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The purpose of this research is to determine a comprehensive support system for assistant principals that would assist them in transitioning to a principalship. The life stories shared by the practitioners will give the reader insights into the world of school administration. Through hearing about the joys, the struggles, the responsibilities, the preparation, the multitasking nature of the job, and the stress that has resulted in many new principals' desire to return the keys to the school and exit the profession, the reader will see the critical need to develop a network of support systems prior to the first year in the principalship to ensure success and sustainability.

A phenomenological approach was taken in conducting this research as lived experiences of the participants were captured through the interview process. Inasmuch as phenomenological researchers seek to understand essential truths about lived experiences, this qualitative approach best met the needs of the problem statement: What are the supports, as perceived by principals, assistant principals, and principal coaches that are needed for assistant principals that will provide a smooth transition to the principalship?

The interview data was coded to search for the themes that emerged and lead to the summarization and recommendations that will ultimately envelope school administrators with layers of support that are critical for their success. The power of mentors and coaches, the role of the university, the supports that school districts can

provide, the need for meaningful professional development, the challenges of school leadership, the critical role of instructional leadership, and the power of trusting relationships are all explored and examined in the context of ensuring the types of support that keep the keys to the school on the keychain of the new principal.

KEEPING THE KEYS: MENTORING AND SUPPORT
FOR ASPIRING PRINCIPALS

by

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Approved by

Dr. Carl Lashley
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This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Bruce, and my three children, Robbie, James, and Emily for all of their love and support. Their love and encouragement have sustained me through this entire process. They have always believed in me. I just hope that I have instilled my love for learning and my high expectations that I have always set for myself in my children. It is also dedicated in loving memory of my dad, Jim Smith, who would be so proud of me, and my father-in-law, Robert Citty, who always wanted a doctor in the family. This is also dedicated to my mother who is in the nursing home. I will proudly wear my doctoral regalia to the nursing home so she can see what a great job she did.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of
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A lifelong dream has been realized. I have always loved academia. What started with a BS degree in Elementary Education has evolved over the past thirty years to a doctoral dissertation that I am extremely proud of. Thirty years after getting my first college undergraduate degree, I have been a teacher, a principal, and an elementary supervisor at the district level. I have earned a Masters in School Administration, a Specialist in Education (Ed.S.) degree in Educational Leadership, and now an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership. Every stop along the way to this destination has been a delightful and inspiring learning experience. My parents instilled in me a love for education, a passion that I hope I never lose. I give grateful thanks to my Heavenly Father for giving me the strength, patience, and intelligence to pursue this dream. Without the pushing and prodding and encouragement of my husband this would have never been completed. When I wanted to give up, he made me continue. When I wanted to sit back and relax, he made me go write. He has always encouraged me in all that I have done and has always been so proud of me. So many friends and family members have supported me that they are too numerous to name.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The challenges of the principalship are many, and the transition from assistant principal to principal is a difficult one. While there is a considerable amount of research about new principals and the challenges of the principalship, there is relatively little literature that has been focused on the assistant principalship and how to best prepare those professionals for their entrance into the world of the principalship.

The role of the assistant principal is one that is not well understood or researched. As Marshall and Hooley (2006) point out, “the assistant is often ignored and sometimes maligned. The old *Encyclopedia of School Administration and Supervision* published in 1988 in its selection of ‘administrative roles’ does not mention the assistant principal at all” (p. vii). The complexity of the job, the lack of job satisfaction, and the multitude of problems that lack simple answers are contributing factors to this lack of understanding (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). There is a disconnect between the perceived role, the reality of the role, and the desired role. To add to this lack of understanding, assistant principals struggle with an identity crisis. As novice assistant principals, they have just stepped out of the comfortable world of the classroom teacher and into the chaotic world of administration. They no longer fit in the “teacher social circle” and they really don’t fit into the “administrator inner circle.” They are stuck in limbo. They struggle with a lack

of clarity about their job description, a search for job fulfillment, and feelings of isolation and separation (Marshall and Hooley, 2006).

The Association for Career and Technical Education (2008) describes the role of the assistant principal as one that aids the principal in the overall administration of the school. That is a very simple description of a job that typically includes a myriad of tasks such as scheduling classes, handling discipline, ordering textbooks and supplies, coordinating transportation, handling custodial concerns, managing cafeteria issues, dealing with attendance problems, and juggling numerous other tasks that change from day to day and situation to situation. Historically speaking, aiding the principal was the original purpose of the role. Has that purpose really changed over the course of time?

While there is not a significant body of research available on assistant principals, Marshall and Hooley (2006) have provided many insights into the position. These authors truly value the role of the assistant principal. They have provided what amounts to a handbook for anyone aspiring to be an assistant principal whether they seek the job as a stepping stone to a principalship or as a career assistant principal. They examine the role, policy concerns, teacher transition to the job, trends, politics of the job, behaviors, opportunities for improving the position, and changes that have evolved in the position. They acknowledge that very little research existed prior to their book that was entirely devoted to the assistant principalship. They point out that most university programs for educational leadership focus on the principalship and devote little time to examining the assistant principalship. Students leave those programs prepared for the theory and

practice of the principalship, yet most of them become assistant principals as their first administrative position.

The shocking reality of the role of their new job is that they are not usually given the opportunity to practice what they learned at the university. Marshall and Hooley (2006) identify some of the major tasks that assistant principals attend to such as handling conferences with parents and students, handling behavior problems, working on the master schedule, monitoring student attendance, and counseling students informally for their educational program and vocations. There is certainly no shortage of tasks that the assistant principal attends to on a daily basis. With the increased attention on monitoring and improving instructional delivery, assistant principals are charged with assisting the principals with classroom walk-throughs and formal observations as well.

It is interesting to note how the role has changed or not over time. Marshall and Hooley (2006) examine the 1988 survey by Pellicer that prioritizes the assistant principal's tasks as student discipline, teacher evaluation, and student attendance.

Marshall and Hooley (2006) also cite a study from 2004 that surveyed 1,230 Texas secondary assistant principals who reported their tasks in order from most frequent (see Table 1). If these are the tasks that assistant principals are engaging in, are they prepared for the tasks and responsibilities of the principalship? Some of the challenges of the principalship that assistant principals must be prepared to face are discussed in this chapter.

Table 1***Secondary Assistant Principal Tasks in Rank Order***

| Rank Order | Tasks |
|-------------------|------------------------------|
| 1 | Discipline |
| 2 | Campus building/safety |
| 3 | Student activities |
| 4 | Building maintenance |
| 5 | Teacher evaluations |
| 6 | Attend ARD 504 meetings |
| 7 | Textbooks |
| 8 | Duty schedule |
| 9 | Tutorial programs |
| 10 | New teachers/mentor programs |
| 11 | Assessment data |
| 12 | Staff development |
| 13 | Supervise departments |
| 14 | Community activities |
| 15 | Attendance |
| 16 | Graduation |
| 17 | Campus decision-making team |
| 18 | Lockers |
| 19 | Master schedule |
| 20 | Curriculum development |
| 21 | Transportation |
| 22 | Keys |
| 23 | Parking |

Time Constraints of the Principalship

Do the duties assigned to the assistant principal prepare them to handle the time constraints they will face as principals? Time has historically been a major challenge for the principal. Multi-tasking is a way of life for most principals. Time-and-motion studies give us a picture of a typical principal skipping from one task to another throughout the day, reacting to requests from others, and spending somewhere between two-thirds to four-fifths of their time talking and listening to stakeholders in their community, according to Cuban (1988). Furthermore, self-reports since the 1920s reveal that principals feel guilt over spending far too much time on non-instructional tasks and that they would prefer to spend more time on supervision and other instructional tasks (Cuban, 1988). There is little doubt that the twenty-first century principal echoes this frustration. They have a clear vision and mission. They know that their instructional leadership is critical to teacher and student success; however, the day-to-day multi-tasked nature of the job tears them away from this priority far too often. “Managerial tasks consumed most of a principal’s time; instructional supervision was clearly secondary in proportion of time spent on it; some portion of the principal’s time was devoted to cultivating community relations and other activities” (Cuban, 1988, p. 60). This tension between time spent managing and time spent on instructional supervision has served over the years to increase the stress and frustration that many principals feel.

The principalship is typically equated with a very long work week. Long hours are a constant challenge for the principal, as many of them work anywhere from 54 to 80

hours a week. They seek to find balance, but typically find it very difficult. Principals often talk about “having too much on their plates.”

So, if assistant principals are engaged in the tasks aforementioned in the introduction, are they really going to be prepared for the stressors of time constraints, multitasking, and long work weeks? The obvious answer would be that they will not be adequately prepared for this challenge, but the ultimate question is “How can they be prepared to meet this challenge?”

Shared Leadership and Empowering Leaders: The Principal Purpose

Time constraints are just one reason that principals must become empowering leaders. The numerous duties and tasks that fall under a principal’s responsibilities seem to grow which further supports the need for shared leadership. “As long as improvement is dependent on a single person or a few people or outside directions and forces, it will fail” (Lambert, 1998, p. 3). True leadership lies within the school and not solely in the principal, and the school leader must build leadership capacity in order to maintain momentum and achieve self-renewal. The infrastructure that supports leadership that is internal and sustainable should ensure that a school continues to run efficiently and effectively in the short-term absence of the principal or in the transition from one principal to another.

Leadership capacity does not just happen. Leadership capacity in a school must be deliberate and entrenched in the whole school community. There must be a shared purpose and shared responsibility. True leadership involves learning together and constructing knowledge collaboratively. There must be ongoing conversations and

members must collaborate to generate ideas. This is not just about School-Based Leadership Teams. It is about whole school leadership capacity building. The relationship piece has to be solidly in place, and it must provide long-term support.

In this model everyone has the right to work as a leader. There is a democracy in place that defines the rights of all to participate in the process. This is both a shared endeavor and a collective endeavor. Power and authority must be shared and redistributed. “Shared learning, purpose, action, and responsibility demand the realignment of power and authority” (Lambert, 1998, p. 9).

Student achievement is always at the forefront of education. How does the development of a professional learning community that is empowered affect this? “Newmann and Wehlage in their 1995 work, *Successful School Restructuring*, noted that schools with strong professional learning communities were better able to offer authentic pedagogy and were more effective in promoting student achievement” (Lambert, 1998, p. 11). These are schools where shared sense of purpose, collaborative work, participatory decision making, and joint responsibility are the outcomes of the work of the professional learning community (Lambert, 1998). There is a high focus on both student and adult learning.

There are several steps that Lambert (1998) says the principal must take in order to build leadership capacity. They are:

- Hire personnel with the capacity to do leadership work. The selection interview must be geared in that direction.
- Get to know one another. Assertive information sharing can disarm the rumor mill (The rumor mill can ruin this work.).

- Assess staff and school capacity for leadership through observation, reflection, modeling, guided practice, collaborative work, and training.
- Develop a culture of inquiry. Reflection, inquiry, dialogue, and action must be integrated into the daily life at school.
- Organize the school community for leadership work. Collaboration is the key!!
- Implement plans for building leadership capacity.
- Develop district policies and practices that support leadership capacity building.

Finally, the relationship piece is key in building leadership capacity.

“Relationships with school have two correlates: high engagement and low bureaucratization” (Lambert, 1998, p. 87). Starratt (2003) says it best,

Some schools clearly promote a feeling of family and celebrate friendship, loyalty, and service. Laughter in the halls, frequent greetings of each other by name, symbols of congratulations for successful projects, frequent displays of student work, hallways containing pictures of groups of youngsters engaged in school activities and cartoons poling fun at teachers and administrators—these are all signs of a school environment that values people for who they are. (p. 145)

How can assistant principals be prepared to empower others? What are the supports they need to learn this skill set?

Principalship Leadership and Management Skills: The Perfect Balance?

There must exist a balance somewhere between both the managerial and the instructional realms of the principalship. Cuban (1988) says, “For those principals who imagine a direction for their schools, who wish to accomplish certain aims with students beyond those mandated by the district, the managerial and instructional roles intersect” (p. 75). Fullan (2001) reminds us that leadership and management are not separate. They should overlap, and a good leader needs both. In the midst of a crisis we often look to

leadership that has answers, decisions, strength, simple solutions to hard problems, and a map of the future. Instead, we should be looking for leadership that challenges us to face the problems for which there are no simple solutions, problems that require us to learn in new ways. We should think of leadership as organizing people to tackle problems. This brings us full circle back to the need for empowerment. This also brings us back to examining assistant principal preparation for the principalship. How can assistant principals best be prepared to balance instructional leadership and managerial leadership?

Starratt (2003) brings forth concepts of the ethics of critique, justice, and care (see Figure 1). It really comes down to caring and nurturing that close relationship building in the school community with all stakeholders.



Figure 1. *Balancing School Culture*

Principals do have to confront the moral issues involved when schools disproportionately benefit some groups in society and fail others. This ethic of critique calls principals to embrace social responsibilities to individuals, to the profession, and to society. After all, schools were established to prepare children to take their rightful place in the community. Educators talk about the need to prepare students who are prepared to meet the challenges of a global society all the time. The ethic of justice encompasses the individual's choice to act justly and the community's choice to govern its actions justly. It is a challenge for principals to balance all of these ethics to create a positive school culture.

Political Frame and Moral Purpose

Another challenge that principals face is how to maneuver their way through political waters. Principals have historically been involved at varying degrees in “community or public relations.” They spend time organizing parent meetings, speaking at civic and business meetings, meeting with community leaders and citizens, and engaging in other acts that are clearly political as they seek support for their school community. The political powers and the strategies principals use as they navigate political waters affect whether a policy is implemented with fidelity in their school, changed to meet the unique needs of their school, or completely abandoned. Keen interpersonal skills and strong core values are “must haves” for the political arena.

In his book, *Change Forces with a Vengeance*, Fullan talks about moral purpose. Fullan (2003) states, “The highest form of moral purpose is not altruistic martyrdom but a mixture of selfish and unselfish motives” (p. 17). He goes further to explain that moral purpose is a critical motivator for addressing the task of complex reform. Passion and

higher order purpose are required because the effort that is needed is tremendous and it must be morally worth doing. Fullan (2003) pulls in the concept of empowerment by reminding us that moral purpose will not work if it is left at the individual level. “Moral purpose means acting with the intention of making a positive difference in the lives of employees, customers, and society as a whole” (Fullan, 2001, p. 3). He reminds us that moral purpose without an understanding of change will lead to moral martyrdom, but moral purpose with that understanding will unearth deeper moral purpose still (Fullan, 2001).

Fullan (2003) pulls all of the components of leadership together by focusing on the fact that energetic, enthusiastic hopeful leaders can cause greater moral purpose in themselves, bury themselves in change, build relationships and knowledge naturally, and seek coherence to bring together a greater moral purpose. If a leader is immersed in these qualities they can’t help but be energetic, enthusiastic, and hopeful. They can make people feel that even the most difficult problems can be tackled in a productive manner with positive results. These leaders spread hope and optimism with an attitude of “never give up!” Their confidence is contagious. For these leaders the dimensions of leadership work together in perfect harmony.

The true test is whether the leader can mobilize people to put their energy into action to improve things. The outcomes are what are important though. The outcomes of all of these dimensions of an effective leader are as follows: enhanced student performance, increased capacity of teachers, greater involvement of parents and

community members, engagement of student in their learning, and an all-around pride for all (Fullan, 2003). Cuban (1988) explains,

For principals, political means to sense and transform public expectation (which is another way of saying values) into formal school decisions and authoritative actions in order to achieve both organizational and personal goals. Principals are sandwiched between what state and district policymakers intend, what the superintendent directs, what parents expect, what teachers need, and what students want. (p. 76)

The characteristic of influencing politics involves establishing relationships with all, but especially those one disagrees with. Actually surrounding oneself only with people who agree with them can be a fatal mistake. That is a hard concept to remember. “Respect those you wish to silence” (Heifetz, 1994, p.51). From those with whom we disagree we can learn empathy, responsibility for our limitations, modeling of new behavior and acceptance of casualties (Heifetz, 1994).

Navigating political waters and building relationships with those who disagree with you are skills that are difficult for even the most experienced principal. How can assistant principals be prepared to meet this challenge adequately?

Leading Change

Leading change has been a challenge that principals have historically faced. How can assistant principals best be prepared to be a principal who will lead a school community through change? Of course, Fullan (2001) is probably best known for his theories about change. He states,

All change worth its salt involves anxiety and conflict, and resisting the urge to paper it over is critical. Leaders, in other words, sometimes need to raise the

temperature, and other times, control it. Lowering the temperature when needed might involve stepping back and addressing small problems, temporarily reclaiming responsibility for tough issues, and slowing down the pace and process of challenging norms and expectations. Leaders have to take the temperature of the group constantly. (pp. 102-103)

Fullan's (2001) *Framework for Leadership* lists the five leadership components of moral purpose, coherence making, knowledge creation and sharing, relationship building, and understanding change. Change also involves the principal getting buy-in from the stakeholders. The principal must understand that leading in a culture of change means that they must create that culture. In thinking of change the educational leader must be careful not to set a goal of trying to innovate the most, must recognize the implementation dip, must redefine resistance as a positive force, and must be the champion of reculturing. It is not just any kind of reculturing though. It is one that deepens that moral purpose through collaboration. The key is creating a culture of change and not adopting one innovation after another. This reculturing according to Fullan is a contact sport that involves hard labor-intensive work. He says, "It takes time and indeed never ends. This is why successful leaders need energy, enthusiasm, and hope and why they need moral purpose along with the other four leadership capacities" (Fullan, 2001, p. 44).

Accountability

Accountability is not just another task added to the already formidable list of the principal's responsibilities. It requires new roles and new forms of leadership carried out under careful public scrutiny while simultaneously trying to keep day-to-day management on an even keel. (Lashway, 2000, p. 13)

The accountability challenge for principals was stepped up several notches in 2005 with the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, otherwise known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). This act requires states to:

- Administer annual reading and math assessments for Grades 3-8.
- Administer reading and math assessments once during Grades 10-12.
- Administer assessments to at least 95 percent of each subgroup and students overall.

Bennett and Washington (2002) point out that there is evidence that some principals and teachers feel trapped by the demands of high-stakes testing, which may discourage others from entering the profession at this time of high attrition rates for principals and teachers. Some may feel that the personal and professional price that they would pay if students do not achieve at state mandated rates on standardized tests may not be worth the risk of entering the profession. Principals must overcome such fears and negativity and strive to create a culture in which positive outcomes prevail. They must lead their learning community to embrace the power of data-driven decision-making that can intensely impact students and staff as opposed to being controlled by data-driven standards that only serve to increase stress and negativity. Bennett and Washington (2002) say, “For the school principal, providing the kind of training and support the learning community needs to move from victim to victor mindset is a major challenge.”

This work requires a leader who can combine traditional site management with insightful instructional leadership. This is a challenge for principals, but the importance of such a balanced leadership approach is critical to school success. Principals have met challenges head-on throughout history, and they still do today. The difference is that

today's principal must prioritize among numerous challenges. Accountability, prioritizing, and balancing leadership styles are huge challenges. They are tough challenges for the experienced administrator and bigger challenges for the novice principal who has just left the assistant principalship unless adequate preparation and support have been provided.

Government mandates and increased accountability are ever-present challenges for principals. Unfunded mandates, state testing programs, teacher credentials, and No Child Left Behind requirements are just a few examples of such challenges. Work-related stress is an inevitable outcome of these accountability challenges. Principals worry about whether their school will be designated as low performing, the demands for school improvement, and the ever changing curricular and teaching methods. Accountability takes on a whole new perspective as the world of special education opens up a multitude of challenges from ensuring that Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates are followed to monitoring full inclusion to following Section 504 accommodations to attending Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings, to handling parental concerns and demands for services.

Money

School funding is always a challenge. There never seems to be enough money to do all of the things that a school wants and needs to do. Prioritizing needs, dealing with monetary shortfalls, handling staff concerns about the budget, overseeing fund-raisers, getting stakeholder input, and managing the many accounts within the budget are all critical components of the role of principal/manager.

Lovely (2004) points out that principal salaries have not kept up with the demands of the job. New assistant principals barely make 5 percent more than a senior teacher. National Board Certified teachers may indeed take a pay cut to enter the realms of administration as an assistant principal. There is also little incentive for these teachers to leave the classroom as they work nine months and administrators work eleven or twelve months. What a dichotomy! Teachers who cannot afford to enter into the realms of school administration; assistant principals who make either slightly more than some staff members or less than others; and assistant principals who have little experience in working with school budgets. Is it any wonder that we have assistant principals who are stressed as they enter the realms of the principalship?

Creating a Vision

Creating and carrying out a vision that is shared and embraced by all members of the school community can present quite a challenge for a principal. Starratt (2003) points out in his book, *Centering Educational Leadership*, that having a vision refers to a firm commitment to an ideal. Having such a vision enables a leader to offer both short term responses and to accommodate long terms needs. Sometimes as a leader it is easy to get so caught up in the short term responses that one doesn't stop to reflect on the long term needs that drive the vision in the first place. Starratt states,

This sense of the educational leader's vision suggests that leaders look into the full reality of what stands before them, see it in its complexity, in its human, existential, and moral dimensions, as well as in its educational and organizational dimensions. This sense of vision enables leaders to respond on several levels to the multidimensional quality of situation, to offer short-term responses and accommodate long-term needs. (p. 15)

In his onion model of schools we can see all of the intelligible layers from the operations to the organization to the programs, policies, goals, and beliefs. The key in the onion model though is what is in the core. “In that core lies the meaning and belief where leaders find the foundation for their vision of what the school can be: the greenhouse for cultivating the educated person” (Starratt, 2003, p. 19). The problems begin when a leader functions in a school that really has no articulated vision ... no core. Starratt (2003) says that the power of the vision statement is in capturing the three or four central meanings within the school, and it must run through all of the various layers of the school to really have meaning and impact.

Once the community has established a communal vision, the work has just begun. That is the first step in school improvement planning and creating a School Improvement Plan. That vision must become engrained in all aspects of the organization of the school. This vision must be at the very core of that school community when you configure it as concentric circles, and the community must continually assess the gap between their vision and all of the institutional or bureaucratic processes, structures, policies, and programs that get in the way of it. It is essential that a leader articulate the vision in terms that are clear and vivid. Too often vision statements are flowery, terminology-laden statements that dress up the entryway, staff handbook or parent newsletter but have little practical application to the everyday business of school.

Are assistant principals experienced in creating visions and articulating a vision to all stakeholders? How can they be prepared to meet this challenge? Who will assist them,

what will they need to learn and how will the support be provided are questions that must be examined.

“If Moral Purpose is Job One, Relationships are Job Two”

The power of building relationships is amazing yet challenging. Principals must build relationships at all levels, across levels, and between levels. Building relationships builds trust. Leadership must be distributed and based on trust. Leaders can use vision to build trust. The book *Jesus, CEO* actually has 85 mini-chapters on qualities of Jesus that can be applied to modern day leaders, but basically they all come down to three main areas: strength of relationships, strength of action, and strength of self-mastery. All three are so interrelated and interconnected. Jesus saw the importance of relationships in this role as a leader, and it is no less important to the role of the educational leader.

The ethic of care focuses on relationships. It does not demand relationships of intimacy but rather it implies loyalty, fidelity, and respect for individuality, dignity, and integrity. Principals must understand and utilize the power and importance of relationships. Mutual trust is a must and it must be in place and stay in place until something is done to actually violate that trust. It is all about the culture of the school. The type of culture that is built in a school is so critical. A sense of community and a culture that provides a positive atmosphere for all is critical to the success of that school.

Fullan (2001) stresses, “If moral purpose is job one, relationships are job two, as you can’t get anywhere without them” (p. 51). This whole idea of relationships plays right into the concept of building professional learning communities. Relationship building is a key piece in that development. There is a word of caution from Fullan

(2001) about relationships in that they can be powerfully right or powerfully wrong. Collaborative cultures are dependent on close relationships, but they have to focus on the right things or they will be powerfully wrong. The leader must ensure that the relationships help produce desirable results. Douglas Reeves (2006) cautions us to remember that the relational leader builds on the trust and integrity that are at the very foundation of enduring relationships. Reeves (2006) points out that relationships are the single greatest predictors of employee performance, satisfaction, and turnover.

Principals have to be relationship builders with diverse peoples and groups while they foster meaningful interactions and problem-solving. The hard part is when they must build relationships from those who are different in purpose and theory from them. It is from those relationships, however, that they will grow the most.

Building relationships and establishing trust are two critical challenges of the principalship throughout all of the literature. How then, can assistant principals be prepared to meet these challenges head-on with ultimate success?

Uncharted Waters

There are areas of research regarding the assistant principalship that remain uncharted. Not much attention has been given to the training and selection of assistant principals. Their job satisfaction and their motivation are also topics that are of vital importance, yet are still not well researched. Very few studies have been focused on the ever-changing and demanding functions of the job. Marshall and Hooley (2006) have targeted what might be the most important topic left untouched: "As assistant principals deal with numerous duties during the course of a single day, how do they derive meaning

and purpose from their work” (p. 4)? This is aligned perfectly with this research in examining the supports assistant principals need in order to transition smoothly to a principalship. If these professionals cannot derive meaning and purpose from their work, how can they be prepared to meet the challenge of the principalship with even more duties and responsibilities? Based on my research, my goal was to make recommendations of the supports that need to be put into place to ensure assistant principals’ success as they enter the principalship.

Job descriptions for assistant principals are hard to find, and those that are available are usually inconsistent and not well-defined. This lack of clarity can lead to the lack of job satisfaction and confidence as well as feelings of futility for assistant principals (Marshall and Hooley, 2006). One thing that is so frustrating for assistant principals is that they pick up multiple jobs in the course of any given day. The job contains many gray areas that are ill-defined, inconsistent, and incoherent with regards to responsibilities, roles and resources according to Marshall and Hooley (2006). Boardman (1946) addressed the duties and responsibilities of the assistant principal at the secondary level. This research, over sixty years old, described the job as one relegated to clerical duties and supervision of extracurricular activities based on a study conducted by Charles R. Van Eman in 1926. Actually, it is very interesting that this article speaks to what led to my interest in this topic for my research. Boardman states,

A considerable number of our younger administrators have accepted positions as assistant principals in the belief that this experience would be desirable preparation for the larger office and would be a stepping stone toward that office. If the conditions found by Van Eman still exist it is doubtful whether the assistant principalship furnishes the kind of experience which would be satisfactory

preparation for the principalship. If, however, the assistant principal has larger responsibilities, if he participates in curriculum making, guidance, supervision, and other important responsibilities, it provides an opportunity for desirable experience. (p. 3)

The Research Questions

As an elementary supervisor who supervised principals, I heard many new principals voice their frustration over not being prepared for the overwhelming responsibilities they faced upon being named principal. Many confided that the assistant principalship did not come close to preparing them for the new, overwhelming responsibility of the principalship that was so complex and ambiguous. It was disturbing to see their fatigue and to hear the frustrations that they expressed. It was more than a concern for me; it became a moral and ethical obligation to conduct research that hopefully lead to the development of an effective support system that can be implemented prior to an administrator being named principal that will, as one primary goal, ensure the success of these professionals and ultimately the success of their staff and students.

Three years after I began working on my dissertation, my career path took a different turn. After being a supervisor for principals for three years, my division was collapsed and the district was reorganized. I expressed my interest in the principalship of an elementary school and was thrilled to return to the principalship. I thought that my experiences as a supervisor and my research would make the job so much easier this time around. What I discovered was quite to the contrary. I felt like a first year principal all over again. I had a new community to engage and with whom to build relationships. I had

all of the overwhelming responsibilities and number of demands that I had experienced as a novice principal and that I had helped novice principals deal with. The one role that I have not played for a reasonable amount of time is that of assistant principal. After being hired as an assistant principal upon the completion of my Master's in School Administration degree, I was selected to move to a principalship just one short month later. Coming full circle in my administrative career gave me a deeper passion for this topic and a stronger commitment to seek solutions to the problem.

A major anticipated practical outcome of my research is to recommend elements of an appropriate, adequate, and comprehensive support system for assistant principals, with the ultimate goal being that when they become principals they can be reflective, competent, confident, and collaborative leaders. Clark (2001) gives the best rationale for providing support for novice administrators:

If we really are expecting sustained change in public schools and improve student achievement as the result, then it is imperative that we begin by developing the leadership skills of our building-level administrators in an organized, intentional way. To fail in this endeavor and still expect results is indeed administrative insanity. (p. 3)

The principalship has always been a multi-faceted job with many demands that create a high level of frustration and stress. The twenty-first century principal could probably multiply the frustration and stress many times over compared to the predecessors. The problem that my research addresses is that many assistant principals are entering the principalship unaware of the demands and expectations before them and are thus unprepared to meet the challenges of this critically important job. Often, the

stepping stone to the principalship is the assistant principalship, and failure to provide the necessary support for the assistant principal could be a contributing factor to the declining number of educators entering the ranks of school leadership. New principals are entering the field every year with university preparation that has historically been focused on conceptual and theoretical knowledge about educational leadership and the principalship, but with little hands-on preparation in the actual practice of being the school leader aside from required internships. In the appendix, the school administration program of eleven universities in a Southeastern state have been examined and compared.

The principalship is becoming a more complex job every year. This causes concern that the attrition rate for principals will begin to climb. A news release from the Illinois Board of Education (2000) cited, “Administrator attrition rates are even higher. As with teachers, the administrator attrition rate peaked in 1995 at about 13 percent. Since then the rate has ranged from a low of 3.4 percent in 1997 to the current high rate of 5.3 percent in 2000, an increase of 56 percent. And 80 percent of all administrators are at least 50 years old” (p. 1).

The academic success of children is at stake as the number of educators entering administration shrinks and the number of practicing administrators decreases. Looking at the approaches to providing support for administrators that have been taken in the research, together with my own professional and scholarly interests, leads me to ask the following primary research question:

What are the supports, as perceived by principals, assistant principals, and principal coaches that are needed for assistant principals that will provide a smooth transition to the principalship?

The following are sub-questions related to my research:

- What are the job-related duties of assistant principals and principals, and how do the two positions compare?
- How well do first year or second year principals feel that they were prepared as assistant principals to meet the challenges of their new role? What aspects of their preparation do they believe were helpful? What other preparation experiences do they recommend?
- What are the job-related duties of a principal that an assistant principal would need support with in order to ensure a smooth transition to the principalship?

Rationale for the Research

Over the past several years, the education community has been focused on the need to attract highly qualified educators to serve in school administration roles. One reason this focus has come about is the frightening shortage of qualified administrators that are available to fill current positions in districts all across the nation. Crow and Pounder (2005) state, “These shortages largely exist for specific positions, such as the high school principalship or the district superintendency, or in specific geographic locations, such as remote rural areas or challenging urban communities” (p. 1). Their research led them to conclude that attracting and retaining competent and dedicated school leaders requires a comprehensive network of support that involves school districts, professional associations, principal academies, university educational leadership programs, and other resources. Gross (2004) says that, sadly, most districts have not provided concentrated programs to help new principals with the same intensity that they have used in supporting new teachers. He explains that the isolation of the position and demands of the job make the need for this level of support crucial and adds that “Any

strategy that will help new leaders find their way and become grounded is important to consider” (p. 13).

Most of the research I read was focused on support for new principals. There was limited research that has been dedicated to examining the support for an assistant principal that would ultimately decrease the frustration and feelings of being overwhelmed that permeate the research about new principals. The research that I found that was focused on a variety of support systems that have been utilized for new principals could also be very beneficial for assistant principals. The focus of my research was on support for assistant principals to prepare them for that first few years as a principal. There was a void in the research in this area of study. The phenomenon of frustration, isolation, and lack of preparations that has plagued novice school leaders for so long still exists today despite years of research and many recommended supports for them during their first few turbulent years as a principal.

My hope was that my research would lead to the development of a comprehensive approach of providing support to assistant principals that would reduce the support needed in their subsequent role as principals and ultimately ensure their success. My purpose was to contribute to the field of educational leadership through examining possible types of support for assistant principals. It was also to provide research that could help school districts better define the role of assistant principals, develop a support program for them, and form partnerships with local universities that would provide necessary support and professional growth opportunities.

This study has thoroughly investigated the role of the assistant principal and the experiences, mentorships, professional development, and other support systems they might need to enable them to make a smooth, successful transition to a principalship. Why is it that after the on-the-job training they receive as assistant principals for the principal's position, they still are ill-prepared to assume this role? Lovely (2004) states, "An excellent assistant principal does not always make the best principal. Without depth and complexity in his experience, an assistant principal may be able to manage a school but will struggle to lead it" (p. 49). This perspective was at the heart of my desire to conduct this research. The relevance of this topic is indeed one of local, state, and national magnitude. The federal mandates in the *No Child Left Behind (2002)* legislation in addition to state and local policies and expectations add to the complexity and stress of all administrators, particularly the novice principal who has so much to learn. The impact that the role of the principalship has on the lives of our most precious resource, our children, is too important to be left to chance. The time has come for school systems to take a serious look at how they are supporting their assistant principals as they groom them to assume the principalship.

Summary

In this first chapter, I have described my dissertation topic relevant to the types of support an assistant principal would need to ensure a smooth transition to the principalship. I have also shared why this research is so important to me on a personal and professional level, but beyond that, why it is important to our most important natural resource, our children. Whitney Houston sang these lyrics, "I believe the children are our

future. Teach them well and let them lead the way” (Inside Image Creative Studio). I too believe that the children are our future and in order to teach them well and to produce future leaders, we must have strong school leadership that starts at the top. It takes a strong leader to build strong leadership capacity in all stakeholders.

In Chapter II, I share the research that I found related to my dissertation. Through examination of the research that already exists I hoped to gain insights that would help me discover solutions and deepen my understanding of related topics. In Chapter III, I describe my methodology and why I felt it was the best format for gathering my data. I introduce my participants and how I selected this diverse group that made my data so rich. In Chapter IV, I present my findings gathered from hours of interviews. Through careful examination of the data that I gathered, I was able to identify common themes that ran through the interviews. Individual stories and perceptions came together and provided me with the cohesiveness and themes that I had hoped for. Their unique individuality and leadership experiences blended into a rich data analysis that is intriguing. In Chapter V, I bring all of the first four chapters together to offer some thoughts and recommendations based on the research that will hopefully lay a foundation of support for assistant principals that will impact the enormity of the leader at helm of the principalship. The participants are adults, the research is about adults, and the literature reviewed is about adults, but the people most impacted are the children.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

As I began my search for research that had already been conducted that was related to my topic, I soon discovered that I had chosen the right group of administrators to study, the hidden leader: the assistant principal. There was so much research available related to novice principals. There were many books, articles, blogs, websites, and other data sources available about how difficult the first year or two as a principal can be and how to provide support for these administrators. What I couldn't find though was the same literature about assistant principals. The majority of the research that I could find about assistant principals was about their role.

It became clear to me that I needed to read all of the literature that I could find in an attempt to build connections between the existing new principal support literature and the assistant principal roles and responsibilities literature. So that is what I am sharing in this chapter, a diverse and eclectic blend of literature that lays the foundation for the need for my research topic.

Nature of the Principal's Work: What Assistant Principals Must Prepare For

Cuban (1988) describes how the role of the principalship has transformed over time. The early principals were a combination of classroom teacher and administrator. Principal-teachers taught three-quarters to fulltime and received more money to

compensate them for the managerial tasks they performed. It was not until the 1920s that the principal was seen as a professional who did not teach. It was then that the expectations increased. They were expected by their superiors to complete reports, look after the school building, build relationships with adults and students, manage curriculum and supervise instruction. The principal was beginning to be viewed as an instructional leader. It was also in the 1920s that the Department of Elementary School Principals and the Department of Secondary School Principals were established within the National Educational Association. This was formal recognition of the position by a national body of professional educators.

Davis, Darling-Hammond, and Meyerson (2005) have clarified the multi-faced job of the principalship as they state,

More than ever, in today's climate of heightened expectations, principals are in the hot seat to improve teaching and learning. They need to be educational visionaries, instructional and curriculum leaders, assessment experts, disciplinarians, community builders, public relations experts, budget analysts, facility managers, special programs administrators, and expert overseers of legal, contractual, and policy mandates and initiatives. They are expected to broker the often-conflicting interests of parents, teachers, students, district office officials, unions, and state and federal agencies, and they need to be sensitive to the widening range of student needs. (p. 5)

This passage could be used to write a job description for a principal. The diversity and breadth of the many roles of a principal is astonishing.

Bugbee (2006) addresses how the principal's role has evolved to the highly political position it is today. The pressures from the community, the state and federal government, the superintendent, staff, parents, and teachers' unions require principals to

be involved in many activities and to keep up-to-date about current issues affecting schools. The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (U.S. Department of Education, 2008) has added an increased accountability for principals to ensure that their schools meet Adequate Yearly Progress and high student growth. Added to all of the stressors is the endless receipt of emails and phone calls that demand immediate attention on a daily basis. What can result is a high level of anxiety, loss of sleep, and a feeling of frustration and powerlessness. DeLeon (2006) addresses the importance of the principal and the troubling metaphors that have been used to describe them such as “deer caught in the headlights,” “in the hot seat,” “in a vise,” “in the eye of a storm.” She points out that one cause for this is the educational reform movement of the past two decades that has moved American education to such high accountability and heightened expectations with such serious penalties for schools that fail to perform.

DeLeon (2006) goes on to say that principals are expected to be visionaries, instructional leaders, assessment experts, disciplinarians, community builders, public relation experts, communication experts, budget analysts, facility managers, special program administrators, and guardians of legal and policy mandates as well as guardians of various legal, contractual, and policy mandates and initiatives. Add to all of this the expectation that they meet the needs of all stakeholders, including parents, students, and staff. It is no wonder that assistant principals enter the principalship and experience feelings of frustration and being overwhelmed as they are called to deal with situations that require knowledge and skills that they simply do not have yet. The responsibilities

are staggering, the accountability is high, and the preparation they have received is often insufficient.

Principals today are called upon to be instructional leaders as their first order of business. They must balance this accountability with the day-to-day managerial demands and with relationship building with community, parents, student, and staff that are so critical. In this age of accountability, all building level administrators need to be instructional leaders and to be actively involved in monitoring and supporting quality instruction for their students. Duval and Wise (2004) tell us,

With No Child Left Behind and other requirements for accountability within the public education system, school principals at all levels, now more than ever, must step into classrooms and provide support, guidance and feedback necessary to ensure quality teaching and enhanced student achievement. Members of the administrative team at every school must become instructional leaders and create systems that promote and monitor student progress. (p. 23)

The multitude of responsibilities, the high-stakes accountability of federal legislation, and the multiple tasks that a principal must complete on a daily basis all add up to a recipe for stress, frustration, and anxiety. Fullan (2003) reminds us that the 1990s was a difficult decade for the principalship. This was a time when expectations for school were ever increasing, policies were becoming vaguer, implementation strategies were deemphasized, and leadership training and development was almost nonexistent. The end result of this turbulent decade for administrators was the beginning of the exodus of principals through either normal or early retirement. The principalship that had always held an esteemed position had become an unattractive career. To this end, Fullan (1997) made the following observation:

Despite all the attention on the principal's leadership role in the 1980s, we appear to be losing ground, if we take as our measure of progress the declining presence of increasingly large numbers of highly effective, satisfied principals. (p. 1)

This whole issue is compounded if these principals lose track of their moral compass.

Principals must remind themselves often of why they became an educator, what they stand for as a leader, and the legacy they wish to leave behind (Livsey, 1999).

All of this research about the role of the principal relates back to two of my sub-questions related to my research:

- What are the job-related duties of assistant principals and principals, and how do the two positions compare?
- What are the job-related duties of a principal that an assistant principal would need support with in order to ensure a smooth transition to the principalship?

The question looms, “Given the enormous number of duties and tasks that principals attend to on a daily basis, how can assistant principals best be prepared to meet the challenges of the job and ensure that they meet with less stress and feelings of frustration?”

School Leaders as Instructional Leaders: A Partnership

The whirlwind of tasks that a principal has to perform combined with the expectation that s/he is the instructional leader of the school has created many challenges for the principalship. Cuban (1988) takes us back in history to 1841 when the Cincinnati public schools implemented an early release schedule on Wednesdays for principals to use to plan, organize, and implement programs in their schools. This was an early step toward viewing the principal as an instructional leader. A body of research findings on

effective elementary schools that serve large numbers of children of poverty and minority children has researchers declaring that the principals who set goals, communicate those goals to their community, supervise curriculum and instruction, frequently evaluate teachers' performance, and establish both academic and behavioral expectations for students and teachers that are above the standard, are true instructional leaders. Lambert (1998) points out that student learning is the content of leadership. Over the past few years we have read and heard more and more about the principal as the "instructional leader." Fullan (2003) states that this is just too narrow a concept to carry the weight of the kinds of reforms we need for the future. Instead he calls for leaders who can create transformations in the learning cultures of schools and the teaching profession.

The idea that principals should serve as instructional leaders, not just as educational managers, is a common standard among educators. In practice, though, few principals act as authentic instructional leaders. Their days are filled with the activities of management: scheduling, reporting, handling relations with parents and the community, and dealing with the multiple crises and special situations that are inevitable in schools. Most principals spend relatively little time in classrooms and even less time analyzing instruction and giving feedback to teachers that will improve their instruction. They may arrange time for teachers' meetings and professional development, but they rarely get the opportunity provide intellectual leadership for growth in teaching skills. It sounds great that the principal should be the instructional leader in the school, but the reality is that they are overwhelmed with all of the demands of the job and do not really get into the depth of instructional leadership that is required for it to affect student achievement.

Current definitions of instructional leadership are more in-depth and much deeper in context than those of the 1980s. Originally, the role involved traditional tasks such as setting clear goals, allocating resources to instruction, managing the curriculum, monitoring lesson plans, and evaluating teachers. Today it includes much deeper involvement in teaching and learning, more advanced views of professional development, and more emphasis on the use of data to make decisions that drive instructional delivery. Attention has shifted from teaching to learning, and some now prefer using the term ‘learning leader’ over ‘instructional leader’ (Fink & Resnick, 2001). In this day of high stakes accountability, the principal is called upon to make instructional leadership the top priority. The principal alone cannot lead the charge in the role of instructional leader alone. The assistant principal must be a partner in the role of instructional leadership. Fink and Resnick (2001) write:

Time on the job as an assistant principal or a principal deepens the gulf (between administrative competencies and instructional ones). Principals’ time is filled by the many demands on them for administrative functions. Like most people, they also tend to gravitate toward doing what they know how to do. Unsure what to look at or how to intervene when they visit classrooms, principal tend to visit rarely, perhaps only to make required formal evaluations. With their knowledge of teaching growing outdated, they delegate questions of instruction and professional development to others. (p. 3)

Good (2008) examines what assistant principals can do to develop their instructional leadership skills to become more effective administrators. Preparing for this role prior to being named a principal can only serve to build a principal’s efficacy in addition to building leadership capacity within the school. The first thing the assistant principal must do is let the principal know that s/he desires to build their instructional

leadership skills and take an more active role in curriculum and instructional leadership. In addition to making known their desire be a part of the instructional leadership in the school, they must also express their desire to move beyond the traditional role of the assistant principal of dealing with bus discipline, school discipline, and textbook management. The administrators should discuss together the barriers that are keeping the assistant principal from getting into the classrooms to monitor instruction, provide feedback to teachers and develop a plan to provide support in reaching this goal.

The assistant principal must be proactive as well. Setting a goal for the number of classrooms that can be visited in a week; becoming more literate about current trends in education and best instructional practices; becoming involved in a study group that reads books and articles together; selecting a best practice to monitor, support, and implement; attending professional learning community and team meetings with teachers; becoming a trained facilitator and leading staff training; teaching a class; attending professional development with the teachers; securing a mentor who is a role model in instructional leadership; and staying internally focused and disciplined are all excellent ways to build instructional leadership capacity (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Being an instructional leader doesn't happen by chance. It must be deliberate and planned.

Although little research has been devoted to the role of the assistant principal as the instructional leader, Marshall and Hooley (2006) offer some questions to consider in this area:

- How does the assistant principalship function in facilitating instructional leadership?

- Is it possible and/or wise for the assistant to exercise leadership in the instructional program?
- If so, under what conditions does this happen and with what results?
- Does being an assistant principal help or hinder a person in learning effective instructional leadership behavior?
- Does an assistant principal forget the orientation to instruction and to teacher needs while serving in that position?
- What instructional background has prepared the assistant principal to evaluate instruction and to lead curriculum change?
- How useful is experience in physical education or music instruction to an assistant principal who is offering feedback on a classroom lesson in calculus or French III?

Instructional leadership takes an extraordinary amount of time. Utilizing the assistant principal as partner in this process serves a dual purpose of monitoring instruction with feedback given to teachers and of preparing the assistant principal for the work of the principalship.

Nature of the Assistant Principal's Work

The work of the traditional assistant principal differs quite a bit from the work of the principal. Crow and Pounder (2005) remind us that the assistant principalship used to serve as an apprenticeship model for the aspiring principal that provided preparation for the responsibilities, pace, and scope of this awesome job. Over time that has changed. In order to transform the assistant principalship to a comprehensive training ground for

aspiring principals, schools must focus on shared leadership and redesigning the role of the assistant principal. According to Crow and Pounder (2005) this shared leadership model means that the assistant principal's role expands to one that includes instructional monitoring, supervision, accountability, community relationships, resource allocation, and other administrative responsibilities.

For many years, the perception has existed that the traditional model of an assistant principal was one of the administrator who handled bus concerns, dealt with the majority of discipline problems, and took care of the textbook ordering and inventory. That model no longer meets the needs of our schools, but it is important to realize that the model still exists in some schools and districts. In this age of accountability, all building level administrators need to be instructional leaders and to be actively involved in monitoring and supporting quality instruction for their students. Good (2008) poses the question of how assistant principals, who are already filling their days with bus discipline, schoolwide discipline, and textbooks, are going to find the time to become better instructional leaders.

Preparing School Leaders at the University

Examining the critical role of the university in preparing principal candidates is an integral part of this research. On the one hand, university classroom and lecture-type instruction can provide theory, foundational training, and basic leadership and administrative skill development; however, these foundational skills may not be sufficient to determine an educational leader's success or failure. Fleck (2008) takes a look at the university's role in preparing assistant principals for the principalship. She

points out that universities only have a limited amount of time to prepare one for the master's degree in school administration. The university programs tend to focus more on the theory but provide few opportunities for immediate practical application. The university degree should not be the end of leadership training. It should be the beginning of a journey of continued growth and reflection that could best be facilitated through the mentoring model.

Fleck (2008) poses the question of how the university can marry the theory and practical knowledge. She proposes full year internships at the university level as well as field experiences that are rich in scope and depth. These experiences should extend well beyond the boundaries of their own school. She charges universities to sufficiently fund principal preparation programs; provide a mix of theoretical and practical experiences; include relevant and authentic projects as part of coursework; provide field experience that expose future principals to more responsibilities gradually; encourage involvement from veteran principals and school districts; encourage interns to attend networking opportunities at the district, state, or national level; ensure that students are exposed to a variety of practicing principals; and maintain high program expectations (Fleck, 2008).

New ground has been broken in the area of preparation for educational leaders. For the first time, in August 2010, Harvard University offered a new, tuition-free Doctor of Education Leadership Program (Schmidt, 2009). The classes are being taught by faculty from the Harvard Graduate School of Education, the Harvard Business School, and the Harvard Kennedy School. This unprecedented program's intent is to prepare leader equipped to transform the American education system to ensure that all student

succeed in the twenty-first century world. This will be a three year program that will enroll twenty-five students per year. Harvard President Drew Faust said, “I am delighted that professors from three outstanding professional schools are combining their knowledge and experience to create this groundbreaking program” (Harvard, 2009). Funded by a ten million dollar grant from The Wallace Foundation, this will be the first new degree offered at Harvard in seventy-four years. The degree is based on practical application and designed to develop in the students a deeper understanding of teaching and learning as well as management and leadership skills that are necessary to reshape American education. The program will combine curriculum classes, modules, and practice-based experiences for the first two years of the program. In the last year, the students will work a full year residency in a partner education organization that is pursuing transformations change enabling the candidates to receive hands-on training and complete a capstone project that will complete the degree requirements. Harvard Graduate School of Education Dean, Kathleen McCartney said of the program,

We believe this new degree program will be a catalyst to drive that change. It will allow us to meet our goal of producing a new generation of education leaders, who will have a laser-like focus on student learning and will know how to translate that into large-scale system change. They will be successful by altering education policy debates, forging powerful public-private partnerships, and restoring public confidence in our schools. (Harvard, 2009)

The uniqueness and success of this new program in combining learning and instruction with management and leadership and with policy and politics awaits us.

In examining some graduate programs in school administration, it is clear that each university is committed to preparing their students for “school leadership” and the

term principal is used frequently in course titles, but is there an intentional focus on the assistant principalship? How can universities bridge that gap? This will be discussed further in Chapter IV as interviewees give their perspectives relevant to their experiences.

Mentoring and Coaching School Administrators

Mentoring is one method that is often utilized to provide support to a novice practitioner. A mentor is defined in Merriam-Webster dictionary as “a trusted counselor or guide” (Merriam-Webster). Dictionary.com defines one “a wise and trusted teacher and counselor or an influential senior supporter.” Bugbee (2006) speaks to the topic of mentorships as a gift. She reminds us that our forefathers introduced the whole mentor process through the apprenticeships they established. It remains an effective method to prepare someone for a new occupation. The experienced insight and guidance a mentor can provide in concert with being a safe sounding board provides the mentee with many layers of support. Mentoring that is established as an organizational system supported by administration has been shown to yield great success. It must be structured and the progress routinely monitored.

When does a principal find time to be reflective and work with a mentor? Hall (2008) states that one of the biggest obstacles to effective mentoring is finding quality time to talk, banter, share ideas, ask questions, and grow together. He has conducted interviews that indicate that 70% of his respondents cited “time” as their major impediment to a quality mentoring program. He advocates for regular, frequent meeting times. The mentor and mentee must carve out significant blocks of time for the process to be beneficial. It has to be a priority, and it must be done purposefully. The mentor could

be from the same district as the assistant principal or from another district. There is one school of thought that suggests that having a mentor who has knowledge of the assistant principal's district is of great benefit.

Another school of thought suggests that the mentor might feel safer talking to someone who is not from the district. Just as new principals need a support system that will provide feedback, continual encouragement, and opportunities for reflective practice, assistant principals would benefit from the same level of support. Schmidt (2002) contends that without a mentor both the novice and the not-so-novice administrators stumble around and make unnecessary mistakes, feel inadequate, and ultimately suffer.

Brown (2005) provides statistics from a study called the *2003 Public Agenda* that suggests that 52% of principals felt that the mentoring they received from colleagues was the most valuable preparation they received. Brown's (2005) research is based on his work with the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP). They partnered with Nova Southeastern University in 2002 to develop a program to train retired principals to be effective mentors for new administrators. One of the advantages pointed out from this study is that the mentor experiences growth along with the new principal. Bugbee (2006) also indicates in her research that the mentors found themselves crossing back and forth from leader to learner. Through asking probing questions and reading more books about leadership they indicated that they became more reflective themselves. The mentors from the NAESP program stated that they had refined their listening and questioning skills substantially through their involvement with the program. This program involved a three-day seminar and required readings related to mentoring in

addition to a nine-month internship that provided in-depth practice in mentoring. These trainees were provided coaches for their small group that required monthly online chats and reflection papers. Participants were required to submit a final project that summarized their mentoring experiences. The goal was to produce “master mentors.” The training that the mentors go through must clearly define roles and responsibilities. Poorly trained mentors can do more harm than good.

Hall (2008) recommends benchmarking of goals in the mentoring process. The goals must be created and refined together and they must be laid out in an action-plan format. Brown (2005) says that the most important thing the mentor can pass on to the mentee is the gift of self-reflection. He suggests the mentor help the mentee refine this practice through asking probing questions, providing honest feedback, listening, analyzing decisions, proposing alternative viewpoints, encouraging independence, fostering lifelong learning and offering caring support. The mentor must understand that their role is not to run the school but to guide the mentee to make decisions. They are to support the learning not to give directives. People learn from their mistakes.

One support for assistant principals is grounded in the professional responsibility that their supervising principal has to groom them for the principalship. It is clearly not enough for the aspiring principal to simply work alongside and shadow the principal. This support must have a more intentional approach. Johnson-Taylor and Martin (2007) interviewed principals who have served in this role of grooming future principals to glean strategies they have found effective. These principals have stated that it starts with the initial interview. They say that they ask applicants right up front what their career goals

are. They then give feedback and support toward acquisition of these goals. They also stated that they only hire assistant principals who have a solid background in instruction. They look for candidates who can analyze data, determine the effectiveness of programs, monitor classroom instruction, and collaborate with teachers to assist them in making decisions about their instruction. One principal shared, “While the most important aspect of running a school is being an instructional leader, I also make sure my assistant principal knows how to handle the budget, how to deal with parents and the media, and how to reset the burglar alarm on the school when it goes off by accident” (Johnson-Taylor & Martin, 2007).

Johnson-Taylor and Martin’s (2007) research stresses that aspiring principals need to know everything, including how decisions are made from the principal’s desk. These principals also spoke to knowing when it was time to “get out of the way.” At some point, the assistant principal has to fly alone and take the lead in order to build skills and confidence. It also allows the assistant principal to experience the stress of being the one who is accountable and how to prioritize their time. These principals stressed how important it is to have the difficult conversations with their mentees. Tough issues and problems have to be discussed with honesty and integrity. Discussions also have to move beyond the surface level and push their thinking to another level. Encouraging them to attend professional conferences, read quality literature in education, and participate in district meetings are also ways these principals supported their assistant principals. There are three general themes that are evident in the support these principals give in grooming aspiring principals: providing opportunities to see all aspects of how to

run a school, giving feedback that makes a difference, and suggesting professional development that fosters growth. By far, the most important thing though that these principals did was to be effective role models. They must walk the talk and lead by example as they mold and shape future leaders.

What is the difference between a mentor and a coach? Merriam-Webster defines a coach as a “tutor” (Merriam-Webster). A coach teaches their coachee through the use of a prescribed coaching model that needs to incorporate lots of reflection. Bloom, Danilovich, and Fogle (2005) address the importance of coaching for beginning administrators. They stress the impact that a trusting relationship with an effective coach offers with a level of personalization and relevance that is not created anywhere else. The training that is provided for the coaches is critical. Blended coaching is a model that prepares coaches to use instructional strategies to teach principals the practical skills needed in addition to using facilitative strategies to help them learn how to manage complex problems and concerns. Coaches who have been through an intense training program and who have used this training to work with beginning principals have reported positive growth for themselves as well. As they practice active listening and the art of asking reflective questions they are able to grow professionally.

Clark (2001) details the frustration of a first year assistant principal through her interviews with him. His frustration was expressed as he confided to her, “I want to do a good job, but I don’t know what to do. They don’t teach you what to do in school. I never knew it would be like this” (Clark, 2001, p. 3). Clark’s (2001) solution was to find someone to coach new administrators such as this overwhelmed first-year

administrator. Since most principals are also overworked and stressed, she suggests that superintendents hire other seasoned administrators who are looking for a change and a challenge to serve as coaches for struggling principals and assistant principals. They would be available daily to teach, mentor, and advise.

The impact of mentorships is well-researched. It stands to reason that the logical mentor for an assistant principal would be the principal at the same site. In fact, Calabrese and Tucker-Ladd (1991) state it that the principal has a strong responsibility to serve as a mentor. Inasmuch as the assistant principalship is often a stepping stone to a principalship, it is a worthwhile and meaningful investment for school systems to utilize the principal as mentor for these professionals. It should be both a professional and a personal commitment on behalf of a principal to facilitate the growth of another human being and to ensure the welfare of their school and the educational professional through a strong mentorship relationship. Some principals are just natural mentors and assume the role without even knowing it.

Effective principals choose to model the behaviors and responsibilities for their assistant principals that will enable them to achieve maximum growth opportunities with confidence and motivation. Modeling is a powerful tool in building leadership capacity. The mentor should model professional values that exemplify the highest standards of professionalism, ethics, care, and commitment. Shindel (2004) relays her own experiences as an assistant principal and how the modeling provided by her principal mentor was extremely effective. She was encouraged to shadow her principal to watch how she handled things like pace, techniques, and interactions with students. This

principal also modeled for Shindel how to interaction with constituents such as community members, politicians, businesspeople, clergy, and parents.

Utilizing a collaborative approach the principal also modeled with her how to write a letter, plan an assembly, observe teachers and write observations. “It is important to demonstrate ways to defuse conflict, seek compromise, admit failure, and accept success” (Calabrese & Tucker-Ladd, 1991, p. 72). These researchers describe the mentor/mentee relationship as one that provides strong synergistic activity. This description really helps to conceptualize the principal as a mentor and the impact on both the assistant principal in that synergy is all about the combined actions of two individuals that result in a greater impact. It implies an alliance, collaboration, and teamwork that could only serve to strengthen an administrative team. “A strong mentoring relationship exhibits the qualities of initiation, collaboration, inclusiveness, coaching, reciprocation, development, separation, and modeling” (Calabrese & Tucker-Ladd, 1991, p. 68). Such a relationship should serve to build a collaborative school organization, facilitate strong instructional leadership, and assist the aspiring principal’s career development. This relationship that is being described must begin with and maintain a foundation built with trust. By building a trusting relationship the principal is able to create a safe environment in which both administrators can share their reflections and expose their vulnerabilities. The principal must be willing to bring their mentee into their confidence regarding staff evaluations, the political framework within the district, informal networks, and micro-political issues.

The concept of collaboration in the realm of administration is an interesting one. Collaboration implies that everyone in the process has expertise and knowledge to bring to the table. Principals who are mentors must see their mentees as talented colleagues who are being prepared for entry into educational administration and not as a future competitor. Collaboration also implies a relationship that goes beyond modeling and giving advice. It takes the relationship to the next level of co-leadership and teamwork.

The mentor must encourage the assistant principal to share expertise and set processes in place that ensure that the staff regards them as an administrative team. The mentor must facilitate this collaborative process by being willing to share such tasks as working on curriculum, staff evaluations, community relationships, staff development and other areas that have traditionally been viewed as being reserved for the principal. Providing this type of structure is a natural venue for allowing the principal to coach and provide feedback in these areas.

Hix (2003) says that perhaps the most crucial factor in growing assistant principals is to “share the ugly.” He ensures that his mentees are exposed to all phases of the responsibilities of a principal. Sometimes the words mentoring and coaching are used interchangeably. The word coach implies grooming, training, assisting and instructing. The shift to a coaching role requires that the principal maintain a delicate balance between over-coaching which may indicate to the mentee a lack of confidence or trust and under-coaching which may indicate to the mentee a feeling of indifference or lack of commitment.

An important aspect of coaching is reflection. This is often difficult because of both time constraints and lack of formal training in reflective practice on behalf of both participants. The principal can start the process by sharing their own reflective practice. S/he needs to take the time in a situation to describe the choices they were faced with, the ramifications of each possible choice, the possible political implications, and the pros and cons of their decision. Sometimes this involves the principal “thinking out loud” so the assistant principal can actually hear their thought process. There also needs to be a block of time set aside each day for the two administrators to debrief. As they review the major issues that were dealt with during that day, they should choose one situation and do an in-depth analysis and debriefing. Calabrese and Tucker-Ladd (1991) suggest the following questions that could lead to some powerful insights:

- Were there any other alternative?
- What if the situation were altered slightly?
- What was the risk of your decision?
- What were the possible outcomes?

The principal will become a co-learner in this process. Many mentors report that their learning was significantly impacted through the coaching process. They gain from the feedback they receive from their mentee and from the reflective dialogue. Both administrators will move their thinking to a deeper level and grow professionally as they go through self-discovery. Patience and guidance are key words in the coaching process. Through this reciprocal sharing the assistant principal feels valued and the principal is able to exploring their own thinking with a trusted professional colleague. The

principalship is a lonely job, and this constant exchange of ideas and reflection provides a safe environment in which to grow and share leadership challenges together.

Bloom and Krovetz (2001) describe the “Growing Our Own” initiative in Santa Cruz County. This was a mentor/apprentice program sponsored by the New Teacher Center at the University of California Santa Cruz and the Department of Educational Administration at San Jose State University. This was a series of information meetings of principals, assistant principals, and teachers to collaborate about how they could create apprenticeships that prepare people for the principalship. They are quick to point out that often this type of program instills the notion that this is a burden placed on principals. Quite to the contrary, the principals involved in mentoring reflected upon their own practice and as a result, grew in their own leadership skills.

Bloom and Krovetz (2001) propose that the highest calling of exemplary leaders is to build leadership in others, and effective principals realize this. The mentor/apprentice agreement states that this group desires the following shared outcomes:

- The development of future principals through structuring the assistant principalship as an apprenticeship.
- Developing future school leaders who have the skills, attitudes, behaviors and courage to lead and manage public schools in a manner that will maximize the learning of all students.
- Designing the role of the assistant principal in a manner that supports the work of the principal as a site leader.
- Designing the principalship and assistant principalship in a manner that the individual who serve in these positions not only survive, but thrive. (p. 2)

In their interviews with ten principals who are helping their assistant principals prepare for a promotion to the principalship, Johnson-Taylor and Martin (2007)

discovered ten strategies that these principals identified to build principals. First, they ask candidates for the assistant principalship positions about their career goals. They are not seeking to hire career assistant principals. Second, they only hire candidates who are strong in curriculum and instruction as they know that the primary role of the principal that they will groom these administrators for is that of instructional leadership. Third, they get on the same page quickly. They recognize the importance of and set in place structures to ensure that the administrative team presents a united front. Fourth, they involve their assistant principals in all aspects of running a school from the budget to dealing with parents to handling the media to resetting the burglar alarm. Fifth, they know when to “get out of the way” and let the assistant principal take the lead. They have to learn how to jump in and make decisions and run the daily operations as there will be times when the principal is away from the school. This also helps the assistant principal learn how to prioritize and understand the stress of being in charge. Sixth, they have the difficult conversations. Tough issues, problems, and concerns must be discussed openly and honestly in an atmosphere of trust. Seventh, they ask critical thinking questions that get their assistant principals to reflect on their leadership skills. Eighth, they provide meaningful staff development opportunities for their assistant principals. They encourage them to attend professional conferences and to read books that they discuss together. Ninth, they are the advocates for these professionals. They let the superintendent know when their assistant principal is prepared for the principalship. They are the coach, teacher, role model, cheer leader and the marketing agent for their assistant principals.

Calabrese and Tucker-Ladd (1991) summarize the outcome of principals mentoring assistant principals well:

Through the mentoring process a principal demonstrates commitment to people, excellence and cooperation in the profession. In this role the principal acts as teachers, coach, adviser, facilitator, and colleague for the assistant. Most important, the principal models the kinds of behaviors as mentors that the assistant principal will use with other professionals. (p. 74)

Johnson-Taylor and Martin (2007) know that principals must take this challenge seriously. Their role in preparing an assistant principal for the principalship prepared to effectively lead a school is a privilege that enable him or her to leave a lasting mark. Johnson-Taylor and Martin (2007) discuss the role of the mentoring principal in their assistant principals transitioning to a principalship. They propose that the principal become the advocate and marketing manager for their assistant principal. They can invite the superintendent to the school and give the assistant principal a chance to shine as well as share recent evaluations with the superintendent to provide support for promotion. By providing examples of projects the assistant principal has managed and giving the assistant principal credit for instructional progress that he/she has initiated or monitored is crucial. Mentoring assistant principals is the natural, logical, and inspired work of principals.

Professional Development

Lemley (1997) suggests some recommendations with respect to principals' development that makes sense to extend to assistant principal development as well. He points out that as principals have moved from the old pattern of top-down leadership to

creating “communities of leaders,” the professional development that prepares them for this shift must be applicable, practical, and focused. Protocols for shared leadership and management along with site-based management and team decision-making must drive the growth opportunities for all school administrators. As leadership is about change and leading change, it is critical that leaders continue to have their skills refined in this area as they seek to empower others. Principal and assistant principal professional growth plans and goal setting plans must reflect how they build relationships, for without strong relationships, the collaboration, empowerment, and site-based management will exist in theory only.

A valuable professional development that will assist principals and assistant principals move their schools forward will be to create opportunities for them to gather together and talk about their practice. This must be done with intentionality. There is incredible power in storytelling. As school leaders come together to share stories, victories, and challenges, they facilitate their own growth with their colleagues.

Marshall and Hooley (2006) explain the survey in which 42 NASSP (National Association of Secondary School Principals) assistant principal members in 50 states were questioned about opportunities to improve their role. Their suggestions for improving training focused on preparing them for the work they face day-to-day in their roles such as community relations, discipline management, staff evaluation, instructional management, legal issues, handling emergencies, drug education, computer skills, facilities and fiscal management, bus scheduling, fund-raising, and extracurricular

supervision. Number one on their list was discipline management with a special emphasis on positive approaches.

As many assistant principals have experienced staff development that has little relevance to their job-related needs, many turn away from these opportunities. If districts would conduct a needs assessment and then provide staff development particular to the information gathered and targeted to the assistant principal audience it would be of great benefit. Districts tend to focus their trainings on preparing and recruiting principals, not assistant principals, so their needs tend to go unmet.

Marshall and Hooley (2006) describe the “grow your own” approach that Santa Cruz County in California has taken. They focus on building partnerships with universities; creating mentorships; conducting weekly and quarterly reviews; providing variation in AP tasks to broaden their exposure; nurturing a thriving instead of a surviving environment; and assisting assistant principals seek out meaningful professional development opportunities. They also describe the Teaching Assistant Principal program in the Capistrano, California, School District in which principals recruit potential assistant principals for the program. These participants are given a range of leadership duties that include developing curriculum, coordinating intervention programs, forming liaisons with parents and community, and managing schedules and inventories.

Administrator organizations have begun to pay attention to the professional development needs of assistant principals. NASSP awards a National Assistant Principal of the Year award at their annual conference. Marshall and Hooley (2006) report that

these conferences are typically reasonably priced, provide renewal credit hours, and provide sessions on networking, resume and interviewing skills, and job fairs. They usually cover topics of interest to assistant principals such as

crisis management, the assistant principal's role in making Adequate Yearly Progress, managing a diverse student body, communicating with parents, achieving staff buy-in for instructional leadership, handling tardies, safety, special education law, staff development and teacher evaluation, gangs, balancing personal and professional lives, 'court-proofing your suspension and expulsion hearings,' proper search and seizure, and so on. (Marshall & Hooley, 2006, pp. 87-88)

Many districts provide assistant principal academies. If done well, utilizing the expertise of practicing administrators and professors, this structure can provide skills and experiences that will benefit the participants in furthering their careers. The best model would provide continued support from the district and the formation of study groups. It would also benefit the participants to bring all levels together periodically to have discussion about issues. New Principal Induction and Success programs play a major role in many districts in assisting assistant principals as they transition. Regularly scheduled meetings that feature speakers, time for questions and collaboration, book studies, and many other strategies provide an extra layer of support for transitioning administrators.

Support Systems

One type of support system that many school districts utilize is to pool their resources to establish a local, regional, or state orientation program for aspiring leaders. The Principals' Executive Program (2009) that the North Carolina Center for School Leadership Development offered provided support to aspiring, novice, and experienced

administrators. Their “Leadership Program for Aspiring Principals” provided participants twelve days of instruction organized into four three-day residential meetings. They covered topics in the areas of curriculum, communication and public relations, leadership, personnel management, and self-knowledge.

Goodson (2000) contends that assistant principals must intentionally establish their own support through a positive relationship with themselves. He suggests that assistant principals take the time to develop the self-esteem they need in order to handle successes and failures professionally. The following tips are offered by Goodson (2000): know your role as that of assisting the principal; be a good listener; know where to get help; manage your time wisely; maintain your composure by being consistent and calm; respect parents’ feelings by establishing a positive, trusting relationship with them; make a commitment to excellence by keeping your standards high; and learn how to handle stress by having an active life outside of work.

Another partnership that can provide support and a possible solution to the principalship crisis that is erupting nationwide as the number of eligible candidates is shrinking each year calls for school districts and universities to establish formal relationships. At present, most universities provide a solid theoretical foundation with limited or no practical experience in the field. Potter (2001) describes how Mobile County Public School District in Alabama and the University of South Alabama implemented a program as described several years ago. They created a 15-person board, comprised of principals, assistant principals, central office administrators, and university faculty to develop a program that would support assistant principals to be ready to move

to a principalship with a high probability of effectiveness. Forty assistant principals were broken into two groups, elementary and secondary, and met once a week for twelve weeks at the university. The approach was light on theory and heavy on practicality. Presenters ranged from principals to central office staff to parent advocates to university professors. Their program covered instruction and supervision of curriculum, special education, school law, community relations, communication/public relations, principalship (vision, leadership, delegation), student services, human resources, facilities, maintenance, food service, mentorship, transportation, conflict resolution, accountability, and leadership styles. From the first group of 40 participants, six were named principals that following year, and they all indicated that they felt prepared and ready to accept the challenge.

The College of Education at Virginia Tech worked with six school districts to transform their conventional principal preparation program for thirteen future principals selected through a screening and interview process. Gordon and Moles (1994) describe the mentor program that developed in the Roanoke area as a part of this collaboration. The mentor principal was to be a teacher, model, and supportive colleague for the aspiring administrator. The participants worked through the full gambit of administrative duties from teacher evaluation to parent communication. Each intern had a committee consisting of the intern, the mentor principal, a central office associate and a professor from the university. These teams met on a regular basis and included reflective dialogue. In this seminar setting, all participants were learners. An unexpected outcome of this

endeavor that has been mentioned in other similar programs was the learning that the mentors experienced that promoted their professional growth as well as that of the intern.

Petzko (2008) examines the recommendation from the Stanford Educational Leadership Initiative's study that calls for rich field-based internships, problem-based learning, and cohort groups as parts of exemplary leadership development programs in schools of education. This needs to be combined with quality mentors and a strong collaboration between the university and the school district. There is limited research that has specifically asked new principals about the type of preparation that was or would have been critical to their success, and an even smaller amount of that limited research has been conducted since No Child Left Behind(NCLB) and its impact on principals' work with regards to accountability and school improvement reforms.

Marshall and Hooley (2006) propose that no amount of training or support will improve the assistant principalship unless they have some areas in their work in which they have flexibility, independent resources, control and the power to be the expert. They must have areas of discretion, authority, and autonomy. Special projects, start-up funds, titles, and management teams are all possible ways to provide these opportunities. Consider the possibilities if school districts would provide the seed money for a special project to be developed by the assistant principals with the condition that it must be a project that will ultimately contribute to the well-being of the school. The benefits are both to the professional and the district.

Summary

The research is clear that the principalship is an overwhelming job with tremendous responsibility and stress. The ethical concern is that if something is not done to prepare the assistant principals who are standing in the ranks waiting their turn at the principalship, they are going to be set up for a job that is far beyond their expectations, creating a continued exodus from school administration. Chapter III examines how I went about conducting my research and the professionals who contributed to the richness of the data gathered.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The review of the literature solidified my interest in my chosen topic of support for assistant principals. Add to the literature review my own personal experiences as a principal and as an elementary supervisor and the plan was set in motion for me to begin my research. In this chapter, the rationale for my methodology is explained as well as an explanation of how I organized and analyzed the data collected.

I chose to utilize a phenomenological approach in conducting my research in that it examines the lived experiences of the participants in the study. I was interested in the lived experiences of assistant principals as they related to the amount of preparation and support they both had and needed to ensure their success as future principals. Inasmuch as phenomenological researchers seek to understand essential truths about lived experiences, I concluded that this qualitative approach best met the needs of my problem statement.

Data Collection

Phenomenological studies utilize interviews with multiple participants in multiple roles. An interview is simply, “a method of data collection that may be described as an interaction involving the interviewer and the interviewee, the purpose of which is to obtain valid and reliable information” (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 82). I felt that I would get the richest data from utilizing in-depth interviews. These interviews helped me

understand and identify the needs of assistant principals and the types of support that would be most beneficial to them. The purpose of the interviews was to assist me in eliciting critical perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs from novice principals, assistant principals, principals who were currently supervising assistant principals, and coaches for first and second year principals regarding the level of preparedness and support needed to assume a principalship. The questions asked are included in Appendix A. These questions were utilized as a part of in-depth interviews allowing the participants' perspectives about assistant principal preparation for the principalship to unfold and shape this study.

I asked the assistant principals about the type of supports they were currently receiving. I interviewed assistant principals at both the elementary and secondary levels with varying levels of experience as an assistant principal. I also interviewed both novice assistant principals with one to three years of experience and veteran assistant principals with five or more years of experience. Male and female subjects were chosen while ensuring ethnic diversity and a mixture of administrators from both Title I and non-Title I schools. My hope was to learn from the assistant principals about their job-related duties, the types of supports they were currently receiving that they felt would help them transition to a principalship, and the types of experiences they felt were missing. These questions that were utilized as a part of in-depth interviews allowed the participants' perspectives about assistant principal preparation for the principalship to unfold and shape this study.

Another group of interviewees were first or second year principals. I used the same criteria used to select assistant principals to select this group of principals: years of

experience, gender, ethnicity, Title I school, and level. From this group of interviewees I inquired about the job-related duties they were performing as principals that were different from those they performed as assistant principals. I probed to learn about the preparation and support they felt could have been provided to them as assistant principals that would have been beneficial to them in their current roles. Interview questions are in Appendix C.

I interviewed two people who served as coaches to first and second year principals. These coaches were part of a program that was funded by a philanthropic foundation. These coaches served in a formal role as a coach to either first or second year principals for either a half day a month or a full day a month. What I learned from this group of participants are the types of tasks they saw new principals least prepared to perform and what support would have helped them as they served as an assistant principal. I also inquired if they had seen any particular patterns as they worked with novice principals who are meeting with challenges. The questions I asked these coaches are included in Appendix B.

The last group of people I interviewed was a group of principals who were supervising assistant principals at their schools. I selected principals based on gender, ethnicity, Title I vs. non-Title I, years of experience as a principal, years of experience as an assistant principal, and number of assistant principals they have supervised in their career. What I gleaned from this group of administrators was what they consider their role to be in preparing their assistant principals for the principalship, what the barriers to effective mentoring of their assistant principals have been, what supports they felt would

be valuable for their assistant principals, and what supports they felt would have best been supplied both internally and externally. Interview questions are in Appendix D.

Table 2

Interview Participants

| Data collection | Subjects | Number of subjects | Frequency |
|------------------------|---|---------------------------|--|
| Interview | Assistant principals | 6 | one-two hour interview per participant |
| Interview | First or second year principals | 5 | one-two hour interview per participant |
| Interview | Principal Coaches | 2 | one hour interview per participant |
| Interview | Principals currently supervising assistant principals | 6 | One-two hour interview per participant |

The data analysis of these interviews focused on emergent themes, roles, support systems, structures, and practices. The digitally audio-taped recordings from the individual interviews were transcribed and then coded both manually and with the assistance of NVivo software to identify themes, roles, support systems, structures, and practices. Glesne (2006) explains that keeping up with one's data involves writing memos to oneself, making analytic files, and developing coding schemes. Coding helps locate themes in the research you have conducted by focusing on classifying and categorizing. Glesne (2006) says, "Coding is a progressive process of sorting and defining and defining and sorting those scraps of collected data (i.e., observation notes, interview transcripts, memos, documents, and notes from relevant literature) that are applicable to your research purpose. By putting like-minded pieces together into data

clumps, you create an organizational framework” (p. 152). I thought that coding 19 interviews would be much easier if I purchased software to assist me. While the software was helpful it was not enough. The process still required a great deal of time pouring over the transcripts and making sure that I had extracted all of the necessary themes and areas of focus.

I carefully followed the guidelines pertaining to the use of human subjects in gathering data for my research as specified by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). There was minimal risk to the participants in this study, and confidentiality was maintained through the use of pseudonyms and a research confidentiality agreement that was signed by the individual who transcribed my audio taped interviews. Digital recordings were kept in a locked, secured location during the research process to protect the participants and were electronically destroyed at the completion of the research along with any paper documents such as interview transcriptions that were shredded to ensure participant confidentiality.

The amount of time needed for administrator participations was minimal. They each participated in an interview that lasted less than two hours. The location for conducting the interview was determined jointly by the researcher and the administrator according to the needs of the administrator. All of the administrators selected to either come to my school or for me to come to their school for the interview. All interviews were scheduled during times that were not part of the administrator’s work day.

Another data source I utilized was document analysis. I examined the Masters of School Administration program from eleven Southeastern universities. I examined the

programs to help determine the types of knowledge, experiences, and skills these administrators were exposed to as they entered the assistant principalship and how that compared to the roles of both the assistant principals and principals.

Validity, Reliability and Authentication

It was imperative that I take measures to ensure the validity and reliability of my research. I solicited a supervisor and a researcher to read and analyze select samples of my data. Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, and Spiers (2002) state,

We argue that reliability and validity remain appropriate concepts for attaining rigor in qualitative research. We argue that qualitative researchers should reclaim responsibility for reliability and validity by implementing verification strategies integral and self-correcting during the conduct of inquiry itself. This ensures the attainment of rigor using strategies inherent within each qualitative design, and moves the responsibility for incorporating and maintaining reliability and validity from external reviewers' judgments to the investigators themselves. (p. 1)

They also pointed out that without rigor, research is worthless and useless. Guba and Lincoln (1985) brought forth the idea of substituting reliability and validity with the concept of "trustworthiness" containing the aspects of credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability.

Researcher Subjectivities

As I reflected on my own positionality, I found that I was positioned in a couple of contexts or shifting networks of relationships. I was an upper-middle class Caucasian female pursuing a doctoral degree in educational leadership. I brought a certain bias to the research that had to be addressed. For three years I was a senior level administrator in the school district and my work involved supervising, mentoring, and supporting sixteen

principals. This allowed me to hear first-hand from some of my own principals in their first year in the principalship about their frustrations and stressors. It was really this experience that fueled my passion to research this topic.

It is noteworthy to mention that my positionality did take a bit of a change during this research. The division that I worked in as a supervisor was eliminated when the district went through reorganization. With my job dissolved, I decided to throw my hat back into the principal ring and became principal of an elementary school once again. It had been three years since I had been a principal, and I returned to the principalship thinking that all of the knowledge I had gained from supervising sixteen principals and all of the experience I had had over those three years would make this principalship much easier than my first one. I was wrong! All of the anxiety, stress, frustration, feelings of being overwhelmed, and the multitude of emotions and stressors that I had experienced before and helped other principals deal with came flooding back. I felt like a first year principal again. This really enriched my perspective and my commitment to this research.

The first year that I was a supervisor, I had seven of my sixteen principals who were in their first year principalship. I found myself fascinated with their stories and their needs. In addition to that, my life experiences that centered around thirty years in education helped form the subjectivity that I brought to this research. According to St. Louis and Barton (2002), "Subjectivity refers to the life experiences that researchers have had as well as the social, cultural, and political factors that influence an individual and how those experiences and factors contribute to biases and assumptions in the type of research that researchers choose to engage in." This subjectivity inevitably influenced

how I analyzed and interpreted my research. My assumption that all assistant principals needed more intense support in order to be effective principals could not be allowed to skew my data collection and interpretation, but I had to be upfront about what I have observed over those three years as a supervisor. I never found an assistant principal over those three years that I was a supervisor who entered the principalship without challenges, frustrations, feelings of being overwhelmed, and struggles. It was with that in mind that I entered this research to seek answers and solutions.

As I began this research I based my theoretical framework on the foundation of constructivism as I have determined several premises. One premise that I entered this research with was that administrators are prepared at the university to become principals. Often a significant length of time passes before an assistant principal becomes a principal and is able to practice the knowledge they learned in the Masters of School Administration program. My second premise was that assistant principals were still more or less performing duties akin to the three mundane tasks that have been associated with the position for decades: managing the buses, handling most of the discipline, and ordering and distributing textbooks. They typically have not received rich experiences as instructional leaders, culture building, community relationships, and other critical aspects that they will encounter as principals.

As a qualitative researcher I discovered that I adhere to the social constructivist paradigm. Glesne (2006) states, “This paradigm maintains that human beings construct their perceptions of the world, that no one perception is ‘right’ or more ‘real’ than another, and that these realities must be seen as wholes rather than divided in discrete

variables that are analyzed separately” (p. 7). The values associated with this paradigm are rapport, reflexivity, and trustworthiness. In my research it was critical that I established a rapport with my subjects that was based on trustworthiness. This was also important inasmuch as reflexivity involved critical reflection on how I interacted with and influenced my participants.

My positionality as an elementary supervisor with supervisory responsibilities definitely shaped my interest in my research topic. I was constantly struck by the variance of entry level skills that new principal candidates brought with them to the position. These were bright educators who had graduated from a university with a graduate degree in school administration and typically with one or more years of assistant principal experience. Obviously they had been selected for a principalship because of their effectiveness as an assistant principal, yet many confided in me that the position of assistant principal did not prepare them for the principalship. They had glowing evaluations, received wonderful recommendations from their supervising principals, and performed very well when interviewed. Why then, was there often a gap in the responses given in the interview process and the practical application of knowledge demonstrated once the new administrator was in place?

Most often, the support that was provided to new principals was focused on their first two years as a principal. Sometimes they were given a coach who was a retired principal. They also had a practicing mentor principal to work with them. They also had an elementary supervisor, an executive director, or a regional superintendent who served as both a mentor and an evaluator. They attended “new principal” sessions that offered a

crash course in a variety of pertinent topics over the course of a year. How did the ones who made it survive? Is it that they knew how to find the resources, asked the right questions, and sought out the help that enabled them to persevere? Why did the ones who didn't make it not meet with success? What could have been done prior to the appointment to a principalship to provide the support and training needed to ensure success?

I am interested in this research as it is so critical to the success of the students and staff of that new administrator. The research is clear on the detrimental effects on students' achievement if they have a sub-standard teacher for two or more years in a row. What are the effects on both teachers and students if they have a substandard principal? Once the proper support is put in place for an assistant principal, what needs to continue or change in terms of support into that first and second year as a principal? The job is too important to leave it to chance. The future of children is at stake. The future leaders are sitting in classrooms across this county. They deserve strong, effective, purposeful administrators who can guide their schools collaboratively toward a vision of excellence.

Summary

This research did not lend itself to precise, quantitative data collection. I was not interested in facts and figures. I was interested in the perceptual data that could only be meaningfully gathered through interviews with multiple stakeholders. I toyed with the idea of shadowing one first-year principal and doing an in-depth study of that administrator's first year and their assistant principal experience. I am thankful that I decided to conduct interviews with multiple sources as the variety in their experiences as

well as the areas of commonality in their experiences gave me such rich data from multiple perspectives. It has been akin to making a quilt. Each person's story is a block in my quilt, and the entire quilt is stitched together with the richness of their insights. Chapter IV will give you the insights that they gave me during the interviews. The personal stories and themes will emerge.

CHAPTER IV

REFLECTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF PRACTITIONERS

Introduction

It is not surprising that the best part of this research was conducting the interviews and hearing about the experiences of administrators. What began as a series of interviews conducted to gather research information turned into an intricate tapestry of delicately woven stories about the successes and challenges of administrators. Each one had a fascinating story to share about their personal experiences during internships, assistant principalships, principalships, and mentorships. Even though each participant was different, they shared many commonalities. These commonalities are the basis for the themes that emerged throughout this interview process. This chapter is organized by the themes that surfaced from the data collection through the interview process.

Participants

Table 3 outlines the diversity of my participants. Even though all of the building level administrators were currently employed in the same school district, they each brought unique backgrounds and experiences that contributed to the richness of the data.

I interviewed a very interesting mix of administrators from all levels and all types of experiences. They were all administrators from Grandiose Unified School District except for the two coaches. Grandiose Unified School District is a pseudonym for a large

school district located in the southeastern United States that serves students in both rural and urban settings.

Table 3

Participant Demographics*

| Name | Position | Gender | Ethnicity | Level |
|------------------------|--|---------------|------------------|--------------|
| Mr. Rod Gardner | 1 st or 2 nd yr. Principal | M | W | Elementary |
| Mr. Barry Thomas | 1 st or 2 nd yr. Principal | M | W | Elementary |
| Mr. Michael Vanderbilt | 1 st or 2 nd yr. Principal | M | W | Elementary |
| Ms. Diana Holmes | 1 st or 2 nd yr. Principal | F | W | Elementary |
| Mr. James Hope | 1 st or 2 nd yr. Principal | M | B | Elementary |
| Ms. Brittney Brown | Assistant principal | F | B | Elementary |
| Ms. Emily Hart | Assistant principal | F | W | Elementary |
| Mr. Matthew Moore | Assistant principal | M | W | Middle |
| Mr. Elton Monroe | Assistant principal | M | B | Elementary |
| Ms. Carly Comer | Assistant principal | F | W | Elementary |
| Ms. Marie Burnette | Assistant principal | F | B | Elementary |
| Ms. Carole North | Supervising Principal | F | W | Elementary |
| Ms. Beth Easter | Supervising Principal | F | W | Elementary |
| Mr. William Foster | Supervising Principal | M | W | Middle |
| Mr. George Summers | Supervising Principal | M | W | Middle |
| Mr. John Mullens | Supervising Principal | M | B | Middle |
| Mr. Stephen Eggleston | Supervising Principal | M | W | High |
| Ms. Barbara Wilson | Retired Principal Coach | F | W | n/a |
| Mr. Robert Fleming | Retired Principal Coach | M | B | n/a |

* Participant names are pseudonyms

The School Administrators

Now it is time for me to introduce you to my interviewees.

Diana Holmes and Carole North. I first met Diana when she was a Principal Fellow student at a nearby university. The Principal Fellows Program is a merit-based scholarship loan program funded by the state General Assembly. During the second year of the program the participants are required to participate in a yearlong, full-time internship. She was working her full year internship at one of the schools that I was supervising. She came into the Principal Fellows Program after being a middle school teacher.

Carole, another one of my interviewees, was her cooperating principal for the internship. Diana was hungry for knowledge and experiences, and Carole gave her many valuable experiences. She drank up every bit of knowledge and every new experience she could get.

In January of that year, the superintendent organized intervention teams to go out to low performing schools to assist with preparing students for the upcoming End of Grade or End of Course tests. I was assigned as the leader of one of the intervention teams that would go to one of my schools that I supervised. A team was assembled for me to go out to the school and provide support. I asked special permission to take Diana with me on my Intervention Team. She was awesome. She jumped right in, rolled up her sleeves, and said, "What do you want me to do?" It was a difficult year for this particular school. The principal was out on medical leave and there had been a revolving door of retired principals there to help out. We went into that school with the motto, "We don't

have all the answers, but we are here to help. What do you need from us?" We were well received as we did roll up our sleeves and work. We tutored children; we attended grade level meetings; we lead staff meetings; and we mentored teachers. In the whole process, Diana fell in love with the school. The next year, she was named assistant principal at an elementary school in the district. By February of that school year, a principalship came open and Diana was named principal at the very school where she did her Principal Fellows internship with Carole. She stayed there the next school year and had a great year. Several times that year, she confided in me that she really missed being at a Title I school. She had such a heart for struggling schools and students who came from impoverished backgrounds. I received a phone call from Diana one day telling me that she had applied for the principalship at that school where we served as an Intervention Team. She was named to the principalship at that school and went in with the heart and mind of a determined leader. Her love for that school remained steady and at this writing, she is still the helm.

Elton Monroe. Another one of my interviewees was Elton, Diana's assistant principal at the time of the interview. Elton started his educational career as a lateral entry teacher whose college degree was history with a minor in math. I asked Elton why he wanted to be an administrator and his heartfelt response was, "One of the things that inspired me to become an administrator was because I wanted to expand what I was doing within my classroom to take it abroad to have a greater impact on a greater number of kids than just the thirty or so kids who were in my class." Elton served his first year as an assistant principal with a different principal at this same elementary school. He said

that his largest responsibility was discipline in working with the other principal. He felt that Diana had given him more and varied experiences and responsibilities that had facilitated his growth. Elton came into an elementary administrative position after being a middle school math teacher so he said that learning elementary curriculum had been a huge stretch for him. Attending grade level meetings and studying the elementary curriculum were a priority for him.

Carole North. Carole was Diana's cooperating principal during her internship at the elementary school where Diana later became principal. Carole moved to another elementary school the following year after Diana worked her internship. Carole had been an assistant principal at one elementary school and had been principal at three elementary schools. This school that she was leading at the time of the interview was the first one where she had an assistant principal even though she had supervised four interns. Carole had a real passion for mentoring interns and first year principals.

Brittney Brown. Brittney was an elementary teacher and curriculum facilitator before deciding to pursue her administrative degree. Her first assistant principalship was served at the elementary school with Carole, and she had just completed her second year. Brittney was the curriculum facilitator at a school for five years where the principal was being mentored by Carole when he was a first year principal. Prior to being a curriculum facilitator Brittney was a kindergarten and first grade teacher in two different states. It was so interesting to discover that even though Grandiose Unified School District was a large school district, the connections between administrators were numerous and intricate.

James Hope, Beth Easter, and Rod Gardner. James was the current principal at the elementary school where Carole and Diana were former principals at the time of my interview with him. It was his first year in the principalship. He worked his internship at a middle school where he became an assistant principal the following year. James had been an elementary music teacher prior to entering administration.

Beth Easter came to this district from another state where she had been both a principal and a supervisor for principals. Diana was one of Beth's assistant principals and so was Rod. Rod was also a Principal Fellow like Diana. Both Rod and Diana gave Beth a lot of credit for the excellent mentoring she provided them as assistant principals. Even though both served short terms as assistant principals, they said that Beth really facilitated their growth in a short period of time. Beth talked candidly about how much she has enjoyed mentoring assistant principals. Rod was in the middle of his first year as a principal when I conducted his interview. He was still calling upon Beth throughout the year for advice and guidance. James was in the Principal Fellows Program with Rod and remained a good friend and colleague whom he turned to as well for reflection, advice and support.

Michael Vanderbilt. Michael was an assistant principal at a middle school under the leadership of two very strong principals in his assessment of their leadership and mentoring of his career. His whole career had been at the middle school as a teacher and as an assistant principal. His first principalship was at an elementary school, so he said the biggest learning curve for him was elementary curriculum.

Barry Thomas. Barry was an elementary counselor before becoming a middle school assistant principal, a position he held for seven years. Barry was hired by a principal who moved to another county after Barry's first three years there. The next principal he worked with was Bo who was another one of my interviewees. Barry shared how very fortunate he was that both principals lead with a team concept and how that contributed greatly to his growth and preparedness to be a principal. He also felt that having been an assistant principal for seven years really served him well as he entered the principalship.

John Mullens. John had been an administrator for many years. He had been the mentor to many interns and assistant principals. He said that the thing that has been frustrating for him was to know that a person was not ready for the principalship and to tell someone at district office that he didn't think they were ready yet, and then they were moved to a principalship anyway. Some struggled through the first few years, but have gone on to be successful principals. Others hadn't reached out for help and have struggled. Matthew was an assistant principal at this middle school under John's leadership at the time of my interview with him. Matthew was an elementary teacher prior to becoming a middle school assistant principal. After three years in the public school system he left and went to teach in the private sector for two years. After that he actually decided to try another field and went into the financial services field for about nine months. He was not happy and ended up coming back to teach in public education at the elementary level, as a physical education teacher as a matter of fact. After a few more years, he felt the urge to reach children at a different level and to aspire to a challenge so

he applied for the Principal Fellows Program and was accepted. After interning at a high school and an elementary school, he ended up as one of three assistant principals at a large middle school. He had lots of praise for the mentorship that John has provided him through a variety of rich experiences and a lot of trust.

Stephen Eggleston. Stephen was an elementary teacher who became an assistant principal at an elementary school and a high school. He later became a high school principal before moving to this current district to become a high school supervisor at district office. While in that role he was moved to one of the high schools that he supervised as the principal there for about a year. During that time he supervised four assistant principals at a turbulent time for that school. He shared how meaningful that experience was for him.

Emily Hart. Emily was a magnet school director at an elementary school after being an elementary teacher for five years. She moved into the principalship at that elementary magnet school. Her move to administration happened very fast and she decided to go back to the assistant principalship to get more experiences that would serve her well in a future principalship. She said that serving her assistant principalship experiences with two different principals has been very valuable and provided her with rich experiences.

Carly Comer and Marie Burnette. Carly was the assistant principal at an elementary school with a principal who only had three years of experience as a principal. She was very complimentary about how a principal without a lot of experience himself had given her so many opportunities to grow and had really advocated for her to be

offered a principalship. Marie was a second year assistant principal with a veteran principal. She had been a curriculum facilitator at one of the schools I used to supervise. It was rewarding for me to watch her career blossom as she moved into an assistant principal position. Marie was still a very curriculum centered educator as she had not lost that love for curriculum and teaching.

William Foster. William was the principal at a large middle school. He had also been the principal of an elementary school. William was researching mentors for new principals at the time of the interview so our discussions were very rich along those lines. He has had the opportunity to supervise several assistant principals at the middle school including one who was a career assistant principal by choice and several who desired a principalship.

Research Questions

Each of these administrators added great insights and perceptions regarding the primary research question: What are the supports, as perceived by principals, assistant principals, and principal coaches that are needed for assistant principals that will provide a smooth transition to the principalship?

There were some sub-questions that fall under this main research question that I sought to get answers to as I conducted my interviews:

- What are the job-related duties of assistant principals and principals, and how do the two positions compare?
- How well do first year or second year principals feel that they were prepared as assistant principals to meet the challenges of their new role? What aspects

of their preparation do they believe were helpful? What other preparation experiences do they recommend?

- What are the job-related duties of a principal that an assistant principal would need support with in order to ensure a smooth transition to the principalship?

The themes that emerged through hours of interviews with these talented professionals are discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

Challenges

Inasmuch as it was the challenges that I saw so many new administrators deal with and grow tired and frustrated over, this theme was one that was especially interesting to me. The first and second year principals shared openly with me regarding the challenges they were facing in the principalship.

Rod was quick to admit that it is so easy to let discipline sidetrack you and take your attention away from instruction. Rod was at a school that had a high level of parent involvement and a significant number of parents who felt that they had a lot of influence in the school community. He confided that they expected him to drop everything and meet with them on demand at the moment they showed up at the school no matter what else he was involved in. It is certainly a delicate balance for a new administrator to balance instructional leadership, ensuring that the school is a safe environment, and building critical relationships with students, parents, and staff.

Elton said that his first year as an assistant principal overwhelmed him with the amount of discipline he handled. His second year, Diana, the new principal at the school gave him the Positive Behavior Support (PBS) program to oversee at the school. His

perspective on this was, “This year—to be honest, this year PBS has been so phenomenal. And the reason I say that is because kids are buying into it more, and the teachers are buying into it more.” Elton talked about how much he enjoyed being given projects to be in charge of and how that was facilitating his professional administrative growth. He felt trusted and empowered.

Rod noted that a challenge for him had been the lack of time to stop and reflect. Decisions come at principals at alarming rates. Each day, principals make numerous decisions. Some are small decisions and other are very big decisions. These decisions always have consequences for their staff and students. Some require a split second decision in that it might impact health and safety. Others require thought, reflection, and collaboration. Knowing which one the situation calls for is critical. Rod made a quick decision to stop a practice in the school that he later found out was a “sacred cow.” He replaced it with another practice that he felt would be more effective. Looking back, he now realized he should have spent some time thinking through the repercussions and talking to stakeholders. He broke a trust and had to earn it back. He handled it in the right way though in that the first thing he did was that he apologized.

The multitude of experiences that an administrator handles on any given day demands that they be skilled at multitasking. Matthew said that he didn’t think most assistant principals realize that you really need to be a master at this when they first take the job. Even though he has gotten better at it, he still said that after being an assistant principal for two years now, he felt that on a scale from 1-10, he might be a 7.

Knowing and learning the culture of the school is also a challenge. If the culture is toxic that presents its own set of issues. If the culture is healthy, the principal must ensure that it stays that way. Know how to navigate those waters is critical. Brittney confided that she really learned a lot about change and how it can impact a school culture through some Michael Fullan training she attended several years ago. She said she had learned that understanding or misunderstanding the culture of a school can make or break you and how an administrator must combine the process of change with understanding the culture of the school to help build a foundation for success.

Assistant Principal Tasks

It was interesting how the experiences and types of tasks that each assistant principal experienced were so varied. Brittney said, “Some of my primary responsibilities are probably custodians, communicating with custodians, being over buses, and handling bus dismissal issues. We pretty much split behavior, so whoever a teacher can grab, that is what they do. My newest thing would be the teacher observations, having to do official teacher observations.” Matthew said that his supervising principal told him when he hired him, “The experience that you’re going to get here is going to be like no other that you’ll have. I will delegate. I’m going to throw you things and see how you do with them. I’m going to trust you. I’m here if you have questions.” Matthew said that the trust that John has had in him and his willingness to let him try things on his own has been so valuable to him. He said that John has emailed him the budget before and told him to “have at it.” He said that many of his assistant principal colleagues complained that they knew very little about budgets, but he was so thankful that his principal kept him heavily involved in

budgetary processes. Manipulating the allotment workbook and determining how to divide out the local weighted student formula dollars in ways that will bring the most impact to the school were experiences that he had been afforded. Matthew also spoke about his experiences with personnel matters and emergency situations. His principal had served as an excellent role model of how to remain calm in such situations.

Brittney described experiences to me that were more of what I had read and heard from so many assistant principals. She listed her primary responsibilities as handing custodians, communicating with custodians, handling buses, dealing with behavioral issues, attending Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings, etc. She wasn't surprised though by these experiences. She said this was what she thought the job was going to be. She credited the university experience in helping her to understand the "whys" of things that happened and to understand herself more as a professional.

Elton was a second year assistant principal and had a different principal supervisor this year. He described his experiences as managing buses, managing custodians, getting involved with curriculum, making sure teachers were following the state's Standard Course of Study, making sure teachers were teaching with rigor, and making sure teachers were actually teaching the kids and getting them where they needed to be. It was clear that he was beginning to build those instructional leadership skills in this role. He said that his two pet projects were PBS and overseeing and monitoring the instructional delivery of the math curriculum as he was a former middle school math teacher. Elton also talked about how the staff at his school served on goal teams to monitor the goals on the School Improvement Plan. He spoke with a lot of knowledge

about the School Improvement Plan and how those teams monitored each goal. He spoke at great length about learning how to handle a situation involving a teacher who wasn't performing up to standard. The one area that he said nobody has really sat down and explained to him related to the budget.

Amount of Assistant Principal Experience

Barry said that he felt that he was probably more prepared than many of his colleagues who entered the principalship due to the amount of time that he was an assistant principal. He was an assistant principal for seven years, and he really feels that this served him well. The first principal who hired him felt that he was ready to be a principal when she retired, and when she left, she shared that with the incoming veteran principal. Barry still had strong ties to both of those administrators to provide him with insights, information, and advice.

Matthew said, "The experience of being an assistant principal for a few years has really helped me. If I were to go straight out of a Master's in School Administration program right into a principalship, I feel like it would be much harder. Having this experience as an assistant principal for a few years has been very valuable, I think." He definitely saw quantity and quality combined as key factors for assistant principal success and preparation for the principalship.

Instructional Leadership

As the role of being the instructional leader has taken on a huge emphasis over the past few years, we spent a good deal of time discussing this topic and how to prepare for the role. Matthew, a second-year middle school assistant principal, talked about his

curriculum knowledge. He had become more comfortable with that role as an assistant principal by having conversations with critical colleagues, attending staff development, making frequent classroom visits, and knowing what good teaching looks like no matter what the subject is that is being presented. Leading grade level meetings had also served him well in preparing to be an instructional leader. The best learning for him had been just immersing himself in the classrooms on a daily basis. Not knowing the middle school curriculum when he was hired was an obstacle for him that he worked hard to overcome.

Even though Rod, a first year principal, felt really strongly in the realm of instructional leadership when he came into the principalship, he said that it felt very different to know what good instruction looked like and to know what to do to help a teacher who was struggling with their instructional delivery. Recognizing good instruction was easy for Rod, but providing the appropriate and most meaningful support for the delivery of poor instruction was more difficult at best. Being a strong instructional leader can be a challenge as well if the staff is not accustomed to that type of leadership. Rod said that he was asking lots of probing questions at grade level meetings. He was expecting the teachers to be reflective and have meaningful discussions about student achievement and data during those meetings. The teachers were getting frustrated. Finally the curriculum facilitator confided in him that he was the most instructionally minded principal they had ever had in the ten years that she had been at the school. Rod had to stop to reflect about the change process and how to bring about the instructional focus that he desired so that teachers were comfortable and felt supported in the process. Rod had some great insights about the instructional leadership role. He said, "I'm the

instructional leader, and you know maintaining a safe and orderly school is a big part of the job, but I feel like having procedures in place, you know PBS style procedures, can help take some of that off your plate so you're able to focus on instruction.”

Second year principal, Diana, talked about ways that she had tried to build instructional leadership in her assistant principal, Elton. He worked with teacher assistants with regards to how they needed to be instructional partners with the teachers as opposed to clerical assistants. He led bi-weekly meetings with them and made sure that they are aware of the curriculum focus. He attended all curriculum meetings with the staff and served on the Positive Behavior Support goal team for their School Improvement Plan. Spending a lot of time in the classrooms helped him learn elementary curriculum inasmuch as he was a former middle school math teacher. Elton said, “I’m concentrating on the math portion of instruction. I didn’t want to bite off too much. I kind of oversee the math portion of instruction as well as Positive Behavior Support. And those two are my focus areas.” The school was in the process of undergoing an overhaul with their school-wide discipline program. Both administrators knew that spending less time on discipline enabled both of them to spend more time on instruction. The two of them met every Monday with the literacy curriculum facilitator, the math curriculum facilitator, and the science specialist. When Elton talked about his role and how it was being formed, he was quick to point out that Diana’s goal was not for him to be at that school forever. He said that she wanted him to get his own school and do well because that would be a reflection of how well she had trained and molded him to be a successful instructional leader.

William talked about how he worked to build instructional leadership in his assistant principals. He had given them the responsibility at this middle school to be the instructional leader for the grade level that they covered. William said that it was his goal to build his assistant principals' curriculum leadership by giving them that grade level responsibility. "I have given them the responsibility now of being the instructional leader on their grade level. So we have shifted from the use of the term assistant principal to calling it the grade level administrator." The "grade level administrator" was responsible for walk-throughs, approving the content meeting agenda for each subject for the coming week, teacher Individual Growth Plan development, teacher observations, and serving on the School Improvement Team. The grade level administrator observed teachers on all grade levels though so that their vision of the whole school was not narrowed to just their grade level. William's goals for them were that they know more and more about instruction, could provide meaningful feedback to teachers, and would be involved heavily in the hiring process for teachers on their grade level. Maybe this whole concept of the term "assistant principal" needs to be reexamined. Does the term itself lend itself to a certain perception of a lesser position? Do teachers, students, and parents view the role as a necessary one that is on the same plane with a principal? Carole told me that she read an article recently that spoke to this issue. It proposed a co-principalship in which one administrator is the managerial leader and the other principal is the instructional leader. Is this the wave of the future?

Stephen said that he felt that it was the principal's job not only to be an instructional leader but to grow others to be strong instructional leaders, starting with

assistant principals and department chairs or grade level chairs. Bo also weighed in this idea. He said that he always found out what experience his assistant principals have had and then provided them with the additional support and experiences they needed to be instructional leaders. One particular assistant principal that he had came from a counseling background. He knew that the teachers would see this as a weakness in that the administrator never taught so Bo started working with him immediately to get as much curriculum knowledge and exposure as possible.

James knew that his actions would be the key to building his instructional leadership. As a first year principal he decided to build upon the Marzano study that the staff had already completed and start the year by telling the staff that the guiding question for the year was, “How do we know what our students know”? This question came directly from the Marzano book they had read. He was carrying that question throughout the year and laying the foundation for the staff to see that his main priority was instruction.

This particular staff saw the principal as the manager. He needed them to see that while he is both, instruction is number one. He made good use of his curriculum facilitator whose strength was literacy as his strength was math. The two of them had taken their subject area strengths and led the grade level meetings accordingly. Next year, he plans to switch it up so that he learns more and more about literacy.

Learning from colleagues helped him a great deal. He had another first year principal as a friend who was an elementary curriculum facilitator and former Principal Fellow with James. He relied heavily on his expertise if he had questions. Utilizing the

strengths of those around you and knowing who to go to for help were two strategies that were serving him well. James realized that it was easy for other things to take your attention off of instruction. For this reason, he said that he told his curriculum facilitator the summer before school began, “I want to be an instructional leader in this building and you’re going to hold it over my head. Any time you see me veering off and all I can think about is the car rider line and the PTA and all those other non-instructional things, I need for you to bring me back to instruction. And even if I look mad when you say it, I’ll get over it because I’m asking you to do it.”

After the staff celebrated making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) he led them to really dig into the data and they determined that individual student growth was not where it needed to be. All of this work was done prior to the state releasing the growth data. As he led the grade levels to peel back the layers of onion, they discovered that only two children in the school had actually made high growth. The staff was amazed to have uncovered this data-driven truth. While their performance composite score and their student proficiency rates were high, student growth was only at the expected growth level and not at the high growth level where they wanted it to be. This really helped establish James’s role as an instructional leader as he was able to structure conversations about data and relate it to instruction and student growth.

James had a whole other challenge in the area of instructional leadership. He inherited a staff with several teachers who have sort of plateaued in his words. They were not growing and they had about two more years until retirement. They didn’t want to do anything new or different. They had become complacent. He knew that how he

approached it could make or break the situation. If he pushed too hard he knew there would be tears and compliance, not commitment. If he didn't push at all he risked a lack of student growth. Knowing how to approach such a challenge is difficult for the novice principal. This is a challenge that he was still reflecting on and deciding how he needed to affect change.

Barry also discussed the challenges of instructional leadership. His first year as a principal, the state renormed the end of grade reading test. His school scored about forty points below their normal performance score. Barry was a scared first year principal when he saw those scores. He remembered thinking, "How do you keep the morale up and be positive when you have doubts yourself about how you are going to tackle this problem?"

Managers

The managerial tasks described to me by assistant principals and former assistant principals were typical: supervising the custodians, coordinating the buses, ordering and organizing textbooks, supervising hallways and lunchrooms, scheduling, and organizing the United Way campaign were just a few of the ones shared. William said that was trying to make a shift with his assistant principals from managerial tasks to instructional leadership. Marie was a curriculum facilitator for several years and by her own admission was more of a global thinker. The organization and discipline required to manage all of the paperwork and day-to-day routine tasks were challenges for her. Each leader has his unique strengths and weaknesses. Marie was worried about the managerial part of the job. She considered paperwork to be mundane. She had never been much of a "computer-

friendly” person either, but she knew that the computer could help her be more efficient and manage her time. Knowing your needs and weaknesses is critical.

Money Matters

The one thing that most of the assistant principals said that they feel that they have had little experience with was the budget. Elton said, “Now that would be the one thing that I would say as an assistant principal that I have very little experience with, and have had very little time as far as an administrator sitting down with me to explain to me the budget.” He said that he has had exposure to the budget in the class for assistant principals that Grandiose Unified School District provided that was taught by a university professor. Thinking back to his university experience he said, “When I was at the university taking graduate classes, there was not a class on budgets, so our professor brought a couple of people in, but it’s still not like having hands-on experience, actually being able to manipulate it yourself.” He said that at the end of the year he planned to sit down with his principal and ask a lot of budget questions.

Matthew agreed that he needed to go deeper in his understanding of the monthly budget reports and processes. Brittney said that if she were to be named a principal she too would need help with the budget process. As she reflected back over the budget experience she had as a curriculum facilitator and as an assistant principal and her feelings that she would need help in that area as a principal she said,

I was familiar with 069 and 072 money because those are the parts that I dealt with, you know, but how those other pieces fit together, and how those pieces can be moved, you know, within the law I’m not sure. I see the monthly budget sheet. And that’s one of the things I wasn’t necessarily given, but as a curriculum facilitator I kept up with my tutoring budget, so for me, that helped me make sure

that my projected expenses were matching up and that I wasn't going to run out of money.

Michael said that his principal mentor gave him some great responsibility with budgetary processes that served well as a first year principal. His mentor put him in charge of the Saturday Academy remediation. "I was responsible. I had to work with the treasurer, so I had to learn, figure out budget codes. I had to pull the budget just like you would as a principal."

William talked about how he educates his assistant principals as far as their understanding of the budgetary process. "I never really thought about involving them in that, because I felt like when I was talking budget with the leadership team or with the teachers or whatever. That was just something I was giving, giving, giving, where I'd give all the information, but what I've learned is just getting them involved in that process has been really helpful." He started out with the workbook which is a spreadsheet provided to the principal by the district. It is this document that principals use to allocate their budgetary resources and designate any staffing adjustments. He printed each of them a copy and they walked through the whole process together. They talked about putting the money into different accounts based on need such as professional development and instructional supplies.

James also said that he was familiar with the workbook process, but really had only been talked through some things before becoming a principal. He said that he was very grateful to have an excellent treasurer to learn from. "I'm just very thankful that I have a really good treasurer because I can talk about here's what I want to do. Tell me

where I can get the money. What can we do, what can't we do? I do wish I had more budget experience.”

Mentors

This topic by far generated the most discussion during the interviews. There were two different types of mentorships that were discussed in great detail throughout the interviews. One type of mentorship is the one that exists between an assistant principal and the supervising principal at that school. The other is the one that exists between a first year principal and a coach (usually a retired principal) from outside the district. Grandiose Unified School District had a coaching program in place for first year principals.

For Rod, as a first year principal he wanted someone who was readily available on a daily basis if needed. He had that person in his mentor principal who supervised him as an assistant principal. Beth was there for him. He called her often and valued her advice. He also named several other experienced principals whom he called to ask for advice based on their areas of expertise. Beth had some profound reflections about her role as a mentor. She said, “If you feel that you *need* an assistant principal, you’re probably not going to mentor them well.” If a principal needs to feel that they are the person in control they are probably not going to be an effective mentor either. Beth thinks that basic leadership style might be the best determinate as to whether one is a good mentor or not. She shared her insight when she said, “I think it comes from within.” Is mentoring an innate ability? Is it a skill that comes naturally to some and could possibly be taught to others?

Matthew, a middle school assistant principal, talked a lot about his supervising principal's role as a mentor. He felt that he had been given numerous opportunities and experiences because his principal knew that his career goal was to be a principal, and he gave him those rich experiences that would assist him in reaching that goal. He said that he just told a group of Principal Fellow students,

Make sure that the principal you're working with is going to be that kind of mentor to you, and if you don't, if you're not getting the kind of experience that you think you should be getting before becoming a principal, you need to ask. You need to start asking questions. You need to almost start demanding that you are exposed to these things that principals are exposed to. That way you're not experiencing a whole different job once you become a principal because it really literally could be a completely different job if you're not exposed to some of this stuff.

Matthew said that he was so grateful to his principal mentor for helping him try to find balance in his life. His principal told him, "You've got a job to support your family, not a family to support your job."

What is it that makes some principals good mentors whose assistant principals always seem to become successful principals. Can good mentoring be taught or is it an instinctual skill set? William said that he definitely feels that principals who have assistant principals should have some sort of training on how to mentor their assistant principals and prepare them for a future principalship. He reflected back over his first year of having assistant principals under his supervision as a middle school principal. He said, "Part of it I think was just me not really knowing how to effectively utilize their skills or even how to recognize their skills because I was of the mindset that I'm the principals and I don't need you to help me." In discussing the barriers that prevent

principals from begin able to be a good mentor, John stated that he felt that insecurity is a major reason. We talked about how so many principals in the district had not been assistant principals very long before becoming principals so they lacked the depth and breadth of experiences necessary to feel confident as a mentor/coach for their own assistant principals.

Most of the principals cited time as the main barrier for effective mentoring. William said, "I think we get caught up in the day-to-day grind." He also noted the just having the time to plan together is a huge problem. William also mentioned something that nobody else had alluded to. He felt that he and his assistant principals needed to take some professional development together during the summer. The team building time would be of utmost value for them. He had set aside professional development funds for the administrative team to go to a conference together for the upcoming summer. William came from being the only administrator at an elementary school to the principalship at his current middle school assignment with three assistant principals. He said, "I was in the mindset that I had to do everything myself, so it took me a while to realize that they could do more than just discipline and deal with bus situations." His strategy to change that had been to talk with each assistant principal about where their interests lie and then giving them responsibilities in those areas. As mentioned earlier, he also changed their title from assistant principal to grade level administrator as a result of their conversations about them needing to be viewed as experts in instructional leadership and other areas. They are the first point of contact now with parents, teachers, and students at their respective grade

level. William set processes in place that they utilize in the event that they need his intervention.

Another barrier that was shared from one of the principals was relationship building. It was noted that it is often difficult for principals to have those “difficult conversations” with their assistant principals because of the fear that it will permanently damage the relationship even when they know that it is for the assistant principal’s own professional growth that they have the conversation with them. Having the mentoring principal as the assistant principal’s evaluator brings a whole other issue to the table. Could an assistant principal really be open and honest about their weaknesses and needs with the person who was going to evaluate them at the end of the year?

William was working on his dissertation research when I interviewed him. His interest was in the area of new principal mentors. We had a rich discussion about mentoring. We discussed the possibility and rationale for a district providing mentor training for all principals who have assistant principals. When I asked William if he felt that such a mentor training program was necessary he said, “I think it’s absolutely necessary because as I said to you at the beginning of this interview, my first year at the middle school, I’m sure I didn’t give those people (his assistant principals) anything. It was more of this is the way it’s going to be, and this is what you can do to make it happen, to help me make it happen.” William had never had an assistant principal prior to his middle school appointment. He went on to say that he didn’t think it was just him not knowing how to effusively utilize their skills or to even recognize their skills. Working together as an administrative team was an important piece of the puzzle as well. We

discussed teamwork in relation to the principal and assistant principal leadership model. We discussed his decision to take all three of his assistant principals with him to a conference for the upcoming summer after our interview. The learning related to assessment at the conference was going to be powerful, but his major focus was to approach the learning as a team and to come together as an administrative team.

William shared with me was that he had a “career assistant principal” who was at the school when he came there as principal. He remained, by choice, an assistant principal. At the time of our interview, he had another assistant principal who told him that he could mentor her and give her this responsibility and that task, but bottom line she said, “I don’t ever want your job.” She was another “career assistant principal” by choice who was a very good administrator. William told me that he asked one of his assistant principals who later became a principal what he could have done that would have made a difference for her. She told him that she always knew that he was there to pick up the pieces for her. She said that she wished that just one time something would have fallen apart and she would have had to put the pieces back together by herself. Reflection was the lesson William took from this. So now he asks his assistant principals to reflect on their decisions and then come back and share with him their rationale. “Giving them the opportunity to think through situations is extremely important.” William is a very reflective principal and he has learned that he has to set the processes in place to teach his assistant principals to be reflective practitioners.

Emily also talked about the benefits of reflection as one of her principal mentors would not just point out to her a mistake that she made, but he would instead ask her why she did something a particular way or why she responded to a situation the way she did.

He is a very deep thinker, that makes you think, and so he used a lot of strategies with me. He would say to me ‘come on, sit down, and tell me what you think about this.’ And the one thing that I always enjoyed about him was that even if I screwed up, I felt like he had my back, in public.

Later she said he would bring me into his office he would say, “Okay, now that may not have been the best way to deal with this.”

Elton shared with me that his mentoring principal gave him a copy of the self-assessment that is a part of her executive evaluation and encouraged him to use it. She told him that at the end of the year she would reflect with him about what areas he had developed in and what he had accomplished using those same criteria. He was quite excited about being given this opportunity. Diana, his principal, talked about this as well. She said,

The first thing we did was we sat down and went over the new principal rating instrument so that he could understand kind of what I was being evaluated on and what he would be evaluated on as a principal, and the areas he needed to be proficient in. We talked about each area and some projects or tasks that he thought he could grow in for that area, because he said that primarily he was a disciplinarian before.

What a great strategy to facilitate reflection and collaboration between the members of the administrative team! She actually did tell him that the one thing that helped her so

much as an assistant principal was that she was treated as an equal and an important member of the administrative team. She wanted to set up that situation for him.

Emily also talked to me about that reflection and interaction piece of the mentorship. With her former principal, he engaged her in discussions about situations all throughout the day, first thing in the morning, and at the end of the day. Her current principal utilized more of an “end of the day” administrative meeting format. Emily said that she felt more reflective and grew more in the model where she engaged in meaningful dialogue all throughout the day.

Michael said that when he became an assistant principal his principal told him from the start that she was looking for him to be a principal. She told him that she felt that she had two years to get him ready. He can look back now and see that she organized everything to put him in a good position for that to happen. He said of her, “She was always teaching.” He handled tough situations. He worked with teachers on Action Plans for improvement. This was in a middle school setting and he was like the “8th grade principal.”

Control was a topic that came up several times in discussing the mentoring role. Beth made an interesting statement about control. She said, “If you need to be in control of a situation, and if you think you need an assistant principal, you’re not going to mentor them well.” She also felt very strongly that a person’s ability to be an effective mentor directly related to their specific leadership style. A principal who is power hungry will most likely not be an effective mentor. She said that she feels training on how to be an effective mentor would be helpful for principals who have a genuine desire to grow

future principals and don't have a desire to have all the power in their position. She also felt that it is key to select the right people to be in the schools. School districts must be intentional about who they select to lead particular schools and about who has the skill set to be an effective assistant principal mentor or the desire to learn that skill set.

James was so pleased with the mentorship he had as a first year principal that he replicated the process for his beginning teachers. He had a formal principal mentor assigned by the district and a coach who was a retired principal from another district. He had given each new teacher a teacher in the building who had the mentor training as their paid mentor as well as assigning them a former teacher as their sort of coach. When he spoke of his principal mentor that he had as an assistant principal, he said, "There were times where we just bounced ideas, and then there were some times when he would give him a situation and ask him what he would do in that situation." In situations when James was in his principal's office he found that he was getting more and more opportunities to stay and see how a situation was going to be handled. It was important to him for to have a lot of different kinds of experiences. His principal mentor started being more intentional about saying, "I want you to stay in here and hear how I handle this situation because this will help you."

Rod reflected back over his assistant principal experience with his principal as his mentor and said, "I can look back and see that everything that she did, every job that she gave me, was to be a principal and not to be just an assistant principal." His relationship with that principal coupled with the knowledge that she trusted him and helped prepare him for a principalship was very important to him. He still maintained a close

professional relationship with her. He felt that assistant principals whose principals felt that they should only be give assistant principal things to do, that they only have the standard assistant principal roles and duties, are at such a disadvantage. It won't matter how long those assistant principal are in that role, they will not get the quality mentoring and preparation from that principal that they need to ensure success. Rod was so grateful to Beth and he made that very clear. Rod was also very clear about the other administrators who have been informal mentors to him. Another first year principal has been his confidant and peer mentor. Rod said, "You remember those bracelets they came out with WWJD (What Would Jesus Do)? James and I have different bracelets; I've got a WWJD (What Would James Do) bracelet. We know each other's strengths."

Stephen made an interesting point. He said that the principal's role is to impact student achievement and that a big part of that might be mentoring your assistant principal. If we asked a whole district of principals to list the ways that they impact student achievement I have to wonder how many would list mentoring their assistant principal(s) as one of those ways. Stephen made quite a statement that deserves much reflection. Certainly, effectively mentoring an assistant principal to be a quality instructional leader as well as a quality manager would result in positive gains for staff and students.

John had mentored many assistant principals. He said that his goal was always for them to know as much as he knew and for them to really want his job. He said that everyone always wanted to give their assistant principals responsibility for handling discipline. That was the one thing John did not do at first. He started with the

instructional piece. They did walk-through visits to classrooms and reflected with them about what they observed. He said that he made sure that they knew what good solid instruction looked like. He also tore down walls and put up walls to create spaces for his assistant principal to be out in the building. “There’s no need for all three of them to be sitting up under me. They need to be out there, as a first line of defense.”

Carole offered an interesting perspective on ensuring that principals are effective mentors. She offered that just like beginning teachers had a paid mentor who met with them throughout the year and provided them with additional support, maybe beginning assistant principals could have a paid mentor as well. That mentor would receive a monthly stipend and training, if needed, to provide quality mentoring to the assistant principal.

Coaches versus Mentors

I talked with the educators about the difference between a principal mentor and an outside coach and what the benefits of what that coaching piece might be for an assistant principal. Elton said that he thought it would be great to have a coach as an assistant principal who could follow you into your first year principalship. He would want a person who would be very honest with him and not evaluate him on the fact that he is such a nice person, because he said, “Niceness isn’t going to get it!” Elton felt that if he were going into a principalship next year, he would need a coach who could help him with budget issues as that is an area he still feels uncomfortable with.

I would want that person to just come by and kind of look at the environment just making sure that I’m addressing all the areas as far as instruction; making sure that I have that eagle’s eye; making sure I’m honing in and covering every aspect;

making sure that all the instructional needs of the school are being met; making sure that I have a warm environment that's student-centered; and making sure that I have that professional learning community within and networking within my school.

Grandiose Unified School District had a coaching program in place for all of their first year principals and some of their second and third year principals. Rod said that while his coach was excellent he had limited access to her so that he really only saw her for an hour or so every few weeks. He felt that having a coach when he was an assistant principal who could have followed him into his first year principalship would have been very beneficial.

Marie said that she would want a coach who would have a checklist for her to make sure she knows everything she needs to know about fire drills, data management systems, custodians, cafeteria, and other specific areas. Brittney said about a coach,

They wouldn't necessarily have to be outside of Grandiose Unified School District, but not attached to the district would probably be better because even with the highest level of professionalism, everyone talks about things. And you are a lot more free to be open and honest and candid when you are a lot more secure that what you are saying is not going to be repeated. And so I would definitely have to have that level of trust with an individual that, you know, you're not going out and having dinner with my principal after our session.

The Coaches Speak

I interviewed two retired principals who are from other districts and have served in the role of a coach to first and second year principals. Barbara said that she felt the most important part of her coaching was asking the right questions and then giving the principals adequate wait time. Sometimes she had to consider other ways to ask the

question to get the novice administrator to reflect and problem-solve appropriately. When I asked her about her coaching style she said that she utilized pieces of several different coaching models including the use of the national coaching standards. She said that the model she used most often was blended coaching. It is a combination of directive, consultative, and collaborative approaches that are utilized dependent on the situation. Blended coaching is a research-based method used to help novice principals as they face common obstacles and pressures. Directives are sometimes necessary, but she cautions against it if at all possible. Getting these novice principals to be reflective has proven to be one challenge of the coaching model.

Both coaches agreed on several main points. They both felt strongly that the coaches must come from another district. They agreed that this increases the feelings of trust and confidentiality that are crucial. Confidentiality was the other common aspect that they both stressed. Barbara said that there must not be a reporting system in which the coach had conversation with the principal's supervisor. Robert and Barbara both felt very strongly that they must not have an evaluative role with the principal and that they could not discuss concerns with the evaluator or the trust would be destroyed. Barbara admitted though that she would not allow a district to get into legal trouble because of the possible actions of one of her charges. Both coaches were also very clear about the benefits that they have reaped from the coaching experience. Barbara said, "I have gained more than anyone I have ever coached." Staying current on the latest research and trends in education in addition to the collaborative sharing has helped these coaches continue to be lifelong learners as they mold and shape the professional lives of these young

administrators. Robert said that he has learned many new ideas from the principals he has coached. He notes that he is a better coach because he has to do so much research in order to support his principals and because of the reciprocal sharing between him and the principals.

When asked to consider how their coaching might be different if it were directed at assistant principals, Barbara said that she would want to make sure that her coaching was parallel with the training that the assistant principals were receiving in the aspiring principals' academy. Asking questions that build upon the questions from that experience would serve to further enhance the experience. She would want the experience to be very hands-on and reflective.

Have all of her principals been successful? Unfortunately, they have not. Barbara said that she would estimate that ninety-five percent of the principals she has coached have become successful principals. She also notes that the ones who have not, lacked the personal and professional maturity to respond to the coaching. It was with pride in her voice that she noted that the coaches have been able to save many principals who were struggling in those first couple of years. What a wonderful feeling of satisfaction that must bring! These two coaches have heard over and over the words that lead me to my initial interest in this topic of assistant principal support, "I thought I was ready for this job, but I didn't have a clue." Once an educator has been named to a principalship, one of the rituals that is very exciting is one that seems very simple. It is the handing over of the keys. Typically, the supervisor meets the new principal at the school and hands over the keys and the school cell phone or Blackberry device. It is sometimes at that moment that

one realizes the awesome responsibility that has just been handed to them. Reality and responsibility settle in. Barbara reflected over the numerous times that novice principals have said to her during their first year principalship, “Barbara, I’m ready to give them back the keys.” I was so emotionally affected by this statement from this coach that I used it in the title of this dissertation. What needs to be done so that new principals never say “I’m ready to give them back the keys?”

My final question to the coaches was to ask them to share their ideas on what could be done to support assistant principals so that they could have a smoother transition to the principalship. Barbara noted that structured professional development such as an aspiring leaders program would be critical to the success of aspiring administrators. These sessions should provide a better understanding of organizational analysis and of how to develop a shared mission and vision, Barbara also noted that the universities and the district have done an excellent job of teaching these administrators how to organize and interpret data, but they don’t know how to build the relationships and foster the support that their staff members need to use the data effectively.

Personnel

Whether it is conducting staff evaluations or dealing with poor performance issues with a staff member, personnel issues are clearly an important part of school administration. Personnel issues are also stressful for administrators for a variety of reasons including relationships with parents, students and staff that can be damaged; student success that can be affected; school culture that can be impacted; financial and

emotional stress that can be created; legal issues that can arise; and large amounts of time that must be invested into adequate monitoring and supporting situations.

Brittney talked about this when we discussed any additional concerns that she would have going into a principalship. She said,

I think I'm still maneuvering my way through, and it's changing right now. I understand the evaluation process. I understand the structure of it. I understand my little color-coded evaluation template and when things are due. But, when there is an issue, how and what are all the necessary steps to address those issues? And I don't know if that's on a case by case basis, but we know it's just very difficult to get rid of or to help mediocre or below standard teacher move on. Maybe there's not a road map to that, but I guess just making sure that everything is documented.

She said that she had never experienced working with a teacher on an action plan so that would be another growth opportunity for her.

William said that he doesn't let his assistant principals write action plans. He does have them write letters that will go to the employee's personnel file, but he has them share them with him first so he can give feedback and so he doesn't get any surprises. He tells his assistant principals "I don't like surprises, other than birthday gifts." There is a delicate balance between empowering the assistant principal and staying informed of potentially explosive situations as the principal.

William feels that it has been critical to involve his assistant principals in the hiring process. Especially since he has moved them to the title of "grade level administrator," he wants them to have more control and input over who is hired on their grade level.

I definitely allow them to be involved in the hiring process for teachers on their grade level. That has been something that I've had assistant principals say to me that their principals have never included them in before. I would have assumed that most did, just because you want more than one opinion and more than one perspective, so we do involve them in that.

Elton shared that he was able to be an integral part of the process involving a teacher whose performance was well below standard. He was able to see the whole process that led up to the dismissal of this teacher. "Had I never experienced that I would not have known where to begin. Just being able to follow that through was a very good opportunity for me."

James said that one struggle he had faced as a first year principal was having some staff members who had stopped growing professionally.

Some of my teachers have kind of reached a plateau. They're not going to grow. They still have maybe two more years to retirement. It's frustrating because I really don't think they're harming kids. I don't think it's bad instruction. It's just not great. And so it's frustrating for me to know that they're never going to do anything that's going to be enough to push them out and if I push them that they're not really going to grow, it's just going to be a tear festival. When we start talking about reflective practices and meaningful grade level meetings and really using the data to drive our instruction that's when all the other excuses come in. So trying to work through that, that's tough!

How does a young, motivated, innovative young administrator handle veteran staff members who have reached a plateau in their career and just want to be left alone until they can retire? That's a daunting task for a veteran principal let alone a novice. Again, personnel issues are so emotionally charged. Maybe these educators aren't really harming children but they surely aren't helping them reach their full potential.

Advocacy

One of the topics that generated a lot of interesting discussion was advocacy. Who should advocate for assistant principals? What should that advocacy look like? Who are the people the advocates need to talk to? Why is advocacy critical?

I intentionally interviewed some principals and assistant principals who work together now or had worked together in the past to look for patterns and trends. I interviewed Beth Easter for this reason. Two of her former assistant principals, Diana and Rod spoke very highly about her role in not only building their leadership capacity but in how she advocated for them. Rod shared that Beth was a “true advocate.” He felt that she “sold” him every chance she got. She was always telling people at the district level about what a great job Rod did with particular tasks. When she was out of school for medical reasons, Rod ran the school for about six weeks at the beginning of the school year.

Diana also had Beth as a supervising principal. Diana is now a principal supervising an assistant principal herself. She said that Beth was a good role model for her. She sees the difference in a principal who is an advocate and one who is not as how they view their assistant principal. She said,

. . . some people view an assistant principal as ‘Okay, this is someone that helps me get the job done. I can’t live without him, and I don’t want him to leave yet’. And then some people view their assistant principals as ‘I’m growing this person.’ And I think the greatest compliment that could ever happen to me was if he (her current assistant principal, Elton Monroe) became a principal and was successful and could speak about me like I speak about Beth.

Diana said that she has told Elton, “Why don’t you go to this? You be the representative here because you need to get your name out there.” This trio of administrators

exemplifies how important modeling can be. Beth modeled advocacy and Diana has taken what she learned from that modeling and has applied it to herself as the advocate for her assistant principal. The circle of support and advocacy continues.

Advocacy was discussed in relationship to the mentor/mentee relationship between the principal and the assistant principal. John said, “I think the principal has to play a key role in saying yay or nay to whether or not a person is ready. I’ve had two to leave, become principals, and I had told central office that they were not ready, and it showed. They weren’t bad people. They were excellent administrators, but they just needed another year of some things that we just didn’t get to make happen.” He also said that when he feels that one of his assistant principals is ready, he gives them more responsibility that year. Diana said that she is constantly seeking opportunities for her assistant principal to get his name out there. She lets him do even simple things like the phone messages to all parents.

Stephen feels that exposure is so important in advocating for your assistant principal. The principal has to get their name out there, have conversations with key people in Human Resources and bring the assistant principals to principal meetings and other district functions. Having intentional discussions was talked about a lot. Principals said that they have to have discussions with their assistant principals about their career goals and how they can help them reach those goals, and assistant principals said that they have to have conversations with their principal about being their advocate and about giving them the rich experiences they need to be ready to be a principal.

Bo feels that one key piece in the advocacy arena is visibility. He had his assistant principals divide up the professional development that had to be delivered to teachers regarding the new teacher evaluation program that the state was about to roll out the next year. He felt that getting his assistant principal out in front of the faculty in that leadership role was an important way to increase their visibility with the entire middle school staff.

When William and I talked about advocacy for his assistant principals, he said, “Well I think it is my role to do that if I feel like I’ve given them every opportunity.” He talked about his various experiences over the years regarding those who were ready and those who were not. Some had the skills they needed, but lacked that “political” edge or an inability to know when to be “politically correct.”

Elton couldn’t contain his smile as he shared with me about his principal’s advocacy for his career. “Her goal is for me not to be here forever. It’s for me to be able to get a school and to do well, because she feels as though it’s a reflection of her and how she has trained and molded me and prepared me to be that successful instructional leader.”

Trust

The trust factor is *so* critical. Michael said that he uses his district mentor to ask the questions about who to call and procedural things, but it is his coach from outside the district that he calls to ask for advice with problem situations or challenges. Diana talked a lot about the trusting relationship that she has with the retired coach who has been with her since she started as a principal mid-year. She said that it has been her coach’s sole

purpose to build her up. She admitted that most principals did not trust their coaches at first. They were very skeptical that the coaches were reporting back their faults to supervisors. It took time for that to be proven untrue. She also said that the trust factor was higher when they knew that the coaches were being paid out of a grant. She said that once the district started paying for part of those salaries for the coaches, the suspicion crept right back in with principals and coaches who had not established a trusting relationship yet. Her coach was “dead set against” the district’s financial support of the program.

When we were talking about what he was satisfied about with regards to his job, Matthew said that he was satisfied in the fact that he knows he has the support and mentorship of his principal. “He trusted me, there’s a big trust factor there, and he was willing to take a risk on a first year assistant principal. He’s really trusted me and I’m very pleased with that.”

James found himself in an interesting position as a first year principal at a school that had had lots of principal turnover over the past few years. He said that the lack of trust in administrators was very evident. He had to reflect on how he could both establish that trust and ensure that the staff would see him as the instructional leader. He also knew that he had to build trust with his parent community.

I don’t feel like I cater to parents I just felt like I have them a chance to be heard, express how they feel. Their views are important. And at the end of the day I still stand my ground but I think part of that was from establishing some really good trust up front. I think I’ve become more of a presence in their community.

Professional Development

Professional development is always a hot topic in education. So what about assistant principals? What would benefit them? Many of these administrators had been a part of collaboration between a local university and the school district. A university professor provided professional development targeted specifically for assistant principals, a sort of “Assistant Principal Leadership Academy.” The feedback from everyone regarding this experience was extremely positive. They were given practical, applicable assignments and then received feedback. They discussed topics such as cultural leadership, instructional leadership, managerial leadership, and other key components of educational leadership that would help these assistant principals grow in preparation for a principalship.

James said that the only problem with the experience was that they would spend time talking about how to be an instructional leader one month, but then they would go back to school the next day in their role as an assistant principal and not be able to fully implement what they had discussed. “When you got back to your school the next day, you still were passing out keys and counting textbooks.” Regarding these sessions Brittney said, “Class really aligned closely with the leadership standards and understanding the leadership standards, which is important, and which has its place, but that’s the philosophy of it and what you’d have to do is then translate that into daily application.”

We discussed the pros and cons of whether assistant principals should attend district principal meetings. Most elementary schools in the district did not have assistant

principals so it would be easier to bring the assistant principals who are in elementary schools. We discussed that at middle and high schools maybe there could be a rotation for assistant principals so that they at least got to attend a few meetings a year. It was also noted that bringing them to district meetings does give them a chance to network and get their names out there. Diana was able to attend all of the principal meetings when she served her internship for a full year. I was the supervisor for the school where she was interning. She told me that she felt that attending my principal meetings were learning experiences for her. "I got to meet sixteen other principals. It was huge." The networking served Diana well. She established friendships and professional relationships with many principals that year. She also shared an interesting story with me about a situation that occurred when she was an assistant principal. The school board attorney was presenting a session on "Legal Updates" for principals only.

Diana's principal called the superintendent to request that Diana be allowed to attend with her. When he declined she told him that her assistant principal was dealing with many of the same issues that she was dealing with, same parents, same discipline issues, and that she needed to attend that training as well. After the superintendent informed the principal that growing her assistant principal was her job, she agreed with him, but also shared her concern that the district was not doing anything to support these aspiring principals. Her question to him was, "Are you growing principals or are you growing assistant principals?" A few days later Diana received an email inviting all assistant principals to attend the legal update session. I loved this story because it goes to

the core of both professional development and advocacy. Sometimes you have to advocate for an entire group of people and not just your own employee.

We also discussed the disadvantages of working the internship as a full time working teacher. Many felt that the Principal Fellows who got to work a full year internship received much better preparation and had richer experiences. We talked about internship experiences as well in many cases. Matthew was quick to point out that he felt very fortunate to have been one of the Principal Fellows. He believes that the ten month internship was a huge asset. The opportunities that this afforded him not only in being fully immersed in an administrative experience but also with the time and opportunities to shadow different administrators at different levels and at different types of schools were tremendous. The conferences, the shadowing and the coursework formed a triangle of preparation for him. He admitted that some classes were better than others but that overall about 90% of them were very meaningful. Diana also talked about the Principal Fellows Program and how that experience helped her. She said, "I got to just live the life of a principal for a whole year and I think that's what sets the Principal Fellows internship principals apart from others is because they know how to do that." We talked about the fact that Principal Fellow interns could attend principal meetings each month. Assistant principals do not get that opportunity. She said that those meetings gave her both the opportunity to network and to learn firsthand about so many issues. She felt that the Principal Fellows had a lot of experiences as interns that assistant principals don't have coming straight out of the masters program.

James was in the Principal Fellows Program as well and also talked about how beneficial that full year internship was. Michael shared that his internship experience was less than desirable. He did his internship like many others while he was a teacher. He said that his experiences were more like projects. When he became an assistant principal, that school had an intern that first year who was a Principal Fellow. He noted the quality and quantity of experiences that this person was able to receive in being in a full year internship, in actuality, was like serving as an assistant principal.

So they walked out there basically having a year of assistant principal experience under their belt. They had confident, solid assistant principal experience, and we treated them like equals. They were better prepared after a month of their internship experience than I was after my whole program.

James also talked about being allowed to attend monthly principals' meetings and being on the forefront of those conversations at those meetings. A former human resources executive director once commented to me that it was interesting that interns were invited to monthly principals' meetings, but assistant principals were not. Some give the argument that an administrator needs to remain at the school during that time, but many elementary schools do not have assistant principals and the principals go to monthly meetings leaving their schools without an administrator. What does it say about leadership if the school cannot run without the principal in the building or without all of the administrators in the building for a few hours? Has true leadership capacity been developed at the building level? Are there structures and processes and communication in place that should make it a "non-issue" for the administrators to be off campus once a month for a few hours?

James reflected back over his experience at the university as we discussed professional development and needs. He said,

They did a great job of preparing me to be a principal, but did a horrible job at preparing me to be an assistant principal. Nothing that I learned in that program prepared me for how to be under someone else's leadership. So there were times when I felt like I didn't have the skills that I needed to walk out of a closed meeting with all the administrators together and fully implement and support a plan that I absolutely did not believe in. That was tough.

What great insight! Rod's comments on this topic were very similar. "I think I felt more prepared to be a principal than an assistant principal. I mean I think the program prepares you well to be a principal, but then I am coming from the experience of being able to take a whole year to be only a student to focus only on learning about leadership." Their comments caused me to actually reflect on my own past experiences. I have to agree with him in that I left my university experience ready to conquer the world of educational leadership. I was ready, willing, and eager to be a principal, but I wasn't sure what being an assistant principal was going to look like. I became a principal three weeks after being named an assistant principal. That first year was hard, but I was ready for it. I never felt that I couldn't do it. I think that this raises an interesting question about what the university and/or the district might be able to do to fill that gap. Brittney said that completing her internship requirement for the university as a practicing assistant principal was very helpful to her. She did part of her internship while she was a curriculum facilitator and the other part while she was an assistant principal so she had a great frame of reference in comparing the two experiences. She shared, "I was a curriculum facilitator. I was doing assistant principal-like things, but not with the level of

accountability. So actually, being an assistant principal and doing your internship, I think was meaningful.”

Matthew felt like some sort of transitional class offered at the university for assistant principals to take maybe the year before becoming a principal would be beneficial. He said, “It would have to be very concrete and practical, because people don’t want to hear about theory when they’re going into their first year.” Elton agreed that a transitional class would just add another layer of support to the cohort class that he had been involved in for assistant principals offered by the district and facilitated by a local university professor.

Brittney expressed a concern as an assistant principal hoping to become a principal that she might not be current on legal issues. “There are just legal issues out there that I’m not even aware it’s a legal issue. You know, I mean we had the law class, but you know, maybe just some highlights, these are some things that the Grandiose Unified School District lawyer has had to deal with.”

District’s Role

Carole said that she feels that school districts should be more intentional about creating transition plans for assistant principal transitioning to the principal. She suggests that if an assistant principal were to follow her as the principal of her current school, the district should ensure that the assistant principal spend a minimum of two months at the school getting to know people, getting to learn the staff, and taking the time to see how things operate at the school. She was also clear in her feelings about the placement of

assistant principal as principals in highly impacted schools. She feels that the district should stop putting first year principals into struggling Title I schools.

This district had an Induction and Success Executive Director. She provided monthly meetings for first year principals throughout that first year that provided additional training and assistance in a variety of areas. Many of the people I interviewed spoke of the benefit of this program. They also spoke about the support of that director. Michael said, "I'd like to take an opportunity to say what a valuable role she plays. She is the easy one to call. She's the one that I call with the nuances of the district. I call her to see if an issue is something that I need to talk to my supervisor about." He said that she has played an important coaching role for him. She spends a full week with them in the summer. He said that although he hated being out of the building that week, he walked away from that training with things in hand that made his life much easier. They organized their staff evaluations and worked on staff handbooks. The week was practical and hands-on. He laughed and said that he wished he could have gone back this past summer just to have that uninterrupted time to collaborate and work on things. He also noted a character trait about this director that has been so critical: TRUST.

Quality and Quantity of Experiences

What matters more, the length of time that one is in the assistant principalship or the quality of the experiences they have? Is it a combination of both of these factors? There were different schools of thought from these interviewees on the amount of time one might need as an assistant principal before moving to a principalship. Emily told me that she did not have a support network when she was a principal and didn't know how to

get one. She said that she was scared for anyone to know that she didn't know about a particular topic. She left the principalship and became an assistant principal again. She had been in this role for four years when I interviewed her. She said, "When I went back to the assistant principal role of course there was that oh, my gosh, you know, the defeatist attitude. It was awful, you know, my self-esteem was low, but it's the best thing I could have done, because I have learned so much from so many people. I would be a proponent of having experience in different places and from different people."

Emily had a difficult experience the first time around as a principal. When we discussed her future she said,

I don't want to into anything that I don't feel would be a good fit for me. I am very cautious, I think more so than maybe some younger assistant principals that are killing for the experience. I've kind of had a taste of it. I know the demands. I want to make sure that I'm ready and that the people I've worked with feel that I can do this.

She was currently enrolled in a sort of "advanced assistant principal" class designed by the district for those who might be ready for a principalship. Participants had to have their principal's recommendation. Emily said that it had been intense but very relevant.

Michael shared that he was offered a principalship after a year and half as an assistant principal. The principal of that school was leaving and he was recommended to replace her. He said that he just didn't feel ready and that his second child was on the way. He admitted that he was a little nervous about turning down the offer, but he was assured that his situation was understood and there were would be other opportunities for him down the road. Indeed there were.

Struggles

Carole talked a lot about how difficult the first year in a principalship is:

I'm very comfortable in this role now but as a beginning principal, you have to make so many decisions and you're worried about who's going to be your friends, there are so many emotions. You don't know that being an assistant principal. I don't think there is anything that you can do to prepare someone for that experience other than interning.

Carole has had several current principal serve their internship under her leadership. She feels that she did a better job of preparing them for the principalship than she is currently able to do with her assistant principal. Diana had an interesting perspective on the principals in this district who consistently host principal interns. She said about them, "They know how to facilitate the principalship not just do it." Diana was an intern with one of these principals, Carole, and she said that she always felt like she was being groomed to be a principal, not an assistant principal. She says that she was set up for success because of the strong mentoring she had as an intern and as an assistant principal.

So now you have met the administrators whose interviews and the insights they shared are the heart of this research. They are a diverse group in many ways including quality and quantity of experience. They shared openly and honestly about their experiences, their struggles, the successes and their challenges. Trust was a hot topic with each of them. We discussed everything from instructional leadership to budget concerns to mentorships to professional development. In Chapter V, I will sum up what I have learned in this research process and make some recommendations that I hope will lead to a smoother transition to the principalship for future generations of school leaders.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to seek a solution to the problem of assistant principals moving to a principalship unprepared for the daunting task before them, overburdened by the stress of the job, and frustrated to the point of wanting to hand the key of the building back to their supervisor. I entered this research seeking answers to the main question: What are the supports, as perceived by principals, assistant principals, and principal coaches that are needed for assistant principals that will provide a smooth transition to the principalship? The data that I gathered from nineteen interviews will be summarized in this final chapter.

While the interviews yielded rich perspectives and multiple viewpoints, this chapter will summarize these findings and make recommendations based on what I have learned from these professionals. In this final chapter I will bring together the knowledge I gleaned from an extensive literature review with the voices of the practitioners. Through rich dialogue and reflection with those assistant principals, novice principals, principal mentors, and principal coaches, much was learned and much is yet to be learned. Who is this research for? Who can affect change? What areas deserve further study? The answers to these questions and more are examined in this chapter with a conclusion about what all of this means for the university, the school district, and the practitioners themselves. This

is not the end but only the beginning of what can and should be done to support this critical, understudied, and misunderstood group of professionals.

Two of the secondary questions that I examined in my research were:

- What are the job-related duties of assistant principals and principals, and how do the two positions compare?
- What are the job-related duties of a principal that an assistant principal would need support with in order to ensure a smooth transition to the principalship?

These two sub-questions are very much related. One seeks to compare the duties of the two administrative positions. The other examines which of the duties of a principal an assistant principal would need support with as they transition to the principalship.

Let's look at some assistant principal and principal duties that my participants identified.

Duties Compared and Supported for Success

Hot Seat

When the work of the principal is compared to the work of the assistant principal, one can begin to see the dichotomy. Davis, Darling-Hammond, and Meyerson (2005) are quick to remind us that principals are in the hot seat to improve teaching and learning. Their description of the many roles that principals play could actually create a check list for assistant principals to assess whether they are experiencing these roles as an assistant principal. The list is daunting: curriculum leader, assessment expert, disciplinarian, community builder, public relations expert, budget analyst, facility manager, special programs administrator, legal expert, policy overseer, and conflict resolution expert. Are assistant principals feeling the pressure of that hot seat too? Many are not due to the

nature of their work. Having more experiences in these roles could help prevent that assistant principal from feeling like what DeLeon (2006) describes as “deer caught in the headlights” or “in the eye of the storm.”

Even in the best of situations for an assistant principal, there is a huge gap that exists in the perceptions and realities of the role of assistant principal. They have long been viewed as the principal’s helper, not a member of an administrative team. It really is a dual role. On the one hand, the assistant principal has the traditional “helper” types of tasks, and on the other hand they are being assigned tasks designed to groom them for a principalship. There seem to be two distinct career paths with assistant principals. There are some assistant principals who are very happy in their role and do not want the top position. They do not want the high level of accountability and responsibility that comes with the principalship. Obviously their support and professional development might be structured differently from that of assistant principals who are using the assistant principalship as a stepping stone to the principalship.

The assistant principalship has a nebulous job description at best. Expectations for the job vary from state to state, district to district and school to school. These administrators leave the ranks of the university preparation program and internship experiences to enter a job that is ill-defined and vague.

Challenges of the Roles

In examining my findings I would have to say that there was an intense focus on the challenges of the principalship and the assistant principalship. After all, an interest in

the struggles and challenges that first year principals face is what started this research in the first place.

While many challenges were discussed, the ones that really stood out and were discussed with great frequency were the lack of time to stop and reflect; the overwhelming amount of discipline to be handled; the need to balance instructional leadership with managerial leadership; the responsibility of ensuring that the school is a safe environment; and the necessity to build critical relationships with students, parents, and staff. Administrators make dozens of decisions a day and must be able to multitask due to the number of tasks they attend to each day. Being able to learn, understand, and shape the culture of the school is also a critical challenge for administrators. There is little doubt that the multitude of challenges associated with both the assistant principalship and the principalship are contributing factors to the stress, frustration, and overwhelming nature of the job, and is inevitably an underlying reason for the exodus from administration.

Beyond Buses, Butts, and Books

The experiences and types of tasks that each assistant principal experienced were so varied. Some assistant principals cited primary responsibilities such as supervising custodians, coordinating buses and handling bus discipline, dealing with behavioral issues, attending Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings, managing textbooks, and other tasks mainly related to management and discipline. Some assistant principals did talk about attending grade level meetings, conducting teacher evaluations, and making informal classroom visits to assess instruction and classroom management. It seemed that

the tasks were directly related to the leadership of the principal and how they perceived the role.

While the variety of experiences that assistant principals had fell from one end of the spectrum to the other, none of the assistant principal experiences had the same frequency, accountability, intensity and stress as those of the principal experiences. Some assistant principals I interviewed did the traditional jobs that we have for years associated with the job: managing buses, discipline, and books. Other assistant principals had richer and more varied experiences. With such variance in experiences, how can structures be put into place to ensure that all assistant principals receive the support they need to make a smooth transition to the principalship?

Instruction, Curriculum, and Budget: OH MY!

The two areas that just about every assistant principal felt that they needed more experience with were instructional leadership and budget. Going back to the literature, Good (2008) gives assistant principals specific suggestions about how they can increase the instructional leadership skills that will help them as they become principals. From ensuring that their principal knows that this is a priority to them to taking the initiative to assuming a more active role in curriculum and instruction, the assistant principal can set processes in place to strengthen this skill set.

Instructional leadership was at the core of every conversation. The role of the principal has shifted over the past years from that of manager to that of instructional leader. This is not a new concept inasmuch as Lambert (1998) pointed out over twelve years ago that student learning is the content of leadership. It was clear from the

interviews that all administrators are clear that this is a critical part of their job. Some of the assistant principals who either came from a counseling or coaching background shared their apprehension at being a strong instructional leader inasmuch as they had so much to learn about the curriculum. It was also clear though that they understand the need to be strong, effective managers. Multitasking and knowing all of the facets of budgeting, personnel, and the law are concerns that all administrators share.

Marshall and Hooley (2006) expand in greater detail about how assistant principals can stay internally focused on instructional leadership. Their book, *The Assistant Principal: Leadership Choices and Challenges*, really serves as an excellent assistant principal handbook. They suggest strategies to build instructional leadership such as goal setting, reading current literature about instructional trends, monitoring a best practice, attending professional development, leading professional learning communities, and securing a mentor who has a strength in instructional leadership. For many of the new principals I interviewed, they shared that learning how to be an effective instructional leader proved to be an enormous learning curve. Many of them became principals at a level where they had never taught, so learning the curriculum was a challenge. The scenario I heard the most was that of a middle school teacher or assistant principal who became an elementary principal. They expressed much anxiety and stress over learning the elementary curriculum.

Budget was the other big stressor for the assistant principals I interviewed. While most expressed at least a working knowledge of the workbook process by which principals allocate their resources, both monetary and personnel, the budgetary process is

what assistant principals felt unprepared for. They stated that they didn't know about transferring funds, reading monthly budget reports, and understanding what each budget code means as far as what they could do with the money in each area. Most of them spoke of their nervousness about budget. One of their goals for that year was to express this lack of preparation to their supervising principal and to request more hands-on experience with the budgetary process.

What's in a Name?

Should we even have assistant principals? Perhaps the role needs to be redefined. The assistant principalship encompasses two roles in one. On one hand, the assistant principalship is a supportive and assistive position to the principal and on the other hand the assistant principalship is a training ground for the principalship. Should our education system adopt a more easily defined role such as co-principal or grade level administrator?

Assistant principals need to be part of the administrative team. Team is a key term here. The model that sometimes exists is that the principal and assistant principal operate as separate administrative entities, not as an administrative team. Wise (2004) is clear that it is the team approach in which members of the team are instructional leaders who create systems to monitor student progress that is most successful in meeting the accountability requirements within the educational system.

The concept of administrative teams as opposed to the traditional principal/assistant principal hierarchy requires consideration and further study as the stigma associated with the term "assistant principal" might stifle effectiveness. Perhaps even the term "assistant principal" needs to be reexamined. Middle schools and high schools lend

themselves to this idea more easily than elementary schools. They can use the term grade level administrator as William did. He said that it took away the stigma that an assistant principal was not really an administrator but more of an assistant to the principal.

Assistant principals have the same university degree as principals. They are licensed administrators with all of the rights and responsibilities that go with that title, but in practice they are often no more than “lead teachers” or “principal assistants.” James shared that coming from a middle school assistant principalship where the approach was really that of an administrative team really made it difficult as a first year principal to be the sole administrator at an elementary school. “So being the single administrator, I think, was the biggest challenge.” He talked about having to make difficult decisions without the ability to bounce ideas off of another administrator.

Staying Afloat on Political Waters

Navigating the political waters of the principalship can be a daunting task. Bugbee (2006) reminds us of the pressures from community, government, district office, staff, parents, and teacher unions. With all of the other tasks that an assistant principal transitioning to the principalship must juggle, understanding and maneuvering carefully through politically charged situations can greatly add to the stress of the job.

Main Supports

At the very core of my research was my desire to find answers to my main research question: “What are the supports, as perceived by principals, assistant principals, and principal coaches that are needed for assistant principals that will provide a smooth transition to the principalship?” We understand the problem, but do we have a good

solution? Is it enough to provide a coach to a first year principal? Are new principal academies and assistant principal academies sufficient to provide information and training? Are we being proactive or reactive in addressing this problem? Is waiting until an administrator moves from an assistant principal to a principalship too late to set them up for success? Who is most impacted if this problem is not addressed? Who has the responsibility for ensuring assistant principal and new principal success? Doesn't this question fall into the ethic of care and the ethic of justice? Can we afford to ignore this when there is a looming shortage of future administrators and student achievement in this country continues to fall behind other developed countries? Some of the major types of supports that the administrators I interviewed brought to the forefront are addressed in the next several sections.

Principal Mentors and Outside Coaches

While assistant principals are typically very clear about what they do not feel prepared to handle going into the principalship, they are also very clear about the need for excellent principal mentors and outside coaches. By far, the topics that generated the most discussion in my interviews were mentoring and coaching. There is a great need for both of these supports, and these administrators candidly spoke up about what these supports should look like. The enormity of this topic cannot be understated. Whether it was the role of the principal as the mentor for the assistant principal or the role of an outside coach to provide support for the principal, it was clear that the need for mentoring and coaching was a priority for all of the participants as far as needed supports.

Need versus Mentoring

One of the most profound statements that came out of the interviews about principal mentors was “If you feel that you *need* an assistant principal, you’re probably not going to mentor them well.” If a principal needs to feel that s/he is the person in control s/he is probably not going to be an effective mentor. Can good mentoring be taught, or is it an instinctual skill set? This question generated a lot of discussion. It was generally agreed upon that principals who supervise assistant principals do need some formal training on how to be effective mentors. Whether the supervising principal is a very novice principal himself/herself or is a veteran principal who just does not really know how to be an effective mentor, it is critical that they are trained to be top quality mentors. Most principals agreed that time was their biggest barrier in being effective mentors. Principals and assistant principals must be very intentional about scheduling time to debrief, reflect, and plan together.

Mentoring must involve both quantity and quality of experiences. There are so many facets related to effective mentoring that it should not be left to chance. It was also clear that this must involve a trusting professional relationship where one is not afraid to share leadership and the other is not afraid to take risks. It is especially critical for the principal to see it as their responsibility to grow assistant principals into principals. Several assistant principals noted that they could look back and see that their principal was always preparing them to be a principal and not to be just an assistant principal. That is the type of support that is needed.

The Trusted Coach

One concept that was discussed and generated positive reactions was the effectiveness of an assistant principal being assigned an outside coach for the year prior to being named a principal. This coach would follow them into the first year as a principal. The relationship and the trust would already be established at that point, so the coaching would be even more powerful.

Participants ranked trust as a key requirement for both the coach and mentor relationships. The coaches who were interviewed had great insights into this topic as well. They agreed that they would want to make sure that their coaching for assistant principals was parallel with the training that they were receiving in the aspiring principals' academy. The concept of coaches who are from another school district, usually retired principals, has caught on in many districts. It was clear from talking to administrators from Grandiose Unified School District that confidentiality and trust are precursors to the success of this arrangement. If the coach ever crossed the line and reported something negative to the principal's supervisor, the trust would be gone and the coaching model would be doomed. Even who was paying the coaches was a threat to the trust factor. For years the coaches had been paid from funds from a generous private foundation. The first year that the district decided to take over that role and employ the coaches, there was skepticism, anxiety, and feelings of distrust. The coaches had to work hard to both build the trust and keep that trust for the coaching to be effective.

The question remains, "Who should they be coaching?" As stated earlier, most of the interviewees felt that having a coach as an assistant principal to help bridge that year

prior to being named a principal would be of great benefit, especially if that coach could follow the administrator into the first year as a principal. This would provide a tremendous support that was already girded with trust. Once an assistant principal is deemed ready for a principalship by either the mentoring principal or someone at the district office, a coach could be assigned to them that last year as an assistant principal and follow him/her into the first two years as a principal to offer support and reflection. For the coach and the aspiring administrator this would mean a three year commitment built on mutual trust. This would be quite a costly venture as a coach could only be effective if s/he had an appropriate number of administrators in order to provide the quality and quantity of coaching needed. Retired principal coaches would not come cheaply, but the investment would yield positive outcomes for schools.

Participants did not speak about support from mentors **or** coaches; but rather, they talked about the need for support from mentors **and** coaches. The two people play very distinct and very important roles in providing new school administrators and assistant principals with the support they need.

Mentors and Coaches as Advocates

“Her goal is for me not to be here forever. It’s for me to be able to get a school and to do well, because she feels as though it’s a reflection of her and how she has trained and molded me and prepared me to be that successful instructional leader.” This statement from an assistant principal sums up what advocacy should be.

Who is going to advocate for the assistant principal who is deemed ready for the principalship? What does that advocacy look like? Some principals said that they made

sure their assistant principal had a pet project and that the district office knew about the success of that project. Others said that they made phone calls and let central office personnel know that they had an assistant principal who was ready. Some assistant principals advocated for themselves with their principal. They told their principals that they felt ready for the challenge and solicited their help and support in every way possible. They asked for more responsibility and more experiences. Some principals said that they knew their assistant principal was ready for certain schools that came open but that they feared s/he was not ready to apply for impacted schools that became available. Many of them expressed their concern that young, inexperienced assistant principals had been placed at highly impacted Title I schools in past years, a task for which they were not prepared. They said that these were schools where veteran principals would have had their hands full and inexperienced young administrators took on the challenge.

Informal Colleague Mentors

Support systems range from formal mentors and coaches to informal mentorships. Every person I interviewed talked about the various people they call upon for help. Some called on the Induction and Success coordinator often. Her name was synonymous with trust and confidentiality. As a well-respected administrator in the district for many years, she had built a reputation above reproach. More importantly, she walked the talk. Administrators referred to her as someone they could call upon to give advice, help them fix a mess, and even vent frustrations about the district or school related issues without fear of a breach of confidentiality.

Others called on colleagues who were both principals and assistant principals in the district. Some of those they called upon because of the expertise in certain areas. Others they called upon because of their established reputation of excellence. Still others they called up based on trusting friendship relationships. Some had a close, trusting relationship with a coach if they were new principals. Assistant principals seemed to have a mix of their principal and colleagues. Rod talked about his former principal mentor, Beth, his Principal Fellows colleague and peer, James, and his coach as people he turned to often for advice and reflection.

The evaluator role that the principal serves for the assistant principal may stifle the informal mentoring. For that reason, they sought out people they could call upon to ask questions and seek advice or reflection with. Many confided that they knew the particular strengths of certain people in the district and that they called upon them based on that information.

The Power of Trust and Building Relationships

Relationships are a tremendous variable in the support of assistant principals. Some of the participants interviewed were able to verbalize either the strong, positive relationship they had with their principal or the fact that it was still a “work in progress.” Whether it was verbalized or not, it was clear from the responses throughout the interview process whether the necessary strong relationship that is needed to provide adequate support for the assistant principal was in place.

Trust was mentioned in just about every interview. Assistant principal participants talked about needing and wanting the trust of their principals. New principals talked

about the trust needed between their coaches. Supervising principals talked about the need for trust with their assistant principals. It all goes back to that need for basic trusting, mutually beneficial, supportive relationships that are genuine, honest, and professional. Isn't that what we all crave in our professional and personal lives?

The power of trust cannot be ignored in this study. Those who had it spoke of it with tenderness and smiles, those who don't feel that they have it yet spoke of it in guarded, nervous tones with looks of disappointment and frustration. Perhaps it is the lack of trusting mentors and coaches that has exacerbated the problem of feelings of isolation, loneliness, frustration, and overall stress associated with the principalship. Making the shift from a teacher to an assistant principal creates a relationship gap from the beginning. The new assistant principal no longer hangs out with the teachers in the lounge, goes out to eat with the teachers for a relaxing time of camaraderie, or performs the same types of tasks as their former colleagues. They have crossed over into the administrative realm and become "one of the bosses." Now where do they fit? Building relationships, trusting relationships at that, is a process that has to begin all over them. Once they move to a principalship it starts all over again. Principals who are the only administrator in the building, as is often the case in elementary schools, face even a greater amount of isolation and loneliness. Building strong, positive, supportive relationships that are built on trust are critical for both positions.

"I Didn't Know It Would be Like This!"

The last sub-question, "How well do first year or second year principals feel that they were prepared as assistant principals to meet the challenges of their new role? What

aspects of their preparation do they believe were helpful? What other preparation experiences do they recommend?” evoked many emotions and reactions from my interviewees.

Clearly, the interviews showed that first year principals enter the position with great variance in the level of preparation they received as assistant principals. What surfaced from the research is that even those who felt well-prepared still dealt with significant challenges and a tremendous need for support. The literature review yielded much information on the nature of the principal’s work and the complexity of the job. From instructional leader to manager, principals wear many hats every day and make dozens of both split second decisions and reflective decisions that impact the lives and educational success of their students. This is an awesome responsibility and one that brings with it significant stress, isolation, and frustration. The shift in the focus of the role of principal from that of a manager to that of the instructional leader coupled with increased accountability from the state and national fronts have exacerbated the problem.

Would Professional Development Help?

Should local universities and school systems partner to offer a transitional professional development experience, would that bridge the year between assistant principal to principal? Again, this was a popular idea but it was clarified with the disclaimer that this must be a practical, hands-on experience that is lean on theory and heavy on practical application.

Professional development must be practical and meaningful. Practical application was a term I heard a lot. It was clear that these administrators were well versed in theory

and commitment but the gap between that and having opportunities for practice and reflection were missing.

There was a great deal of praise for the assistant principal academy that the Grandiose Unified School District had offered. It was taught by a university professor who was a former principal in the district. Participants agreed that the information that was included was beneficial and reflective. They also said that it was most beneficial when it was something they could take back and immediately apply to their practice. Some said that their time at this seminar was the main opportunity that they had to actually reflect on their practice and network with their colleagues. The frustration was clear with those assistant principals who had attended this training but had not been given the opportunities back at their school to put their learning into practice. Maybe sessions should be scattered throughout the trainings for the supervising principals of these assistant principals with the expectation from the district that the learning experiences be applicable back at the school. At the very least providing the mentoring principal with a list of the topics and some suggestions for ways they could provide opportunities for their assistant principals to practice that skill would have been very helpful. The best professional development that could possibly exist falls short if the participants are not able to apply their learning to real situations.

Opportunities for Professional Networking

Networking is critical for administrators. It was very interesting to note the connections that each of my interviewees had to other administrators in the district. Those connections ranged from teaching together, to working together as principals and

assistant principals, to working on university projects as cohort participants, to networking in support groups such as those provided by Induction and Success Departments or university partnership classes. The tentacles of these administrators reached far and wide to find support, share advice, voice frustrations, seek solutions, learn tips and management style, serve on committees, and to build a network that would ultimately help them reach their goal of becoming a successful principal.

As an educator, administrator, and researcher I have examined this research in light of recommendations that can be made for assistant principals, principal mentors, researchers, school districts, policy makers, and universities. Following are my recommendations as they relate to the research questions

Recommendations for Assistant Principals

Assistant principals should look for projects and activities that will allow them to utilize the skills they learned in their university program and internship as well as those that focus on their passions and interests in education. Taking on such responsibilities and activities will not only provide rich experiences but will also assist the administrator in establishing trust and credibility. Assistant principals should be their own advocates in many ways. Finding ways to get their name out there in the spotlight and networking with other administrators will serve them well. They also need to ensure that their principal is their advocate.

Building a trusting relationship and establishing an excellent reputation and work ethic will provide the impetus for the principal to step forward and advocate for their assistant principal. Assistant principals also need to make sure that their principal knows

and understands their career goals. They should tell the principal up front that they aspire to become a principal and ask for the experiences they need to make that happen. The assistant principal should ask for more responsibility, feedback, and opportunities to practice leadership skills in all areas.

Professional development is also instrumental for assistant principals in preparing for the principalship. They should not only participate in seminars for assistant principals and course designed to prepare one for the principalship, but they should also seek out other professional development opportunities that will enhance their growth as educational leaders. Marshall and Hooley (2006) advocate for conferences as they tend to cover a large variety of topics and at typically reasonably priced. An assistant principal survey studied by Marshall and Hooley (2006) suggests professional development that focuses on community relations, discipline management, staff evaluation, instructional leadership, legal issues, emergency situations, drug education, computer skills, facilities management, scheduling, fund-raising, and extracurricular supervision. Positive approaches to discipline management topped the list. Assistant principals should focus on development in these areas and any others that they determine are areas of need for them as determined by reflection, a needs assessment, or recommendations from a mentor or coach.

Often school districts provide assistant principal academies that are taught by university professors or retired principals. Assistant principals should take advantage of opportunities such as this that will provide knowledge and skills as well as networking, collaboration, and reflection. It is important to remember that no amount of professional

development will really improve the assistant principal or provide them with meaning experiences that they need unless they also have some areas in their work that they have power over to have the expertise, control, flexibility, and independent resources to make it work (Marshall & Hooley, 2006).

Be a team player! Assistant principals need to establish with their principal the processes and procedures needed so that the whole community views them as part of the administrative team. Too often the assistant principal is viewed as the lesser administrator who has limited knowledge and power. Being a part of the administrative team, increasing visibility and access, and building strong, positive relationships will help dispel such views. Even a change in terminology can be quite effective. Grade level administrator is a term that takes away the terminology of “assistant” that might bring negative connotations.

The importance of being an instructional leader cannot be understated. Assistant principals can provide training for the staff that is curriculum related; learn all about the curriculum for the level of their school; participate in grade level or content meetings; conduct effective teacher evaluations; and provide meaningful feedback that will improve teaching. There must be a balance of managerial skills and instructional leadership. Assistant principals must ask for opportunities to work with the budget, be involved in difficult personnel issues, assist with controversial parent issues, and practice managerial skills that are consistent with the job description of a principal. If the principal mentor is not providing the opportunities in both the managerial and instructional realms, the

assistant principal must be a strong advocate and express their need and desire to learn such skills.

Recommendations for Mentors and Coaches

Mentors and coaches must remember what Bugbee (2006) said about mentoring. She said that mentorships are a gift. Principal mentors and coaches must give assistant principals the gift of shared leadership and leadership development. While time is a huge obstacle to effective mentoring, principals and coaches must be deliberate about setting aside the time for reflection and provision of meaningful feedback. Reflection requires attention to asking the right kinds of questions. Calabrese and Tucker-Ladd (1991) suggest questions that ask about alternative, possible altered actions, risks, and outcomes.

Principals need to share leadership responsibilities with assistant principals. They must be willing to delegate responsibility and trust the assistant principal to accomplish tasks. Shared leadership is critical. It is part of the principal's responsibility to grow teacher leaders and other administrators, especially assistant principals. The principal must be willing to share the spotlight and at times step out of the spotlight so it can shine on the assistant principal. Egos must be removed and advocacy must become a priority.

Principal mentors need to be reflective with their assistant principals. Reflection can be informal throughout the day, but there also needs to be intentional formal reflection time that is set aside on a regularly scheduled basis to debrief, reflect, strategize, and plan. This is also a key part of the team approach to leadership. The community should see the principal and assistant principal(s) as an administrative team. The administrators may not always agree, but they must always be supportive of each other and respectful of

differences in viewpoints and opinions. They must present a united front of shared leadership that encompasses both managerial and instructional leadership skills.

Enough cannot be said about the importance of trusting and being trustworthy. This is such a critical component of the administrative team approach. All administrators must have mutual respect and trust in order for reflection and professional growth to take place at high levels. Advocacy is a part of this trusting relationship. The principal must advocate for the assistant principal when he/she feels that they are ready to move to a principalship. They should give the assistant principal more responsibilities, more projects, more visibility, and more recognition as this time approaches. Giving the assistant principal a project to champion and ensuring that they get the credit and recognition for the success is very important. Building future principals is an important part of a principal's job. They should provide opportunities and experiences that facilitate the professional growth and level of preparedness of the assistant principal.

The principal is the most important mentor for their assistant principal. They must find out their strengths and areas of needed improvement and then provide the support they need to reach their goals. They need to meet with them regularly and debrief and reflect together. Thinking aloud when they are problem solving is another great strategy. Principals should set processes in place that will provide their assistant principal with the experiences they need to become successful principals. Principals who feel that they need training in how to be an effective mentor should seek out professional development in this area. Obviously the training that a mentor or coach would receive in how to be an effective mentor would facilitate tremendous opportunities for leadership growth and

further skill acquisition for them. Principals must also recognize the professional growth and leadership development that is an important outcome for them in this process as well. Bugbee's (2006) research revealed that mentors cross back and forth from leader to learner.

Bloom et al. (2005) stress the importance of coaching beginning principals. The trust in that relationship is a very critical element. The coaching model is critical as well. Blended coaching that teaches practical skills and facilitative strategies seems to be a model that would best meet the needs of school administrators as it provides assistance in how to manage complex problems. Clark's (2001) research documents the comments of a young administrator who echoed what so many have said and what lead to my own personal interest in this research, "I never knew it would be like this." The coaches and mentors can provide the support that these novice administrators need that will make them want to keep the keys to the school. These coaches need to be available to their charges daily to reflect, teach, advise, and listen. As we growth others, we grow ourselves.

Calabrese and Tucker-Ladd (1991) feel that it is a strong responsibility of the principal to serve as a mentor. They describe the relationship as one that has synergy and collaboration. Collaboration must occur frequently for this system to be effective. Mentors must share the good, the bad, and the ugly. Hix (2003) sees this as a crucial factor in a future principal's growth. Future administrators need to see all realms of the position. Mentors should look at this mentor role as professional commitment and a moral obligation. They must take on the roles of teacher, coach, advisor, facilitator, and

colleague for their assistant principal (Calabrese & Tucker-Ladd, 1991). This is a responsibility that principals must take seriously.

Recommendations for Researchers

My research has yielded a great deal of knowledge, but it has also opened the doors for more research to be done. More research needs to be conducted regarding the concept of administrative teams and the concept of co-principals as opposed to the traditional principal/assistant principal model that has prevailed for so many years. Additional research needs to be conducted around the concept of coaches for assistant principals. Who would make the best coaches? How long should the coaching last? Should the coach be assigned the year before an assistant principal is named a principal? Should that coach follow the assistant principal into the first or second year of their principalship? What type of coaching model would work best? There is much still to be learned about the most effective coaching for assistant principals.

There is a need for research to be conducted about the role of the principal as the main mentor for the assistant principal. Does more formal training need to be provided to ensure that principals are the most effective mentors possible? If the principal is the mentor, who should conduct the evaluation of the assistant principal? If the mentor is also the evaluator, trust and honesty are going to be compromised. Principals should not be the assistant principal evaluator so that mentoring can be effective. Trust is paramount; relationships must be strong and supportive. Reflection is a must, and experiences must be varied and rich.

Recommendations for Policymakers

Policymakers need to reexamine the role of the assistant principal. They need to create uniform job description that includes opportunities and experiences that will facilitate growth and transition to a principalship. A cohesive plan for transitioning an assistant principal to the principalship must be developed and utilized. The concepts of administrative teams and co-principalships need to be examined more closely. These concepts might level the playing field and take away the stigma associated with the term “assistant principal.” Policymakers should develop consistent training for assistant principals that is low on theory and high on practical application.

Finally, policymakers need to examine the type of training that should be provided for principals who supervise assistant principals. Local districts, consortiums, regional offices, or state offices should examine the programs such as the “Leadership Program for Aspiring Principals” (2009) that this southeastern state used to provide and the Principal Fellows Program that the state still provides for aspiring principals. The year-long internships and the networking and collaboration provided with the Principal Fellows Program yielded positive feedback from those in my interview pool who were participants. According to their website,

Schools that have Principal Fellows serving as principal have significantly outperformed the state average on both the ABC’s assessment and on the Federal No Child Left Behind program.

The Principal Fellows Program helps the best and most qualified students to complete a two-year full-time Master of School Administration (MSA) program. As a competitive, merit-based scholarship loan program that is funded by the General Assembly, the program assists selected individuals to prepare for a career

in school administration (i.e., assistant principal or principal). From its beginning in 1994, to date, over 1000 Principal Fellows have participated in the program.

Principal Fellows enroll in the Master of School Administration (MSA) program offered at eleven university campuses. The second year students participate in a required yearlong, full-time internship at various school districts throughout the state. The program has received widespread support from school districts through their granting of leaves of absences to employees who have been selected to receive the scholarship loan, providing sites for interns, and employing graduates of the program. The benefits of the program include the financial support provided to the Fellows while earning the MSA, the opportunity for school districts to work with Principal Fellow interns for a year, and the development of a pool of well-trained, highly qualified administrative candidates available to all school systems. (Principal Fellows Program)

Recommendations for School Districts

Districts would be prudent to utilize needs assessments to determine differentiated support for assistant principals. Every administrator has a different set of strengths and a different set of needs. Once the needs assessment is completed the district should form partnerships with local universities to provide professional development for assistant principals and principals. Another type of professional development that needs to be examined and considered would be to include assistant principals in a pre-determined number of district principal meetings each year. The networking, collaboration, and acquisition of additional knowledge would serve these future principals well.

By utilizing retired principal coaches to work with assistant principals who have demonstrated a level of readiness to enter the principalship, the district can provide an extra layer of support. These coaches could follow the assistant principal into their first and maybe second year as a principal.

Districts should consider reformation strategies such as appointing “co-principals” at large elementary schools and utilizing “grade level administrators” to create administrative teams at middle and high schools. Providing training on administrative teams and moving toward this approach to leadership would be an excellent model of administrative professional learning communities.

School districts need to create job descriptions for coaches, mentors and district office supervisors that clearly delineate roles. Coaching and mentoring must be built on trust and without fear of retribution or negative evaluations. Coaches and mentors cannot have an evaluative role or the value of the support is compromised. Finally, districts must provide mentor training for principals who supervise assistant principals. To leave this very important role to chance would be disastrous.

Recommendations for Universities

Universities need to investigate ways to partner with local school districts to provide professional development for assistant principals. The universities have such a great resource in the highly qualified professors who teach the Masters in School Administration courses. These professors could coordinate the assistant principal seminars that school districts often provide. They could also develop a transition course for administrators who have served two more years as an assistant principal and wish to prepare for a principalship. Creating a class that is light on the theory and heavy on practical application would be a very meaningful experience for these transitioning administrators. Another vital service that universities could provide would be to assist local school districts in providing coaching and mentoring programs and support for

assistant principals. Mentor and coaching training could be offered through the local universities. It is clearly an advantage for the university and the school system to form partnerships that provide the needed support for administrators both present and future.

Universities need to conduct frequent reviews of the syllabi for courses required for the Master's in School Administration to ensure that the topics related to assistant principalships are relevant. Surveying principals, assistant principals, and university interns could yield valuable feedback that could be used to structure the content of these courses.

Fleck's (2008) acknowledgement that universities have a limited amount of time to prepare someone for that master's degree in school administration, supports the need to ensure that the structure and content of the coursework be examined and refined frequently to meet the changing needs of the future administrators. Practitioners voiced to me in the interviews that they felt well-prepared in the theory, but lacking in the hands-on application, with the exception of the Principal Fellows participants. In their yearlong internship, they felt that they had received rich experiences and practical application to the theory that they had learned in their coursework. This feedback may help universities look at how they structure the internship requirements for all students. Fleck (2008) proposes full year internships as well as field experiences that are rich in scope and depth. In his article entitled "The Balanced Principal: Joining Theory and Practical Knowledge," he offers several suggestions for how universities can intertwine the theory and practical knowledge. His recommendation to encourage veteran principals and school districts to

be an integral part of the process integrates well with the role of the district and of the mentoring principals.

One other step that universities could take would be to provide training for principals who provide internship experiences for Master's in School Administration candidates to ensure meaningful internships that connect theory with practice. There is often great variance in the intern experiences based on whether the student is a full time intern or a working educator who has to complete an internship while teaching full time. Those students who have participated in the Principal Fellows Program clearly felt that their internship experiences shaped and prepared them for a principalship or an assistant principalship. Students who were working as full time employees during their internships felt their experiences lacked the quality and quantity that they needed. Fleck's (2008) suggestion that universities include relevant and authentic projects as part of coursework would also help bridge the gap between theory and practical application. Future administrators need to see the connections in what they are learning in their coursework and the practical application of that knowledge. Making those connections throughout the coursework would serve them well, much better than leaving it all to the internship experience.

Personal Applications

While I have learned much about supports for principals and assistant principals, I have learned a lot about myself along the way on this journey. Even though I am currently a principal without an assistant principal to mentor, I had a principal intern last year. I had the opportunity to try out some of the things I was learning along the way with

her. The reflection piece was one example. I made an intention effort to share with her a variety of situations that I was dealing with and have her develop a plan of action for how she would address the situation as a principal. Then we would reflect and talk about her choices versus mine. Often she had great ideas for how to deal with a situation that I had not considered. I was the mentor and the learner.

I took the intern to principal meetings with me and reflected with her about what was covered immediately after the meeting. We conducted walk-through visits to classrooms and reflected about what we observed. I had her conduct the peer observations for staff members, and I read them and gave her feedback. She practiced writing letters, investigating discipline referrals, providing input at grade level meetings, co-teaching staff development with me, and many other facets of the job.

For my first attempt at mentoring, I felt that I did a fair job, but now that I am at the end of my research I see so many other areas in which I could have given her experiences and facilitated her growth. I would have had her attend PTA Executive Board meetings, provided more scheduled times for reflection and feedback, allowed her to practice on a summative staff evaluation, assigned her to write a letter to an employee regarding a serious issue (fictitious of course), assigned her to create a monthly parent newsletter to send out, and many other things.

This year, I am the only administrator with no intern, but have a curriculum facilitator who is a strong curriculum leader. I have encouraged her to pursue her Master's in School Administration, and I find myself intentionally providing her with opportunities to reflect upon situations and try different experiences. When I was sick, I

sent her to the principal's meeting in my place. We have sat down and created a yearly schedule for our walk-throughs and a day to reflect about our observations across and within grade levels. I know that I have to be careful not to involve her in any personnel issues or to break any type of confidentiality, but I have found it easy to provide many enriching opportunities for her that I hope will whet her appetite for school administration.

If I were an elementary supervisor again, I would do some things differently. I would include assistant principals in our monthly meetings, and I would conduct their evaluations instead of the principal. I would work with my principals who had assistant principals to give them or help them find the tools they needed to effectively mentor their assistant principal. Helping my principals be the best mentor possible would be a priority. I would not want feedback about the assistant principal's areas of need because I would be doing the evaluation of the assistant principal and because that would destroy the trust between the assistant principal and their mentor.

I would definitely conduct a needs assessment with the assistant principals or have them do a self-assessment to help them with goal setting and selecting appropriate professional development. Being an advocate for the assistant principals at my schools would be easier because I would know them better and know their skill set better. Including them with the principal and me in conducting classroom walk-throughs together would be a great experience for them. I would advocate for the assistant principal to have a coach the year before I was ready to recommend them for a principalship. I would also advocate for that coach to follow the assistant principal into

the first and second year as a principal. I would receive no feedback from the coach for the same reason of not wanting to compromise a trusting relationship.

This is not the end of my interest in this topic. I have just scraped the top of the surface about a research topic that deserves more study and more action research. What is next for me? The new terminology is “encore careers.”

Encore career is a term used to describe work in the second half of life that combines continued income, greater meaning and social impact. These are paid positions often in public interest fields such as education, the environment, health, government sector, social services and other nonprofits. The recent introduction of encore fellowships seeks to open up access to such encore career opportunities to both mid-life careerists and social purpose organizations. (Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia)

When I retire from public education I would like to pursue an encore career as coach for assistant principals and novice principals. I could apply all of this valuable knowledge to make a difference in the life of an administrator, their staff, and their students. I would also enjoy teaching at the university level in an educational leadership department. Supervising internships and teaching courses that could help marry the theory with practical application would be a meaningful, enjoyable experience. I could also use this research to teach a transition class for aspiring principals at the university or through a private consortium. Maybe I would even enjoy doing some consulting through establishing my own consulting business. I think the opportunities are endless, and the thing I love about all of the possibilities is that I would continue to learn and grow as a professional.

Summary and Conclusions

At the end of this research journey, as I synthesis my learning, I come to the realization that the solution is not simple; the answers are not of the cookie cutter nature and demand attention to individual need. Collaboration is a must; shared responsibility is essential; innovation and creativity are critical; and those who stand to gain the most are the children. There is more to be learned, more to be implemented, and more need to attend to the issue than ever before in the history of education.

It is a huge injustice that bright, creative, compassionate educators aspire to move up the career ladder to a principalship only to find that it is too hard, too frustrating, too stressful, and too overwhelming to be worth it to the point that they think maybe the best answer is to give the superintendent back the keys to the school. Developing a support system that is comprehensive and layered may be the “key” to ensuring that novice principals “keep the keys” to the school and feel the confidence and preparedness to lead their schools to success. It is my desire that those who read this dissertation will see the tip of an iceberg that has been touched and that they will be moved to ignite the fires of reform and a call to action. Fullan (2001) said that moral purpose is job one, so we are called by our own sense of moral purpose to ignite those fires and make those calls to action. The stakes are high and the future of our most precious resource, our children, is at stake.

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APPENDIX A**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PRACTICING OR
IN-SERVICE ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS**

- Reflect back over your educational career with me from start to your current role as an assistant principal.
- What was it that made you want to become a school administrator?
- Discuss the kinds of experiences you have had as an assistant principal?
- What experiences have you had that you feel will help you once you are named a principal?
- What kinds of managerial tasks do you perform?
- What kinds of instructional leadership tasks do you perform?
- What are the opportunities you have not gotten a chance to experience as an assistant principal that might hinder your success once named a principal?
- Does your principal coach/mentor you toward your goal of becoming a principal? If so, how? How effective do you think her/his mentoring is? Be specific.
- If you could have a coach for a year before you become a principal, what types of support would you envision from that coach?
- In what ways are you satisfied as an assistant principal?
- What is it about the principalship that is appealing to you?
- What do you think your biggest challenges as a principal will be?

- What do you feel least prepared to handle?
- What professional development have you participated in that has contributed to your growth as an administrator? Elaborate please.
- What could you do in your current role as an assistant principal that would facilitate your professional growth as an administrator?
- What do you believe are the top three responsibilities of a principal? How are you prepared to meet each of those responsibilities?
- Talk to me about your experience regarding your Masters in School Administration.
- If you could design the syllabus for a course taught at the university to prepare current assistant principals for the principalship, tell me what would be on that syllabus for the semester. Who would the guest speakers be, what topics would be covered, what readings would be required, etc?
- Is there anything else that you would like to add that I have not asked you?

APPENDIX B**QUESTIONS FOR COACHES WHO HAVE WORKED IN THE PAST
WITH ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS OR NEW PRINCIPALS**

- What do you do as a coach? What are the most important aspects of the coaching?
- What do you feel are the things you do as a coach that are the most effective?
- What areas do you feel you need to improve in order to be more effective as a coach?
- Were there any negative aspects of the coaching experience?
- How do you think this coaching model that your district currently utilizes for first and second year principals? How would be different if you used it with assistant principals?
- What have been the professional and/or personal outcomes for you as a result of this coaching experience?
- What positive outcomes have you seen in principals as a result of your coaching and what aspects of your coaching do you believe led to specific positive outcomes?
- In what areas or skills have you found new principals to be most proficient? Least proficient?
- What do you believe can be done to better prepare assistant principals (or other aspiring principals) for the principalship?

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONS FOR FIRST AND SECOND YEAR PRINCIPALS

- Describe your experiences as a new principal.
- What have been your greatest successes?
- What have been your greatest challenges?
- What types of responsibility did you have as an assistant principal?
- What kind of work relationship did you have with your former principal?
- If you could change anything about your principalship experience, what would that be?
- If you could change anything about your assistant principal experience, what would that be?
- What support has been given to you as a new principal?
- What support did you seek out for yourself?
- What support was provided to you as an assistant principal?
- What support did you seek out as an assistant principal?
- In what areas or skills have you felt most proficient as a principal? Least proficient?
- What do you believe can be done to better prepare assistant principals (or other aspiring principals) for the principalship?
- What would you recommend to aspiring principals who are currently assistant principals regarding their preparation for the principalship?

APPENDIX D**QUESTIONS FOR PRINCIPALS WHO ARE
SUPERVISING ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS**

- What kinds of tasks do you assign your assistant principal?
- Describe to me the role your assistant principal plays at the school?
- How often do you meet with your assistant principal? Describe those meetings to me.
- What opportunities do you extend to your assistant principal that will assist him/her as they move to a principalship?
- What are the barriers that prevent principals from being able to mentor their Assistant principals?