole field. You

can do that in our field, you can learn from adults. I mean you can learn from teachers, and you can learn from parents, and you can get a much more well-rounded view than in your bubble. So that's what I would recommend.

Other participants offered advice to future leaders that included not being afraid to walk through a door that has been opened for you, to lend your personal expertise; of simply asking future leaders to step up, contribute, present, or 'put themselves out there.' This exposure to new experiences and perspectives was seen as a transformational aspect of leadership in the field.

Finally, one of the crucial and integral aspects of joining committees and volunteering is the development of networks. To Chavez, committee work is "part of the job. You work in the community, and people meet you, and like what you say or what you stand for, and then they invite you to other things." Miller believes one of the things that helps Texas committees solve problems is that the professional community is active, and members are accessible to each other. She states, "So all those committees, the thing that has been wonderful about them over time has been that people know each other [and] all the joint projects are a fantastic way to understand perspectives."

The leaders in this study asserted that change was possible through networks and collaboration. Siller states:

The big thing is that you have to do it [make change] *with* partners for national or state projects, and all levels of legislative action, and that was how I saw that. We made a way to bring in all these different partners together.

Siller continues describing her passion for making connections, stating “I just loved that part, because we really were able to garner the grassroots from the fact that we gave everybody a place at the table.”

Suggestions for identifying new leaders varied, and included increased mentoring, implementing university classes on leadership, and an increased focus to build leaders by the professional organization and/or the TSBVI Outreach department. What was clear from those interviewed was the fact that new leaders *can* make a difference. Miller describes this field as “a great place to be, because I can make things happen, things can change. While I have no illusions about this field—it is a very small little field, [but] the great thing –about this field is that you can rise in the field if you want because it is tiny.”

Summary

This chapter initially offered organized themes pulled from initial surveys of selected candidates. This survey tool was also used to gather information about respondents, which was then used to screen and select the final 11 participants chosen for in-depth interviews. This chapter has organized and utilized the words of these participants to support key themes and subthemes associated with this study. These themes will be further analyzed, discussed, and linked to literature as a way of possibly determining implications and conclusions in the next chapter

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The purpose of the final chapter of this investigation is to review the findings identified as themes in the previous chapter as they addressed the research questions, discuss conclusions that may be drawn from those findings, detail implications of the research, and make recommendations based on the findings. The purpose of this study was to investigate the career development and contributions of leaders in the field of visual impairment who hold or have held influential positions across the state of Texas over the past 20 + years (aka Current Leaders). Specifically, this study draws from these Current Leaders a reflection on their legacies and shared mission while examining their vision for the field and for growth of future leadership. The research questions associated with this study were:

1. How did current or newly retired leaders describe their professional career development history from entry to practitioner to leader?
2. How have the identified leaders impacted and contributed to the field of visual impairment in policy, practice, service, and training?
3. What concerns did these leaders have for the field?
4. What vision did these leaders have for the field?
5. What supports did the leaders identify as necessary to help build and develop future leadership for the field?

Three bodies of literature were used as to guide this research, utilizing the following frames: (a) Hanson's Integrative Life Planning or ILP (Hanson 2001; Hanson,

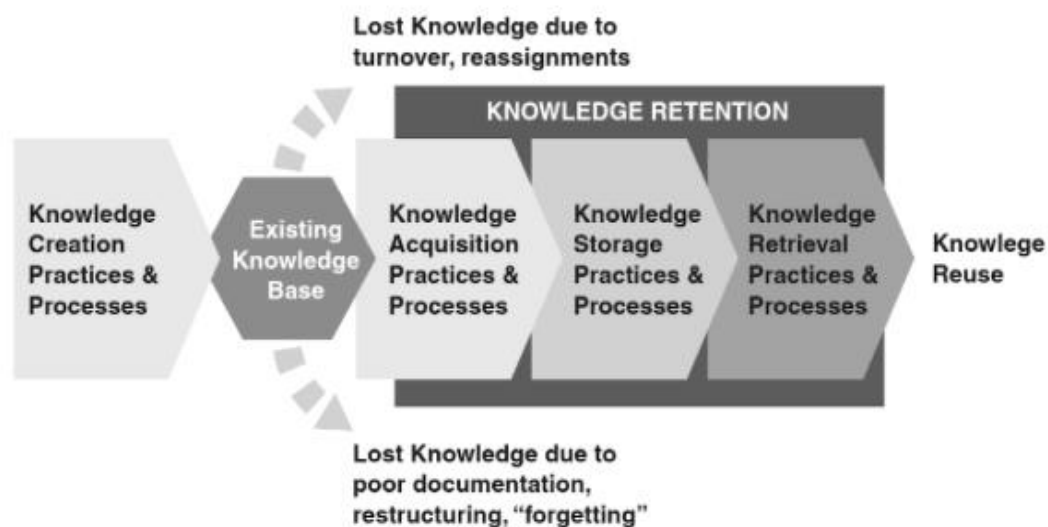
1997), (b) Schlossberg's Transition Framework (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012; Schlossberg, 1981), and (c) selected approaches to Adult Learning. The learning framework includes transformational learning (Mezirow, 1997; Pounder, 2006; Taylor, 2008), experiential learning (Fenwick, 2000; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007; Yeganeh & Kolb, 2009), and self-directed learning (Candy, 1991; Guglielmino, 2008). There is a special focus on self-directed learning as it relates to the development and use of tacit knowledge (Thivierge, 2002).

Review of the Study

This study sought to contribute to the limited available knowledge relating to personal reflections of current or recently departed individuals who have been identified as leaders in the field of Visual Impairment in Texas. A significant amount has been written about the historical leaders who shaped the policies that guide the field (Koestler, 1976; Hatlen, 2010). This literature has been supplemented by leaders' personal reflections on their own accomplishments and the accomplishments of their peers (Barraga, 2007; Irwin, 1955; Hatlen 2009; Keller, 1903; Lownfeld, 1981). Other authors included a review of the past, examined current situations, and/or projected or predicted future needs (Barraga, 2004; Corn, 2007; Erin, Corn, & Bishop, 1993; Goodrich & Lueck, 2010; Hatlen, 2007). Each of these sources has helped to provide meaning and direction to the field of visual impairment on a local, national, and international level. These texts have also provided a link between each stage of leadership and progression experienced in the field. These works have comprised the ethos upon which most of the Modern-day Leaders and Current Leaders in Texas and other regions have built their

careers. What is not present is the story and career development of what are identified here as *Current Leaders*. These are leaders who were often trained by Modern-day Leaders who grew the field, set standards, and developed personnel preparation programs. As of yet, the history of these Current Leaders who expanded the field and the services to the population of persons who are blind and visually impaired has not been chronicled. One direct outcome of this study is what DeLong (2004) identifies as a *Knowledge Retention Activity*. Figure 3 shows the relationship between knowledge that is created and known, and how it can be either be lost or retained and eventually used.

Figure 3. Knowledge retention activities (Reprinted with permission from DeLong, 2004, p. 24)



The real-world experience and reflections on their careers will help us build a history of this generation of leaders, and provide guidance for both the future of the field and for those who may undertake leadership positions. These Current Leaders are a bridge to the iconic Modern-day Leaders of the past from whom many of the identified

participants received direct training and guidance. The Current Leaders have witnessed a revolution in services and now see the field facing a set of challenges that combines some old worries, some new directions, and some critical fears. The experiential learning and tacit knowledge of these leaders must be made available.

The participants selected for this study were chosen because they met the parameters of the study and were deemed likely to give a reflective view of leadership from a variety of perspectives. The views of this most recent and/or current group of leaders were collected to reflect the diversity of the field. One surprising aspect of those selected from the list of award winners was the long tenures that they hold or have held. The original parameter of the study was 20+ years, and the average presented here was almost double that number, with years of service averaging 39.7 years in the field. Two things became clear; these participants held long tenures due to a passionate commitment to the field and the people involved, and they worked under, with, and were supported by the aforementioned Modern-day Leaders. This support does not diminish the accomplishments of the current group, but it does present a challenge for the next generation of leaders – Can they continue to build on advancements of previous generation while protecting the profession and the quality of services offered in spite of changes in the federal and state political climate and fluctuations in the economy of both the state of Texas and the United States? Of significant concern is a political climate that may seek to limit federal and state funding for grant programs that are heavily relied upon to support teacher preparation programs and specialties like visual impairment.

General Findings Across the Research Questions

One key aspect that was clear with each earlier generation of leaders remains clearly represented across the roles of participants of this study. In every role, these participants held advocacy in high regard. Advocating was considered a vital aspect of each of their positions from entry to leadership. The importance of advocacy as a function or duty of every professional in the field is supported by Brown and Beamish (2012) and Meador (2015). The more global the participant's view of the field, the wider the perspective of his or her advocacy became.

Discussion of Research Questions

The following section will detail the findings of the study associated with each of the research questions. Each question will be addressed individually with the research associated with the finding. Following discussion of the final research question, this section will offer the overall interpretation of the identified leaders.

Question 1: Career path - How do current or newly retired leaders describe their professional career development history from entry to practitioner to leader?

Career path was examined as it related to entry into the profession, the participant's story of entering the field, their transition to leadership, and how they advanced into leadership positions. The ways in which these selected leaders found the field of visual impairment seems at first glance to be random, and varied across participants. Upon closer examination, this study showed that predominately these individuals found the field by interacting in some way with a professional who worked

in visual impairment and the participants of this study joined the field to follow their passion/desire to work in a helping field. Two different studies, Hong, Rosenblum, Petrovay, and Erin (2000) and Petrovay (2008), each showed similar findings about how professionals in visual impairment began their careers.

Petrovay (2008) sought to identify personality characteristics that attracted individuals to the field by surveying 132 professionals and coding them using the Self-Directed Search Career Planning form of the of the Holland Occupational Themes or Holland codes. The themes are vocational personality types or codes that are defined as Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional (Spokane & Holland, 1995). Holland theorized people and their work environments fit these basic types (hollandcodes.com, 1995), and that individuals excel in careers that match their vocational/personality types. Petrovay (2008) used these codes and determined that 65.2% of professionals in visual impairment who were studied identified as the Social type. The sub-theme in this study that identified the importance of the shared value of interpersonal connections supports that personality type profile. It is interesting that Petrovay (2008) found that the personality type most associated with leadership, Enterprising, was self-identified in only 2.3% of those surveyed. This again may be explained in the varied ways the recognized leaders viewed themselves in this study, and by the fact that in many cases it was the social connection that created opportunities for these selected individuals to take on their leadership positions. In many cases, mentors opened doors and helped create opportunities that were taken hold of by the leaders in this study. In essence, social connection created opportunity.

Beyond opportunity, the participants shared how they developed skills and perspectives which helped them advance toward and in leadership. This view of enhancing ability follows the contention of Northouse (2009) when stating “Unlike traits that are innate, leadership skills are *learned* competencies” (p. 79, italics in original). This learning is centered in knowledge and experience with the key being how an individual understands and applies their experiences to their positions (Bennis, 2009). Through reflection, these leaders have developed an understanding of both their experiences and themselves. Bennis (2009) contends, “You make your life your own by truly understanding it” (p. 66).

Northouse (2009) divides leadership into three major component skills: administrative, interpersonal, and conceptual. The leaders in this study found challenges in each of these areas. In areas of administrative and interpersonal, participants highlighted skills related to running meetings, managing workloads, building networks, and working with others. Of special interest is the division of conceptual skills into strategic planning and problem solving. One of the most frequently mentioned concepts in this investigation was the belief in making a difference. This was discussed beyond situations of simply helping as a teacher would for a student. Making a difference in the hearts and minds of these leaders meant impacting lives across the state, across settings, across age groups, and across levels of disability. Their interpretation of making a difference centered on advocating for changes and finding solutions to problems faced by persons who are blind or visually impaired. These leaders clearly identified experience as a practitioner as an important component in their ability to lead. Their

ability to solve problems and set agendas identifying which problems to tackle was often directed and motivated by their experiences in the field, and more importantly, by their first-hand knowledge from time spent serving as practitioners in various roles and capacities directly serving students/clients who were blind and visually impaired.

These leaders see themselves as a part of something important. It may not be an enormous thing or impact a large part of the population, but service and leadership in this field truly represents, to all of those interviewed, something that matters. This clearly falls within the framework of Hanson (Hanson, 2001; Hanson, 1997) as work that needs doing, that values the diversity of the population served, and frequently gives (or gave) purpose to the lives of these leaders. Even those participants who humbly downplayed their own personal importance still manifest significant value for the work itself. As mirrored in the population served, advocacy for the field often presents on multiple fronts. Anderson (2009) refers to these individuals like these as *advocacy leaders*. The author uses the following description of advocacy leaders that can also be applied to the participants in this investigation:

Advocacy leaders think on multiple tracks at once. They think strategically and have short- and long-term goals. They have a broad social analysis but are not paralyzed by it. They act in the present, but have, as the old civil rights saying goes “their eyes on the prize,” and the prize is much more than raising student achievement. (p. 3, quotation marks in original)

The *prize* is improving the lives of persons with visual impairments. At any one time, these leaders could be focused on (among other things) training, services, policy,

legislation, and professional development, all of which are completed in collaboration with a web of state, regional, and local entities and stakeholders including parents whose children are visually impaired. One insightful comment presented in the course of this study was “You don’t have to leave [the direct service role of a TVI, COMS, etc.] to lead” (as told by Siller). This comment helps anchor the importance of advocacy leadership from whatever position an individual may hold. The belief that one does not have to be in a designated leadership position to advocate for an individual and their services falls in line with the *Everyday Leadership* concepts proposed by Dudley (2012).

These leaders career paths were marked by leaps into leadership positions. In many cases these leaders were faced with a disorientating dilemma of moving from a learned practitioner to a novice leader. They saw a role that needed filling and were able to transform themselves (and the views they held about themselves) to take on these new roles. This not only again highlights (Hanson, 2001; Hanson, 1997) as work that needs doing, but also supports the adult learning theory of transformational learning. These leaders became something new in their focus, role, and beliefs.

Question 2: Growth and expansion - How have the identified leaders impacted and contributed to the field of visual impairment in policy, practice, service, and training?

The focus on Texas, as previously elucidated, was not based on personal convenience or geographic proximity. I have endeavored to demonstrate that this state has often served to lead or blaze a trail in visual impairment. This is evidenced in personnel preparation, advocacy, and in past and present leadership. The cooperation

and collaboration between different agencies and leaders has developed a fertile environment for advancement of the field.

This study has shown how, in many ways, a *community of practice* exists among professionals who pushed for better services for persons who are blind and visually impaired. This community developed as a common passion that is not only a personal commitment but also a shared social and professional activity (Smith, 2003). Wegner-Trayner and Wegner-Trayner (aka Team BE, 2018) defined the key elements of a community of practice as:

The domain: members are brought together by a learning need they share (whether this shared learning need is explicit or not and whether learning is the motivation for their coming together or a by-product of it)

The community: their collective learning becomes a bond among them over time (experienced in various ways and thus not a source of homogeneity)

The practice: their interactions produce resources that affect their practice (whether they engage in actual practice together or separately) (para 3; parentheses and bold in original)

Each of these elements is present across the group of selected leaders. In practices, services, and intervention, the field has “required newcomers to move toward full participation in the sociocultural practices of the community” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29). Community of practice is also drawn from adult learning literature and was seen as an essential support in explaining the practices and identified themes of the leaders in this study.

These leaders have continued building on the standards established by previous generations and have themselves moved the field forward. This is evidenced by enhancements in aforementioned personnel preparation as well as professional standards, new legislation, and the general expansion of services for the population. The continued collaborative environment developed across disciplines and specialties inside the field has led to “creative ways to foster new approaches to problems” (Wegner & Snyder, 2000, p. 140). Unfortunately, leadership development may be one area in which the field has failed to develop a community of practice. The leadership of the field, across disciplines, appears to have sprung from practically a single generation, with limited participation of newcomers. This assertion will be examined below in leadership development. The lack of full *legitimate peripheral participation* (Lave & Wenger, 1991) by newcomers may indicate that a fully formed community of practice has not continued beyond the pragmatic focus of improving lives of persons who are blind and visually impaired.

Questions 3 & 4: Hopes and Fears - What concerns do these leaders have for the field? and What vision do these leaders have for the field?

Despite the separate presentation of these research questions, the leaders almost uniformly viewed these as opposite sides of the same coin. Bifurcated views of maintenance versus loss, expansion versus limitation, and higher versus lower standards were patterned in responses across the data sources. Uncertainty about the state of the future was contrasted with hope of continued improvement. As Benedict et al. (2014) contend, the role of being a teacher (in all fields) of special education has increased in

responsibilities, scope, and diversity of knowledge. This is certainly true in the professional roles of teachers of students with visual impairments, with the increased populations of students with multiple disabilities, dual sensory loss, and new types of impairments and syndromes.

As detailed in Chapter I, the field of Visual Impairment developed in stages. Knowing the history of the field may assist future leaders in adjusting current practices. As evidence, Brownell, Sindelar, Kiely, and Danielson (2010) detail the history of special education teacher preparation as a premise for the call to move from foundational practices. Brownell et al. (2009) further encourage teacher preparation programs to move from practices of training generalists to an increase of/in specific domain knowledge as a means to better train new teachers.

Question 5: Building new leadership - What supports do the leaders identify as necessary to help build and develop future leadership for the field?

The most significant finding of this investigation revolved around this question. Uniformly across this study, the leaders felt that not enough was being done in the way of succession planning for leaders in the field. Rothwell (2010) defines succession planning not as simply seeking replacements for top officials, but rather as a process that “goes beyond simple replacement planning. It is proactive and attempts to ensure the continuity of leadership by cultivating talent from within the organization through planned development activities” (p. 12). Though several shared stories about strategies that helped them transition to leadership, or ways in which various agencies may be

involved in developing future leaders, all participants shared the belief that succession was a problem.

Training ideas for future leadership were linked with involvement and volunteering with professional organizations and committees, presenting and seeking publication of ideas and practices, specific training from university graduate programs, and a possible added focus of the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired Outreach program. While involvement of each of these entities may be crucial in shaping and encouraging practitioners to become the next generation of leaders, what still seems absent is any real planning for succession. In actuality, the field of visual impairment may necessitate what Rothwell and Poduch (2004) call *technical succession planning*. The authors state:

technical succession planning means any effort designed to ensure the continued effective performance of an organization, division, department, or work group by taking provision for distilling, preserving, maintaining and communicating the fruits of the organization's institutional memory and unique experiences over time. It is about capturing, preserving and communicating information about what it takes for the organization to achieve success in its operations, and toward its objectives, over time. (p. 407)

This study (and others like it) may assist in that practice, but clearly more needs to be done in order to adequately meet the future needs of field of visual impairment in Texas and nationally. The vast expansion and specialization of leadership in the field may not allow for what Lave and Wegner (1991) deem adequate time to *reproduce* fully

developed leaders to take their place before a generation of these leaders retire. The interviewed leaders frequently voiced fears for protecting advances and retrenching the field in ideals; concerns which could be significantly mitigated if this kind of knowledge management was undertaken in the state.

Discussing education in general, Hargreaves (2005) states, “Leadership progression is not just an episodic problem in individual schools but a pervasive crisis in the system” (p. 164). Regarding higher education, Richards (2009) contends, “the collegial culture demands continuous dialogue from a variety of constituents and the ability for new individuals to move into consideration for leadership posts” (p. 115). Finally, in discussing higher education in visual impairment as related to both faculty and practitioner training, Corn and Spungin (2002) warn, “Other fields of special education have shortages of faculty, but those in the field of visual impairments are severe enough that they may result in an insufficient critical mass of faculty to supply new faculty as well as practitioners who are trained in this low incidence area” (p. 736). Although this investigation was not grounded in special education, that discipline is present across areas of practice, personnel preparation, and leadership. Visual impairment is a highly pragmatic and decidedly practitioner-based field much in same way as special education. Brownell, Sindelar, Kiely, and Danielson (2010) state that:

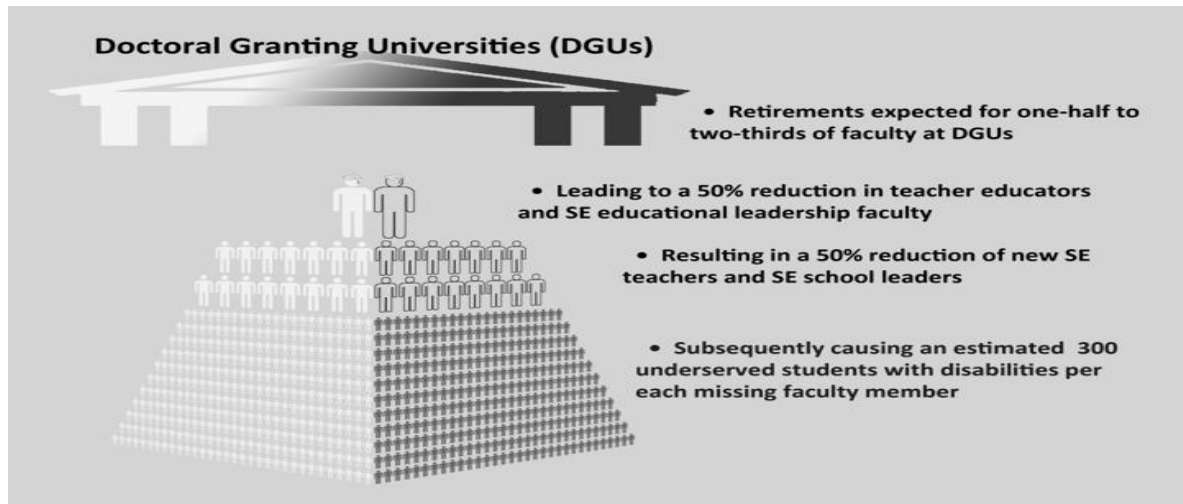
Special education teachers must have well-integrated knowledge bases including an understanding of (a) content and how to teach it, (b) specific problems that students with disabilities may experience in a particular content area, (c) the role of technology in circumventing learning issues or supporting access to more

sophisticated learning, and (d) the role of specific interventions and assessments in providing more intensive, explicit instruction within a broader curricular context. (p. 269)

Challenges associated with diversity of abilities and the presence of concomitant disabilities impacting ability are faced by both the special education teacher and the visual impairment professional. The field of visual impairment has been able to maintain its identity and focus on this specific discipline and interventions related to visual impairment rather than what Brownwell, Sindelar, Kiely, and Danielson (2010) refer to as non-categorical and integrated personnel preparation models that the authors believe have eroded special education services.

Shortages in special education fields like visual impairment have a cyclical impact on leadership development. Shortages of teachers create shortages in the pipeline of future higher education faculty (Smith, Robb, West, & Tyler, 2010), and attrition lessens the capacity to train professionals. This decreased capacity creates higher caseloads and in turn, higher practitioner attrition (Dignan, 2015; Shore, 2016), and teacher shortages negatively impact students and clients who need direct and consultative services from professionals trained in the field. Smith, Robb, West, and Tyler (2010) provide the following description and model for these overlapping impacts on practice. (see figure 4)

Figure 4: The impact of a shortage of SE faculty at doctoral granting universities on the number of SE teacher educators, to prepare a sufficient supply of SE teachers necessary to provide appropriate SE services to students with disabilities. (Reprinted from Smith, Montrose, Robb, Tyler, & Young, 2011, p. 32)



As estimated by Smith, Robb, West, and Tyler (2010), each unfilled position in personnel preparation results in a yearly reduction of 25 trained professionals entering the field, thus decreasing the pool of future leaders. Although the above figure uses doctoral-granting universities as its basis, it is contended here that any gap in leadership or training staff in the small but diverse field of visual impairment would, and does, significantly impact the quality and scope of specialized services received by persons who are blind or visually impaired.

One challenge for the next generation of leaders is the combination of a high value on experience and a relatively older average beginning age of professionals in the field of visual impairment. The fact that so many current practitioners enter the field as

mid-career professionals (Wittich & Dignan, 2008) may make the development of leaders more difficult, or at least limit the length of their leadership tenures. University programs in Texas and nationally extensively recruit experienced educators to their training programs as a second career (Wittich & Dignan, 2008). Statements prompting educators to *Get out of the classroom, not out of education* are used in recruiting for the field. This strategy values the experiential knowledge of these teachers and offers them new opportunities away from the constraints of the traditional classroom. Recruitment of established or second-career teachers may improve the abilities of new professionals entering the field but may also significantly limit the length of their careers.

The shortening of professional careers is not only impacted by who is being recruited, but also by the training programs themselves. Nationally, there is only one undergraduate program training TVIs and one other program training undergraduate O&M specialists. In states like Texas, certification as a TVI can only be obtained as a supplemental certification added to a current teaching certification/license. Petrovay (2008) has called for recruiting younger teachers by making presentations to classes of students in teacher preparation programs of various specialties. The challenge related to the shortage of leaders, as with other problems in the field of visual impairment, needs to be confronted “with determination and creativity together to achieve common goals” (Spungin, 2003).

Uniqueness of this leadership group. This crop of Current Leaders may have been the first to seek a balance between their home and work lives. This balance is part of both Schlossbergs 4-S strategy (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012;

Schlossberg, 1981) related to support for transitions, and the career development tasks of Hanson (Hanson, 2001; Hanson, 1997) relating to connecting family and work and weaving their lives into a meaningful whole. It has been said about the preceding Modern-day leaders like Hatlen, Barraga, and others, that *the field was their life*. To varying degrees, and in certain aspects, the field of visual impairment has played a dominant role in the professional and personal lives of the leaders interviewed here. But what was different in the life courses of these participants was the search for some semblance of balance. Admittedly, some of these leaders were able to find harmony with others (i.e., partners/family) living outside of what might be called an equilibrium. Even in those cases, where these leaders may have committed themselves to the field in a manner out-of-balance, they were able to find a new negotiated balance in which they were able to draw supports from family members or from spouses in their second marriages.

In this time of crisis in the development of new leadership, perhaps the infusion of self-care strategies and other methods of finding balance in personal and professional lives may help future leaders avoid burnout and thus alleviate shortages over the long term. The field of visual impairment has enjoyed long tenures and shown to have higher job satisfaction than other special educators in Texas (Korenek, Ottmo, & Thomas, unpublished study) and in Washington State (Meador, 2015). While this may be attributable to Hanson's *work that needs doing* and *giving life purpose*, Schlossberg's *adjustment to change*, or even Mezirow's transformation of self, a more comprehensive view of those who dedicate their careers to the field may be offered by Skovholt and

Trotter-Mathison (2016). Specifically addressing resiliency in helping professions including teaching, the authors identified key methods to sustain ones professional self. Many of these characteristics were present in the leaders identified for this study; (a) doing meaningful work, (b) maximizing the experience of success, (c) relishing the small *I made a difference moments*, (d) striving for continual improvement, (e) professional understanding, and most interestingly, (f) the creation of a *professional greenhouse* (Skovholt & Trotter-Mathison, 2016, p. 135). Despite increased demands, practitioners are encouraged by these authors to develop a professional greenhouse of support. This support can clearly be linked to the development of new leaders. Skovholt and Trotter-Mathison (2016) define the professional greenhouse as:

A learning environment where practitioner growth is encouraged; leadership that promotes a healthy other-care vs. self-care balance; social support from peers; receiving other care from mentors; mentoring others, and emotional environment of respect, playfulness, humor, and joy. (p. 148)

The establishment of support systems may assist leaders in their self-perceived ability to transition to a form of leadership and provide a support system of mentorship.

Mentorship currently in place for beginning teachers may now be offered to assist those who step into positions of leadership.

Implications for Theory, Research, and Practice

With a focus on the results of this study and literature upon which it is based the following will address how the findings may impact theory, future research, and practices in the field of visual impairment.

Theory. The field of visual impairment is without theories of its own. The larger field of special education also presented little in the way of theory upon to base these implications. Much of the discipline-specific research cited here was focused upon high attrition and predictions of severe shortages of personnel at all levels. This study sought to determine if Current Leaders shared experiences and lifestories as they moved from initial entry into the field, to practitioners, and their eventual transformation into leaders. Though the career entry of these leaders was random the move to leadership was the result of the development of experience. Once these study participants earned experience, they were confronted with gaps or voids in leadership positions which they felt compelled to fill as professionals.

The implications of Hanson's ILP present in this study helped to explain how these leaders were able to develop such a passion for the field even though entry may not have been planned. The work that they did became interwoven in their lives. These leaders found work that needed doing, gave their lives purpose, incorporated their familial relationships, highly valued differences, and provided their lives a meaningful purpose. Like many helping fields, visual impairment, fed these career needs of the selected leaders. The leaders demonstrated great passion for what they do.

Schlossberg's Transition theory helped to highlight how these leaders approached transitions in their careers. In most cases it was personal relationships that led to advancement and growth, as professional networks of support were built on these connections. These leaders were able to utilize assets in their lives for support as they

assumed which of duties that they did not feel ready to fulfill, or to established positions that were so newly-developed that there had been no prior position. In some cases they may have been the only person to ever hold the position. The experiences of each of the participants show how situations, supports, strategies, and self (Schlossberg's 4S model) were brought together to facilitate achievement and/or advancement.

It was evident in the data that as new changes and opportunities emerged these leaders were able enhance assets in the 4S areas and while mitigating liabilities in these same areas. Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2012) state it is the ratio of these assets and liabilities that allow for the change to occur (p. 63). Something in the leaders' situation triggered their jump from practitioner to leader, or from one level of leadership to the next.

Adult Learning theories offered the biggest contribution to this investigation. Transformational, experiential, and self-directed learning all were valued as these leaders developed. Some were faced with the dilemma of moving from a direct service/practitioner to that of a leader. Many stated this jump was made because it was something that needed to be done or it was an opportunity to have a larger impact on the field. Knowledge gained as a practitioner from working with different populations allowed some leaders to use their personal experiences as a source of validation and respect in their advanced positions. For each of these participants, once they entered the field, their path fixed on new and different ways to advocate for others, and on building skills to help make lives better for those who are blind or visually impaired. The knowledge bases which these leaders developed reflect a wealth of tacit knowledge.

Policy. As stated, this study has detailed the accomplishments and the career paths of individuals who have served as leaders in various positions related to blindness. The knowledge and skills of these leaders have helped move the state of Texas forward in services, education, personnel preparation, and legislation. Texas has been recognized as an innovator and a leader in the field of visual impairment in each of these areas.

During this investigation, concerns about maintaining gains and standards of services that have been developed became apparent. Changes in the state level rehabilitation agency have troubled many of these leaders. State services previously handled by caseworkers who were trained specifically in blindness are now handled by caseworkers trained across a generic spectrum of disabilities. Services that had been provided under a continuum from birth/early childhood, through school, and into adulthood have now been split between two separate agencies, with the dividing line being approximately 14 years of age (DARS, 2016). Children are served through the Texas Department of Health and Human Services, and the teens through the elderly are handled by the Texas Workforce Commission. This separation of services between agencies has led to some gaps in services and a significant change in philosophy with a heavy focus on work programs for the those 14 and up. This legislative agency change was a policy battle which was lost by the field, and advocates fear that other gains may also be repealed.

Educational policy remains the strength of these leaders. This was clear in the collection of accomplishments witness by these Current Leaders. Cooperation between advocacy groups, stakeholders, university programs, the school for the blind (TSBVI),

and legislators have resulted in higher standards and more responsibilities for visual impairment educational professionals working in the field today. Services have expanded to different populations, and the two university programs for visual impairment preparation in Texas partner with TSBVI to try to meet the growing training needs and demand for professionals. As stated in Chapter 1, a generational turnover of professionals may be at hand as many teachers and specialists approach retirement.

Policy decisions to continue support for training of professionals through tuition stipends are essential as the field deals with both increased standards, more accountability, and ongoing shortages of trained professionals. Leaders were asked to look to the future and focused an eye on maintaining advancements in services and enhancing the services currently provided. Texas has an abundance of resources not present in other states, including two university training programs, but the biggest resource is cooperation and collaboration. Cross agency and stakeholder groups like the Texas Action Committee for the Education of Students with Visual Impairments demonstrate the partnership between Texas Education Agency, TSBVI Outreach, professionals, and stakeholders. Legislative action has made both the expanded core curriculum and orientation and mobility evaluations mandatory for students with visual impairments in the state. These innovative laws and policies could only have been accomplished through strong collaboration and even stronger advocacy. Continued collaboration will be essential to the maintenance and improvement of services.

Practice. Both of the above sections on theory and policy have addressed practices either directly or indirectly. The need to develop systems that will impact

practice in the future became apparent in this investigation. The field must commence the practice of knowledge transfer before these leaders are gone. Studies like this pale in comparison to the sharing of past voices undertaken by Bersch (2005-2014) in her interviews of Adult Learning professionals, but it is a start. These Current Leaders in visual impairment make up a unique phase in the history of the field. The knowledge and histories of these leaders must be saved and then shared with the stakeholders and professionals in the field.

The field of visual impairment has done enough of predicting of a future plagued by shortages. These shortages will be real, but planning for the future must include actively searching for solutions or ways of mitigating these issues. Programs need to be innovative and efficient. The field must initiate some form of organized succession planning. This is true nationally as well as in the state of Texas. Leadership development must be a practice that is undertaken at all levels. Brownell, Adams, Sindelar, Waldron and Vanhover (2006) discuss how working together will also help the field itself stating “Inherent in this call for collaboration is that the act of planning and working together, by itself, is a powerful professional development tool” (p. 169).

Advocacy, a foundational aspect of the field, must be continually supported and cultivated to give voice to the unique needs of individuals across the population. The training of skills of leadership and advocacy moves the field beyond that of a profession of practitioners. Models that meet the needs of these professionals’ must be drawn from practices proven effective in both adult education and organizational development. Brownell et al. (2006) call for increased understanding of what teachers bring with them

to learning situations and the qualities that assist them in these learning endeavors. The learning of these adult teachers should fall back on and/or incorporate what has been supported by various theories developed in adult learning. Learning opportunities can be enhanced by application of one field of knowledge to a field of practice dominated by pedagogy. Practices in the field must focus on the needs of the students and on the development needs of the professionals providing services.

Recommendations for Future Research

The field of visual impairment has (rightfully so) been focused on the needs of children and adults who are blind and visually impaired. This is evidenced in the focus on enhancement of the pragmatic skills of the practitioner. The goal of the field is to find a way to reach each individual who is blind or visually impaired and to help them learn, grow, exert self-determination, and become more independent across their lifespan. I wholeheartedly believe that the focus of improving services and the lives of these individuals should continue. Investigations into how to maintain and improve services to specific populations should always remain a top priority. That said, areas of future research should move from the identification of shortages in leaders and practitioners to the investigation of new means or strategies to curtail these shortages. Twenty plus years of research has shown that a shortage exists. To paraphrase Dignan, “let’s do something [*different*] about it”.

Research must be focused on action. New and innovative ways to better count, identify, serve, and enhance the lives of persons with visual impairments need to be implemented and assessed. This issue can no longer wait for federal dollars or struggling

national advocacy groups to solve the problem. Leadership development, succession planning, and knowledge transfer strategies must be implemented. Leadership needs to be developed at all levels of training, expertise, and education. The power of this field is its ability to impact lives. This investigation, along with others like Meador (2015), captures the voices and knowledge of those leading and teaching in the current generation. The history of the field is evolving, and the pending generational turnover of leaders trained by early programs will be felt by the field. I have repeatedly stated my hope that the collection of stories of these leaders will make leadership transition more conceivable for those in the future.

The unity of focus and shared passion inherent in the field should be used as a springboard for investigation of future collaborative projects. We have moved from folk-art to profession, but now need to document our foundational underpinnings into workable and investigable theories. We are currently honed by our beliefs and passions, but have not delineated our own theoretical make-up or described what makes us different. If we can build a theoretical background, it may be easier to fight off rollback of services so that we may continue to build on advancements. As the baby-boomer population ages, shortages will become apparent in the ways that were previously the result of epidemics. The time to mine knowledge and make it accessible, to plan for leadership transition/succession, and lay theoretical foundation is at hand.

Conclusion

This study was comprised of five chapters that included an introduction, a literature review, an overview of the research design, a discussion of the research

findings, and a summary discussion of findings. Each chapter served a specific purpose in supporting this investigation.

Chapter I brought forth the history of the field of visual impairment, the background of the problem, the problem statement and purpose of the study. Additionally, this chapter set the research questions and theoretical frame. The chapter closed by detailing the significance of the study in relation to research, practice, and policy. Finally, the chapter provided a definition of terms used in the study and summary.

Chapter II examined literature that was meaningful for the study, including studies that addressed growth and attrition, the historical evolution of the field, and development of the field of visual impairment as a profession. The latter parts of the chapter detailed the current view of the field, and detailed literature supporting the theoretical framework and related research.

Chapter III addressed research design beginning with methodological frame, my own world view, my role as a researcher, and my epoché. The chapter detailed my methodology including (a) site selection, (b) participant selection, (c) data collection, and (c) data analysis. Commentary on my position as an insider in the field was addressed. The chapter closed with a discussion of rigor and trustworthiness followed by a summary.

Chapter IV detailed the research findings collected from the data sources. Profiles of the selected leaders were provided to enhance the richness of the statements presented. Areas including entry into the field, shared values, leadership views, and the

impact on personal lives are all detailed in the findings. The chapter continues with discussion of the changes that have been brought about and witnessed by these leaders during their tenure. It closes with a view toward the future, citing advice offered by the participants for future leaders, and a summary.

Lastly, Chapter V involved examination of the findings, beginning with generalities across the research questions. The chapter then addresses each question individually, providing support in literature related to each question. The question section closed with a comment on the uniqueness of this group of leaders in comparison with those of the past generation. This chapter ends with a recommendation for future research and this conclusion.

It was noted through interaction with my research committee that this investigation sought to develop organizational knowledge from individual interviews. What I found was the existence of commonalities across disciplines, positions, scope, and careers. It was more than a single thread that held this loose-knit web of professionals together; it was more akin to a bloodline or vein. This group shared strong professional bonds of helping the population of individuals with visual impairments, advocacy for change, and enhancement of services. They were able to leave their self-interest and seek collaboration and support from others. This support came in many forms including joining together in committees, advocacy groups, and often in friendships. While many stumbled into the field accidentally, it still became a part of their lives, and a passion beyond that of a typical career. The heart of these leaders is

what has helped them to address problems and to transform themselves and the field – together.

This investigation also presented an opportunity to collect a history of this current generation before these leaders are gone. I believe the voices portrayed here represent some of the top leaders in the state of Texas, and offer perspectives from different fields, positions, regions, and disciplines. This group values and respects practitioner experience and expertise. Many of these individuals continue to work directly with practitioners or service providers to enhance the lives of the population served. The knowledge base and skills needed to be a practitioner have advanced to meet the mandated need for assessment, but have also advanced with the goal of enhancing the lives of persons with visual impairments across the state.

Finally, leaders and leadership needs to be developed. Leadership in the field can be attained or evidenced without moving into a new professional position. Programs and initiatives are needed that ask practitioners to look up from their caseloads and their complicated students and see the field as a whole. Professional development and university training should be offered as a means of growing new leaders. Possible opportunities for involvement and support for new leaders should be explored. Succession planning needs to begin as a way to prepare for future retirements and to develop a means for knowledge transfer from long term leaders to the new professionals who are able and willing to assume a more advanced position. The field of visual impairment has to this point failed to implement such planning, but there may still be time to at least begin the process. I am grateful for what the field has brought to my life

as I have gone through my own transition to leadership and have used a network of support in some cases to help me through different situations. A more formal, structured, and stable system of mentoring new leaders would enable the field to build a community that continually brings in new voices and is ready for new personnel to open their hearts to the possibility of leading others in the field.

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APPENDIX 1

LEADERSHIP AWARD WINNERS

Texas Chapter Award

To be presented to the individual or organization, not responsible for direct delivery of services to persons who are blind or visually impaired, but who has, in one form or another, made an outstanding contribution to work for these persons. Possible recipients include legislators, eye care professionals, physicians, employers, public officials, and interested individuals or organizations.

Texas Chapter Award Past Winners (cont.)

2017 – Alliance of and for Visually Impaired Texans (AVIT)
2016 – Chrissy Cowan
2015 - Tom Westerman –
2014 – Representative Elliot Naishatat & Rudy Beccera
2013 – Dr. Kory Cummings
2012 - Texas Chapter – Senator Judith Zaffirini & Representative Rob Eissler
2011 - Sports Extravaganza ESC Region 10 –
2010 - Dr. Laura Miller –
2009 - Jim Allan -
2008 - Randy Foederer
2007 - Houston Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments (HAPVI)
2006 - ESC Region 3, Low Incidence Team
2005 - Marty Murrell
2004 - Alan Koenig -
2003 - Chuck Mayo –
2002 - Bob Bryant
2001 – Texas Commission for the Blind – Blind Children Program Coordinators –
2000 - Visual Aid Volunteers -
1999 - Bill Bryan & Marty Murrell
1998 – Professional Preparation Advisory Group -
1997 - Phil Hatlen
1996 - Cyral Miller
1995 - Dr. Kathleen Fraser, Santa Rosa Low Vision Clinic, San Antonio
1994 -
1993 - Southwestern Bell of Texas
1992 -

1991 -
1990 - Jane Erin
1989 - Aroline Hutcheson –
1988 - Sandra Rosen
1987 - Jack Val
1986 - Dr. Randall Jose –

Phil Hatlen Award

The Phil Hatlen Award recognizes excellence in leadership and innovative changes in the field of Visual Impairment. This award is given in honor of Dr. Phil Hatlen for exemplary and dedicated service to our field. A visionary of change, Dr. Hatlen has been an inspiration to countless professionals during his career as a teacher, university professor in teacher preparation programs, and in his many leadership roles in national and state organizations and committees. He currently shares his enthusiastic commitment to the continuous improvement of educational opportunities for blind or visually impaired students as superintendent of Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

The recipient of this award may be an administrator or university professor. This recipient must have brought about innovative changes or provided out-standing leadership to our field that ultimately improved services to programming and quality of life to students with a visual impairment.

Phil Hatlen Award Past Winners (15)

2017 – Bill Daugherty
2016- Michael Munro
2015 - Debra Sewell
2014 – K. C. Dignan
2013 - Ann Adkins
2012 - Tricia Lee
2011 - Nora Griffin-Shirley
2010 - Dr. Rona Pogrund

2009 - Frankie Swift –
2008 - Fran Hammer –
2007 - Mary Ann Siller –
2006 - Marnee Loftin -
2005 - Dr. Rita Livingston –
2004 - Cyral Miller

Sammie K. Rankin Award

The late Sammie K. Rankin was the first director of the Lighthouse for the Blind in Waco and was a supervisor of rehabilitation teachers with the Texas Commission for the Blind for many years. This award is to be presented in her honor and memory to an individual or organization who has made an outstanding contribution to services for persons who are blind or visually impaired in Texas. Any TAER member is eligible for nomination for the award.

Sammie K. Rankin Award Past Winners

2017 – Belinda Rudinger
2016 – Valerie Alvarez -
2015 - Neva Fairchild -
2014 – Julie Glover
2013 - Olga Ellis -
2012 - Brenda Lee –
2011 - Scott Meyer –
2010 - Olivia Chavez
2009 - Jill Brown
2008 - Ruth Ann Marsh
2007 - Christy Shepard
2006 - Julie Prause
2005 - Debbie Louder –
2004 - Kitra Gray –
2003 - Nan Bulla –
2002 - Elsie Rao –
2001 -
2000 - Donna Clopton
1999 -
1998- Marcie Glass - TVI
1997 - Jim Durkel -
1996 - Lynda Jones

1995 - Billy Brookshire
1994 -
1993 - Ron Kordas
1992 -
1991 -
1990 - Jim Allan-
1989 - Melanie White
1988 - Mike Bina
1987 - Virginia Sowell -
1986 - Gary Everhart

APPENDIX 2

AWARD WINNERS NOT MEETING CRITERIA (30) FOR STUDY

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Award</i>	<i>Exclusion due to</i>
Tom Westerman	Lion's Club Member	Chapter 2015	Indirect contact
Elliot Naishatat Judith Zaffereini Rob Eissler	Legislators	Chapter 2014 Chapter 2012 Chapter 2012	Limited/Indirect contact with students
AVIT Sports Extravaganza HAPVI ESC-3 Low incidence TCP/BCP Visual Aid Volunteers PPAG SWB of Texas	Group	Chapter 2017 Chapter 2011 Chapter 2007 Chapter 2006 Chapter 2001 Chapter 2000 Chapter 1998 Chapter 1993	Not individual Not individual Not individual Not individual Not Individual Not Individual Not individual Not individual
Dr. Kory Cummings Dr. Laura Miller Dr. Kathleen Fraiser Dr. Randal Jose	Medical Doctors	Chapter 2013 Chapter 2010 Chapter 1995 Chapter 1986	Not education related
Chuck Mayo	Textbook Coordinator	Chapter 2003	Indirect contact with students

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Award</i>	<i>Exclusion due to</i>
Sandra Rosen Jane Erin Mike Bina	Focus outside Texas	Chapter 1988 Chapter 1990 Rankin 1988	Do not fit study parameters of current Texas leaders
Aroline Hutcheson Scott Meyer Gary Everhart Neva Fairchild	Field Professionals	Chapter 1989 Rankin 2011 Rankin 1986 Rankin 2015	Non education
Allen Koenig Jim Durkel Phil Hatlen Virginia Sowell	Deceased Deceased Deceased Deceased	Chapter 2004 Rankin 1997 Chapter 1997 Rankin 1987	Year of death - 2005 Year of death - 2012 Year of death - 2016 Year of death - 1997
Valarie Alvarez Rudy Beccera	Parent Student	Rankin 2016 Chapter 2014	Indirect contact with students

APPENDIX 3

LIST OF POSSIBLE PARTICIPANTS (41) FOR INITIAL ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE

Name	Position	Award
Ann Adkins	TSBVI	Hatlen 2013
Jim Allen	TSBVI	Texas Chapter 2009 Rankin 1990
Billy Brookshire	AVIT, Hadley, Advocate, ABC-TX	Rankin 1995
Jill Brown	O&M, TAER pres, AER president	Rankin 2009
Bill Bryan	SFASU O&M Faculty	Texas Chapter 1999
Bob Bryant	SFASU O&M Faculty	Texas Chapter 2002
Nan Bulla	TSBVI	Rankin 2003
Olivia Chavez	ESC rep, AVIT, Advocate, ACB Texas	Rankin 2010
Donna Clopton		Rankin 2000
Chrissy Cowan	TVI, TSBVI Outreach	Texas Chapter 2016
Bill Daugherty	Outreach, Superintendent	Hatlen 2017
KC Dignan	TSBVI, Author,	Hatlen 2014
Olga Ellis		Rankin 2013
Randy Foederor	Adaptive PE, Camp Developer	Texas Chapter 2008
Marcie Glass		Rankin 1998
Julie Glover		Rankin 2014

Name	Position	Award
Kitra Gray	ESC Rep,	Rankin 2004
Nora Griffin-Shirley	Texas Tech O&M Faculty, Author	Hatlen 2011
Fran Hammer		Hatlen 2008
Lydia Jones		Rankin 1996
Ron Kordas		Rankin 1993
Brenda Lee	ESC Rep	Rankin 2012
Rita Livingston	TSBVI, author	Hatlen 2005
Marnee Lofton	TSBVI, LSSP, Author	Hatlen 2006
Debbie Louder	TAER Board President, TSBVI Board President, University Faculty, ESC Dir.	Rankin 2005
Ruth Ann Marsh	TSBVI Outreach	Rankin 2008
Tricia Lee Marsh	ESC Dir.	Hatlen 2012
Dixie Mercer	SFASU Director, TSBVI outreach, articles	Hatlen 2003
Cyral Miller	TSBVI Outreach, AVIT	Hatlen 2004, TX Chapter 1996
Michael Munro	SFA Faculty	Hatlen 2016
Marty Murrell	TEA Official, AVIT President,	TX Chapter 2005 & TX Chapter 1999
Rona Pogrund	Texas Tech O&M Faculty, Author	Hatlen 2010
Julie Prause	TAER Board President, TVI, RECC coordinator	Rankin 2006

Name	Position	Award
Elsie Rao	TVI, Outreach	Rankin 2002
Belinda Ruddinger		Rankin 2017
Deborah Sewell	TSBVI, Publishing, Author,	Hatlen 2015
Christy Sheppard	TAER Treasurer, AER President	Rankin 2007
Mary Ann Siller		Hatlen 2007
Frankie Swift	TSBVI President, University Facutly, ESC Rep.	Hatlen 2009
Jack Val		TX Chapter 1987
Melanie White		Rankin 1989

APPENDIX 4

INITIAL SCREENING QUESTIONNAIRE

Script: Thank you, in advance, for your time and willingness to participate in this study. The sharing of your reflective experiences will help build understanding of the process of transitioning into varied leadership positions in the field of visual impairment. This study is investigating the impact of *current or recently departed leaders* in the field of visual impairment in Texas. You have been recognized as one of those leaders by your peers and through award(s) from the Texas Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (TAER), the the statewide professional organization in visual impairment in Texas. This study seeks to document contributions of individual leaders and advancements in the field that have been achieved during your career.

Study's purpose: The purpose of this study is to collect, analyze, and document the career development and contributions of current or newly retired leaders in the field of visual impairment who hold or have held influential positions across the state of Texas. This study will also seek to draw from these leaders both a reflection on their transition to leadership, their legacies, and their shared mission while examining their vision for the field and a vision for growth of future leadership.\

Research questions:

1. How do current or newly retired leaders who have held positions of leadership, describe their professional career development history in the field of visual impairment?
2. How have the identified leaders impacted and contributed to the field of visual impairment in policy, practice, service, and training?

3. What concerns do these leaders have for the field?
4. What vision do these leaders have for the field?
5. What supports can be identified as necessary to help build and develop leaders to meet the future needs of the field?

Selection Criteria for Participation

In addition to your recognition as a leader in the field through award from TAER do you mee the following criteria for selection

- Minimum of 20 years of service to the field to ensure witnessing of the transformation of the field that defines the phenomenon under study
- Holding, or having held an office or position of leadership in the field. This leadership position may reflect the diversity of the field and may include regional or state-wide planning, standard development, advocacy, active committee membership, training, publication, having played a key role in the development of legislation, educational codes, and standards implementation and/or leadership and/or development of programs to train teachers and/or specialists to meet the needs of persons with visual impairments in Texas

And

- Are you willing to detail their personal career development through this period by reflecting upon career development, accomplishments, movement to leadership, while also being willing to project future needs of the field.

Selection Priority

To aid in selection of participants

1. First, how do you identify your race/ethnicity?
2. How do you identify your gender?
3. Additional demographic data which relates to your experience in the field of visual impairments

Participant Information	Responses
a. Years of Service to the fie visual impairment	
b. Certifications held related to the field	
c. Leadership positions that hold or have held	

d. Working Status (working full-time, part time, contracting, serving pro bono, or retired)	

4. What different positions have you held during your tenure in the field? (Do you have a vitae or resume you are willing to share?)
5. What different committees, advocacy groups, or agencies have you worked with to advance causes and issues related to visual impairment?
6. What is your perception of how leadership and advocacy in the state of Texas have impacted the field nationally and/or internationally?
7. What has been your personal greatest contribution to the field?
8. During your time working in visual impairment what have been the most important achievements or advances in the field?
9. What challenges do you see as most pressing or of biggest concern in the field today or in the near future?

Finally, would you be willing to complete a one-on-one follow up interview to further reflect on your career and personal journey in the field?

APPENDIX 5

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL: FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE, AND PROBES

Face-to-Face and Follow-up Interview Schedule

Thank you, in advance, for your time and willingness to participate in this study. The sharing of your reflective experiences will help build understanding of the process of transitioning into varied leadership positions in the field of visual impairment.

Study's purpose: The purpose of this study is to collect, analyze, and document the career development and contributions of current or newly retired leaders in the field of visual impairment who hold or have held influential positions across the state of Texas. This study will also seek to draw from these leaders both a reflection on their transition to leadership, their legacies, and their shared mission while examining their vision for the field and a vision for growth of future leadership

Research questions:

1. How do long-term, current, or newly retired leaders describe their professional career development history from entry to practitioner to leader?
2. How have the identified leaders impacted and contributed to the field of visual impairment in policy, practice, service, and training?
3. What vision do these leaders have for the field?
4. Can these leaders help identify essential supports and paths to help build and develop leaders to meet the needs of the field in the future?

Participant information

Life span career transitions to leadership

For this study, *transition to leadership* is not defined simply as advancing or changing jobs, but changing career or career focus by leaving an established occupation for a different one and/or becoming a key resource, and/or moving from training public school students to training future teachers. Your leadership in the field could be as a developer, advocate, trainer, outreach support, or trailblazer in a specialty area associated with visual impairment.

Career transition(s) in the field of visual impairment

1. How would you describe your career path over your life span?
2. How do you describe how you found and entered the field of visual impairment?
 - a) Was there a significant issue, exposure, or calling that prompted your entrance?
3. What has the experience of being part of the field given you?
 - a) What have you drawn from that experience?
 - b) Has your experience and work in the field of visual impairment transformed you and your beliefs?
4. How would you describe the most significant change in the field during your tenure?
 - a) How did that experience impact you?
5. What is the most significant change you have been a part of?
 - a) How did that experience impact you?
 - b) Describe the situational aspects of the time that impacted change?
6. How do you feel you were you able to advance in the field?
 - a) Describe any triggering events that began your career transition to leadership?
 - b) Describe roadblocks/challenges you faced from outsiders or those close to you
 - i) How addressed (probe)?
 - d.) Describe/identify any personal challenges, views, or beliefs that may have held you back?
 - i) How did you overcome or transformed (probe)?
7. What facilitated the transitions? (culture, climate, supports, transformations)?
 - a) What supports were available to you personally and professionally?
 - i. Family (probe)
 - ii. Relationships (probe)
 - iii. Culture and/or time period (probe)
 - iv. Location (probe)
 - b) Did you feel deficits or conflict personally and professionally in those areas that limited you transitions or leadership?
 - i. Family (probe)
 - ii. Relationships (probe)

- iii. Culture and/or time period (probe)
- iv. Location (probe)
- c) Can you describe any personal changes you needed to make to help you transition? How addressed (probe)?
- 8. 8. Were any individuals or groups key in your experience of transition to leadership and development of yourself as a leader? (good or bad)
 - a) How were these connections helpful, and what support or motivation did they provide?
 - b) Can you describe how you used these supports?
- 9. Can you describe your perception of yourself as a leader?
 - a) Where in your experience did you identify as leader?
 - b) How were you able to change yourself into a leader?
- 10. In your (various) roles, can you describe personal challenges you face(d) as you performed tasks of your position?
 - a) Impact on personal life
 - b) Move from expert to novice or developer of new position
 - c) Balance
 - d) Satisfaction
- 11. As you look ahead, can you describe your hopes and fears for the future of the field?
 - a) Where do you see challenges
 - b) Where do you see opportunities
- 12. How would you describe—or do you perceive—your performance as a leader? (positive, negative, both, benign)?
- 13. What would you like for me to know about your experience as and your transition to your position of leadership that I have *not* asked you?
- 14. What would you say to those who are considering moving/advancing in the field from practitioner to leader?
 - a) Advice to them
 - b) Advice to those seeking to develop or attract new leaders

Thank you!

APPENDIX 6

MEMBER CHECKING – FOLLOW UP INTERVIEW

1. Based on your review of the first interview's transcription, what changes or clarification would you like to make?
2. [Ask any unanswered or unclearly answered questions from the first interview.]
3. What else you would like to share about your career transition(s) and experiences as a leader in the field of visual impairment?