A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF PRINCIPALS WHO TRANSFORMED A

POSITIVE IMPACT OF SCHOOL CHANGE

by

Jason Michael Faklaris

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial

Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

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APPROVED BY:

Edward Moore, Ph.D., Chair   Date

Colleen McLaughlin, Ph.D., Committee   Date

Randy Brooks, Ed.D., Committee   Date

Scott Watson, Ph.D., Associate Dean, Advanced Programs   Date

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my wife Melissa and my two daughters Emma and Harper.

Melissa you are my best friend and I would be lost without you. You have seen me

rolling on the floor overwhelmed and still stood by my side. I never could have

accomplished such a difficult task without your love and support. To my mom and dad

who always put their children first. You have always believed in me and supported me

every step I have taken. Thanks to my brother and sisters for all of your support and

encouragement. To my family: I love you and could not imagine making anything of

myself without your love. Thank you too to my mother-in-law and father –in-law for

your support and encouragement.

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study gathered, examined, and described the knowledge, beliefs, and actions of selected high school principals who had improved student achievement in their schools. This study was conducted to better understand the experience of providing moral leadership in schools, responding to moral challenges within educational settings, and understanding the factors which resulted in the phenomenon of high school principals raising student achievement to consistently meet state requirements. High school principals were selected for participation in the study based on their record of increasing the scores of their students on the Georgia high school graduation test and the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), and for their record of increasing the number of seniors to graduate over a three year period. Research data came primarily come from interviews with six successful high school principals regarding their experiences; however, data was also collected from the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire and from each school's improvement plan. Data analysis involved the use of the phenomenological methods known as In Vivo coding and descriptive coding. The intent of this research was to provide insights into the practices of transformational principals who were successful in improving student achievement in their schools. The study found that principals can have an enormous impact on academic achievement when certain personal characteristics and practices are in place. Findings from this study suggest that the principals should be transformational leaders, active as instructional leaders, and committed to their schools' academic success.

Keywords: *Adequate yearly progress, Leadership, Graduation Rate, Scholastic Aptitude Test, Principals, Transformational, Increased Student Achievement.*

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)

Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ)

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

Georgia Department of Education (GDOE)

Social Economic Status (SES)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

This study explored the thoughts, feelings, and actions of high school principals regarding their management of a school and their instructional leadership. The position of high school principal has evolved since the job's inception. Principals who are successful must develop skills to cope and thrive as new roles and responsibilities are placed on them through laws and accountability expectations. Using qualitative procedures, this research provided insight into how principals view their successful impact on student academic achievement.

Background

The specific job responsibilities and expectations of high school principals have evolved over time (Finnigan, 2010; Mulford, 2006; Siegrist, Weeks, Pate, & Monetti, 2009). Constantly changing district, state, and federal requirements have placed a variety of burdens and responsibilities on school principals. Maintaining effective leadership throughout these change processes is the key for schools to attain and maintain success for their students (Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliott, & Cravens, 2009; Sanzo, Sherman, & Clayton, 2010). In 1983, accountability pressures were added to the already onerous duties of school leadership. That is when President Ronald Reagan changed the view on what is expected of a high school principal when he described the nation as a nation at risk (Reagan, 1983). The president's document, entitled "Leadership for America's Schools," focused on the role of school principals as instructional leaders. As subsequent presidents took office, each administration enacted laws that declared different responsibilities for school principals. These legislative changes have placed an intense

focus on accountability and high standards in schools in the United States (Sanzoet et al., 2010).

The pressure on principals to be school managers, disciplinarians, and instructional leaders has made the job more difficult (Hughes, Jones, 2010; Vidoni, Bezzina, Gatelli, & Grassetti, 2008). Principals are responsible for maintaining structure in and out of the classroom. In 2001, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation placed new pressures on school principals by raising the accountability standards for individual schools. A sense of urgency ensued among school principals to find ways to increase student achievement in order to meet the demands imposed by this legislation.

NCLB supports standard-based education, which establishes measurable goals to improve individual outcomes in education (Finnigan, 2010; Hughes & Jones, 2010; Siegrist et al., 2009). NCLB required that each state develop assessment instruments to measure each student's ability to meet the state standards and each teacher's ability to adequately teach the content contained in the state standards. Along with NCLB mandates, school principals are in charge of managing the school, establishing a schoolwide vision, and building a positive climate and culture (Finnigan, 2010; Leithwood, Patten, & Jantzi, 2010). Thus, with the advent of NCLB, the scope of the job of principals expanded from a managerial position to a more proactive leadership (Vidoni et al., 2008). The expanded roles of the school principal have brought about much investigation into what types of leaders are successful in promoting schools where success is the norm. The driving force for school reform began with NCLB; new program initiatives have evolved, but expectations have not changed. Race to the Top is a government funded program created to provide funding to schools who meet prescribed

standards of scholastic achievement (United States Department of Education, 2009).

These new political initiatives affect the wording of legislation; however, the

expectations placed on principals by NCLB to improve student achievement remain the

same.

Problem Statement

On the surface, the NCLB legislation may be perceived as a legislation that holds

teachers accountable for student achievement; however, this legislation actually only

holds the principal accountable, thus making school leadership even more critical

(Grigsby, Schumacher, Decman, & Simieou, 2010; Levine, 2005). School principals

must take responsibility for student achievement as well as other necessary management

responsibilities that are inherent to running a school. The government's directive for

accountability based on graduation rate and high-stakes testing makes school principals

responsible for the success of the school. The responsibilities of assessing classroom

instruction, ensuring that the students are excelling on NCLB-mandated standardized

tests, and improving the graduation rate are given to school principals.

Many principals find themselves in a new position of leadership and

accountability never before considered to be a part of the role of a school leader (Shipps

& White, 2009; Wong & Nicotera, 2007). The problem is that the knowledge, beliefs,

and actions of principals who are able to thrive under the new pressures and expectations

and build a successful program where students meet achievement goals set by the state

have not been adequately defined. Principals are so overwhelmed by managing the day

to day duties and activities of the school, the curriculum of the school, the state and

federal testing being administered in the school, and the personnel of the school, that it is

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difficult to accomplish all that must be accomplished in order to be successful (Joseph, 2009). As leaders who do not teach classes or instruct students, but are ultimately responsible for what students learn, know, and produce on a mandated test, principals now have a monumental task before them.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to gather, examine, and describe the knowledge, beliefs, and actions of selected high school principals who improved student achievement in their schools. The research allowed the participants to voice their perceived accomplishments as leaders, but also allowed the researcher to document what actual changes occurred in the schools during the process. The participants were selected from schools that had increased graduation rate and Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores for a period of three consecutive years. Data primarily came from six successful high school principals who were interviewed regarding their experiences; however, data was also collected through a leadership questionnaire. This research was conducted in order to gather qualitative information on the practices of transformational principals who were successful in improving student achievement in their schools. Knowing this information will allow district leaders to hire principals who have a chance to succeed at improving student achievement scores.

Significance of Study

Many studies have found the most important element in an effective school that meets school achievement goals to be the school principal (Gates, Ross, & Brewer, 2001; Leithwood, 1988; Nettles, 2005; Purkey & Smith, 1983). Walters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) found data regarding the effects of principals on schools to be

inconclusive. Leithwood and Riehl (2000) reported that a large number of previous

studies were concentrated on quantitative data examining the influence of school

principals on student achievement. The effect of school leadership on student

achievement seems to be largely indirect (Leithwood et al., 2010; Robinson et al., 2009;

Silins & Mulford, 2002). Two distinct styles of principal leadership exist: (a) typical

principals and (b) instructional leaders. Typical principals are primarily concerned with

managing the school, whereas instructional leaders emphasize the role of principals as

instructors (Leithwood & Montgomery, 1986). Understanding the emotional experiences

of successful principals has helped to provide a framework for new school administrators

to understand what is needed while leading a school. The findings of this study are

significant in two important respects. First, there is a lack of research that clearly

explains how principals positively impact student achievement (Waters et al., 2003).

This study addressed this gap by providing high school principals with a voice to express

their thoughts and feelings regarding how they changed the level of student achievement

at their schools. Secondly, the findings of this study provided the ability for other

principals to better understand the emotions, problems, and challenges that they must

endure if they are to increase their schools' student achievement.

Research Questions

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the thoughts and

beliefs of principals who had improved student achievement. The phenomenological

method allowed the researcher to explore the experiences, perceptions, and opinions of

high school principals who were able to balance the role of instructional leader and

school manager while increasing student achievement. The following research questions guided this study:

Research Question 1: What are the professional characteristics of successful high school principals who were able to balance their roles as curriculum leaders and school managers?

Research Question 2: What are the educational leadership practices of successful high school principals who were able to improve best practices in the classroom?

Research Question 3: What are the educational practices of successful high school principals who were successful in establishing shared leadership with their staff?

Research Question 4: What are the educational practices of successful high school principals who assisted in increasing the graduation rate of students over a three year period?

Research Question 5: What are the educational practices of successful high school principals who positively impacted the performance of students on the Scholastic Aptitude Test and state required testing over a three year period?

Delimitations

High school principals were chosen based on the successful leadership of their schools for three consecutive years. The selected sites were confined to schools that had increased graduation rate and SAT scores for a period of three years, after not making adequate yearly progress (AYP) prior to that three year period. Schools that changed student populations by feeder patterns or due to opening new schools were excluded. The principals selected had successfully raised their schools' graduation rate to meet state standards over a three year period, after having not previously met AYP.

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Research Plan

The phenomenological research sought to describe rather than explain, and to start from a perspective free from hypotheses or preconceptions (Husserl 1970). The first step in this phenomenological study involved each of the six participants completing a Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) survey that provided insight into leadership style on a continuum from passive/avoidant to transactional to transformational (Bass & Avolio, 1995; 2000; 2004). The focus was on leadership style and on specific elements of that style. Next, these same participants participated in interviews in order for me to gain understanding on how they lead their schools during the improvement process. Second interviews were then used to further understand how each principal had increased student achievement. Both the first and second interview dialogues were intended to elicit information to answer the research questions of the study. All interview dialogue was transcribed to enable the researcher to interpret and categorize the data. Open coding was utilized to look for common themes in data collected from both sets of interviews. The dialogue was broken down into discrete parts by examining the data for for. Finally, the method of answering the research questions was undertaken by looking at descriptive data provided by the six principals. School improvement plan data (Appendix A) came from the examination of the schools' curriculum, progress report documents, and website. School improvement plan data collection was conducted in order to identify other key elements that were used by each principal to build his leadership plan.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

NCLB legislation places the responsibility for student achievement on school principals. This accountability, based on graduation rate and high-stakes testing, makes school principals responsible for the student success. The problem is that the knowledge, beliefs, and actions of principals who are able to thrive under the new pressures and expectations, and build a successful program where students meet achievement goals set by the state, have not been adequately defined. The day to day duties and activities of the school, the curriculum of the school, and the state and federal testing can be overwhelming (Joseph, 2009). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to gather, examine, and describe the knowledge, beliefs, and actions of selected high school principals who improved student achievement in their schools. Principals were given a voice in order to document what actually occurred in the schools during the improvement process. This research was conducted to examine the practices of transformational principals who were successful in improving student achievement in their schools. Knowing this information will allow district leaders to hire principals who have a chance to succeed at improving student achievement scores.

The review of the literature begins with a discussion of the theoretical framework upon which this study was built. Next, literature relevant to the research topic is explored, such as principal leadership, transformational principal leadership style, instructional principal leadership, leadership and student achievement, school culture, and accountability. The chapter ends with a summary of the related literature.

Theoretical Framework

The Sociocultural Theory was the foundational theory for this study. Sociocultural Theory explained the role of culture in the cognitive development of students (Vygotsky, 1934). Vygotsky argued that cognitive development occurs at two levels; the social level and at the individual level. Sociocultural Theory puts emphasis on the environment in relation to student learning (Herrenkohl, 2008). The social level of development primarily occurs during interaction with other people; the individual level of development focuses on the intrapsychology of children.

Another important component of Vygotsky's (1986) theory is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). ZPD is the zone of learning just outside of the student's current ability level in which students have the cognitive capacity to learn and develop; however, they need guidance and assistance from other people to reach their potential within this zone. Vygotsky (1986) argued that teachers are able to provide that guidance and assistance by scaffolding, using students' previous knowledge.

Vygotsky's (1986) contention was that the interaction of students with their environment plays a role in their progress and development. In schools, students primarily interact with their teachers and with their peers. Literature suggests that secondary principals have very little direct effect on student academic achievement other than human resource decisions (Cotton, 2003; Herrenkohl, 2008; Layton, 2003; Louis, Dretzke, & Wahlstrom, 2010; Niedermeyers 2003). Students usually do not have direct interaction with school principals.

However, this theory is appropriate in the understanding and explanation of the influence of school principals on student achievement. When students play an active role

in their education, learning is promoted. Therefore, principals should create an academic

environment in which both teachers and students have a vested interest in school

activities. Sociocultural Theory suggests that learners follow the lead of educators.

Principals play a significant role in developing the culture of the school and the

Sociocultural Theory is built upon this idea (Herrenkohl, 2008).

<div align="center">**Review of the Literature**</div>

Transformational Principal Leadership

Burns first introduced the concept of transformational leadership in 1978

(Northouse, 2004). Transformational leadership is leadership that inspires and stimulates

followers (Avolio, 1999; Bass, 1998). Transformational leaders motivate their followers

to do more than what the originally thought was possible. Bass (1985) constructed a

model for transformational and transactional leadership for leaders to better understand

their own specific leadership styles. According to Hargreaves (2010) and Leithwood and

Riehl (2003), successful principal leaders make important contributions to the

improvement of student learning. Even though the principal is the primary source of

leadership, power needs to be distributed to guarantee the success of the vision and goals

of the principal. According to Leithwood and Riehl (2003), inherent in the decentralized

power of transformational leadership is accountability for actions. Because principals

share leadership with other educational personnel, the influence of their leadership is not

clear.

Transformational leadership has significant indirect effects on student academic

and school engagement outcomes (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). Principals are the

instructional leaders of the school and carry the burden to change ineffective teaching

methods in order to increase student achievement. The principal, as the instructional leader, is ultimately responsible for developing a plan to improve instruction, improve standardized student assessment, and increase the total performance of the school (Gupton, 2010)

A successful transformational principal must focus on academic outcomes to ensure the success of students (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). Academic success begins with a vision. A school vision is a picture of what a principal wants to achieve. A vision must engage the teachers, parents, students, and community during implementation and must stress academics (Leithwood et al., 2010). Effective school principals must establish and maintain high expectations for their students and staff (Cotton, 2003).

Principals of high-achieving schools regularly evaluate "all proposals for change in terms of their potential for enhancing student learning" (Cotton, 2000, p. 10). Successful schools and their leaders do not just rely on a strong vision, but stay committed to the idea that there will always be a way to educate all children and ensure that they all have success (Bossert, 1988; Lee & Loeb, 2000; Scheurich, 1998). Similarly, Peterson, & Deal, (2009). noted that transformational principals use "multiple approaches to developing, communicating, and applying an educational vision. Sometimes the vision of the school was part of a mission statement, statement of beliefs, or slogans—but leaders were able to tell people what they stand for" (p. 5).

When a school needs to improve academic achievement, principals cannot hide in their office and hope for success. Cotton (2003) contended that successful principals are "unvaryingly present and approachable in everyday life of the school" (p. 14). Effective

principals are frequently present in classrooms, conducting observations and interacting

with teachers. These principals have inviting offices and use humor to help others feel

comfortable in their presence (Brown & Wynn, 2009).

Research in high-achieving schools found that transformational leaders

consistently hold themselves accountable for the success or failure of the entire school

(Scheurich, 1998). Confidence and the ability to influence people are qualities that are

necessary to ensure success as principals initiate change in low performing schools.

Successful school principals maintain a "no excuses attitude about student performance"

(Wagstaff, Melton, Lasless, & Combs, 1998, p. 14). Principals who succeed in

improving student achievement believe in themselves and pursue their goals regardless of

resistance and difficulties. When setbacks and failures occur, successful principals do not

stop trying to improve their schools (Johnson & Asera, 1999).

In Evans and Teddlie's (1995) review, they found that school principals who

facilitate positive change provide both emotional and practical support to their staff.

Principals can build supportive staffs by providing constant encouragement and support

to the people who work for them. These effective principals express support to their

staff, which in turn promotes feelings and expressions of loyalty (Blase & Kirby, 2009).

Instructional Principal Leadership

Research is inconclusive regarding whether or not transformational principals

have a direct effect on student achievement. Layton (2003) found that principal

leadership in middle school was not directly linked to increasing student achievement,

but was linked to teacher satisfaction and the willingness of teachers to exert extra effort.

Louis et al. (2010) further explored these concepts and found no direct link between principals and the success of students.

Transformational principals constantly work with their teaching staff to ensure that they are taking measures to improve themselves professionally and that they are learning new methods to reach the students. Ingersoll and Smith (2003) stressed the need for teachers to be knowledgeable and well-trained so they enter the classroom feeling comfortable and competent. Skilled teachers are important to a school's success; therefore, high school principals must practice methods that are likely to attract and keep highly qualified teachers in their schools. Recruitment strategies such as signing bonuses, salary advances, and improvements to benefits are necessary in this regard (Marx, 2006). Research has determined that "after three years with the most effective teachers, students show achievement gains significantly higher than those of students with the least effective teachers" (Strong, 2006, p. 1). Interactions between the principal and the school's teachers are crucial to student success.

Successful leadership influences teaching through both face-to-face contact with teachers and through structuring of methods that teachers use to do their work (Ogawa & Bossert, 1995). Transformational principals must develop these relationships and establish these structures in order to keep effective teachers from leaving their schools for other jobs. In 2007, The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future reported that nearly one-third of all new teachers leave the classroom within the first three years of teaching, and nearly half leave within the first five years (Shakrani, 2008). These teachers will only be retained if they feel that what they are doing is important and that their contributions to student achievement are appreciated. There are a number of

ways schools can increase teacher retention, such as improving preparation programs and offering professional development programs (Marx, 2006).

Researchers have found that when principals empower their staff through shared leadership and decision-making, everyone involved with the school benefits, including the students (Blase & Kirby, 2009; Davis, 1998; Gaziel, 1995; Gullatt & Lofton, 1996; Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000). Blasé, J and Blasé, JR (1994) found that "successful principals were those whose staffs had attained high levels of empowerment and participative decision making" (p. 12). By involving many qualified people in the decision-making process, no single person gets overwhelmed with the tremendous nature of the tasks. Delegation of authority is a common practice among effective and successful principals (Blase & Kirby, 2009). Cotton (2003) said that "site teams need real decision-making authority; should have information about legal requirements, budgets, and other mattes that affect their decisions" (p. 22). Principals have to develop a leadership style which encourages frequent collaboration between administrators and the teaching staff.

Successful principals create an environment that fosters collaboration (Crowther, Ferguson, & Hann, 2009; Evans & Teddie, 1995). Collaboration innately gives more responsibility to teachers (Thomas, 1997). According to Thomas, "involving the staff in decisions affected the development of a collaborative school climate, which according to findings shows a statistical relation between teacher morale and student achievements" (p. 25).

Effective principals enhance teacher satisfaction and independence by shielding their schools from excessive intrusions or disruptions from the outside (Cotton, 2003).

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Principals of effective schools establish rules, guidelines, and operational procedures in order to protect instructional time and provide students with access to additional services outside the normal school day (Bartell, 1990; Black, 1997; Cotton, 2000; Evans & Teddlie, 1995; Fulton, 2009; Johnson & Asera, 1999). Minimizing wasted time is the key to maximizing student instructional time (McLeod, Fisher, & Hoover, 2003).

Principal Leadership and Student Achievement

Principals who have increased student achievement almost always support staff development (Boyd, Grossman, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2009; Firestone & Wilson, 1989). These principals also provide opportunities for in-school, group learning sessions and off-site workshops (Bartell, 1990; Gaziel, 1995; Johnson & Asera, 1999; Kirby, Paradise, & King, 1992; Stronge, Richard, & Catano, 2008). Transformational principals should find methods of securing and allocating resources that improve staff development (Gaziel, 1995; Plecki, 2006).

Principals who intend to increase student achievement in their schools should express high expectations to the students and staff in order to affect change (Cotton, 2003). Transformational principals need to construct expectations that will motivate low achieving students to want to improve themselves. Low expectation for students can be demoralizing for students and can have a negative effect on student achievement (Butler, 1997; Marzano, 2010). However, the high expectations of transformational principals do not necessitate harsh demands. Scheurich (1998) explained that in "highly successful schools, the focus on high expectations is based on the revolutionary belief that the natural condition of all children is high performance" (p. 460).

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School Culture

Hofstede and McCrae (2004) define culture as aspects of values and beliefs that distinguish similar people, institutions, and organizations in the same way. The culture of a school reflects the underlying assumptions of the community and can be viewed as the glue that holds organizations together (Hofstede, 1991). Hallinger and Leithwood (1996) concluded that culture has a significant impact on educational administration in terms of the desired outcomes for schools, as well as interaction between the leader and the faculty. In high and low-achieving schools, the definition of school climate and culture pertains to the expectations and norms that govern the behaviors and attitudes of the people within the school (Larsen, 1987). School climate and culture are influenced by the school's principal (Cotton, 2003). Culture refers to the deep structure of an organization that is rooted in the values and beliefs of the members. Climate portrays the organization's environment, which is rooted in their organizational values (Hofstede, 1983; Minkov & Hofstede, 2011). Studies on successful schools revealed a correlation between climate-enhancing behaviors and student performance (Cotton, 2003; Spera, Wentzel, & Matto, 2009; Steller, 1998). Steller (1998) specifically described the contributions of leadership to school culture:

> Effective principals create a school climate where academic achievement is the primary goal. And policies and procedures are instituted to achieve that goal. In addition, effective principals provide the administrative support that allows teachers to concentrate on this primary goal. (p. 21)

Bartell (1990) found that school climate was very important, and high achieving schools contain students that have developed positive feelings about their own school.

These high achieving schools employ teachers who work with the administration to foster a caring attitude that spreads throughout the entire school. Bartell further explained that management of these schools cannot take precedence over the people involved in the school. According to Cotton (2003), a correlation exists between the communication skills of principals and student achievement. In order for transformational leaders to build a positive school culture, they must conduct outreach activities that will involve all of the staff and students in that school (Black, 1997). Wendel, Hoke, and Joekel (1996) found that successful administrators use communication skills to build close relationships as well as use relationships to extend communication patterns. Effetive administrators are skilled at building a staff that is always working to improve their communication skills, whether verbal or nonverbal (Whitaker,T., Whitaker, B., & Lumpa, 2009).

Rituals and ceremonies such as attendance guidelines, awards days, and school designated benchmark celebrations are integral components in a school's sense of community (Cotton, 2003). The system of building a common bond between students of different backgrounds is an important task for principals to undertake. By using ceremonies, principals are able to affect how the members of a school community shape the way they think and act with regard to student achievement. Principals can motivate the teaching staff and students by activating their sense of attachment and loyalty to the school (Leitner, 1994; Peterson & Deal, 2009).

One of the most enduring roles of school principals is to minimize problems so that learning can occur. The school environment must be orderly to facilitate successful learning for students. Sammons, Hillman, and Mortimor (1995) found that "effective discipline involves keeping good order, consistently enforcing fair, clear and well-

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understood rules and infrequent use of actual punishment" (p. 19). Effective principals construct a school environment that exhibits personal warmth and accessibility, where there is a strong understanding of the standards of student behavior (Cotton, 2003). The focus is on making certain that appropriate conduct is an important aspect of the organizational culture of the school (Scheurich, 1998; Spera, Wentzel, & Matto, 2009). School leaders impart knowledge to their students regarding appropriate behaviors and construct an environment where students are likely to behave well (Johnson & Asera, 1999).

Parental involvement is crucial for the success of any school. Cotton (2003) described the connection between school success and parent involvement as significant. Schools that have higher achieving students have principals who are more involved in outreach programs compared to lower performing schools (reference needed). Bartlell (1990) explained that effective principals routinely "solicit input from parents and community members for decision making" (p. 125). Parents and community members have a higher level of satisfaction with their schools when there is appropriate and frequent interaction with school leaders. Principals whose schools experience high student achievement spend more time working with parents and community members than lower performing schools (Grissom & Loeb, 2011).

Accountability

Cotton (2003) described the current state of education in the United States as a system that emphasizes results and a new level of accountability. Principals have to be able to show statistical proof of success in their schools. Each year, accountability reports are processed in every school in Georgia, such as the results on the government-

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mandated standardized tests. Georgia high schools are also held accountable for increasing graduation rates. Each high school has been given the task to achieve a 100% graduation rate by the year 2014 (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009). The pressures are present and real for all high school principals. Some Georgia counties are using AYP results as a factor in the yearly evaluations of high school principals. Principals' annual evaluations will be tied to school performance starting in 2013 (Georgia Department of Education, 2010).

Principals are responsible for actuating the instructional components that lead to school improvement (Ingersoll, 1996; Spera, Wentzel, & Matto, 2009; Steller, 1988). Transformational principals who want to improve student achievement are obligated to put the necessary time into solving the shortcomings of their schools. Bartell (1990) argued that principals of high performing schools support and facilitate instruction in every way possible. Teacher evaluations are crucial tools for principals to assess current methods of instruction because they provide feedback for teachers who desire to improve. Principals can use evaluation tools as a method of opening dialogue between teachers and principals (Kimball & Milanowski, 2009). Hanushek (1992) underscored the importance of a high quality teacher when he stated, "The estimated difference in annual achievement growth between having a good and having a bad teacher can be more than one grade level equivalent in test performance" (p. 107).

Further, schools that want higher student achievement ought to have principals that are taking the time to visit classrooms in the school. Cotton (2003) found a relationship between principals' classroom observations and feedback to teachers and student achievement. Likewise, Robbins and Alvy (2004) found that schools which had

high levels of student achievement also had principals who frequently visited the classrooms. The amount of time a principal spends observing classroom practices has a strong correlation to student achievement (Jacobson, 2011). When principals make routine visits to classrooms to evaluate instruction and observe learning, a greater understanding of the problems associated with instruction become apparent to them. They grow to respect their teachers and trust those teachers' specific judgments on new methods of instruction (Cotton, 2003).

Summary

The Sociocultural Theory provided the theoretical framework for this study. The Sociocultural Theory emphasizes the significance of the interaction of students with teachers for their continued cognitive development in school (Vygotsky, 1986). This theory was important to understanding the influence of principals on school achievement, specifically in terms of increased test scores and graduation rates. High stakes testing and nationally-mandated graduation rates place pressure on high school principals to quantitatively demonstrate that their students are making gains and having success in school.

Transformation leadership is an effective leadership style that balances the dual roles of principals as both instructors and managers (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). Most traditional principal leadership styles focus on the managerial aspect of the job; however, these traditional leadership styles may not be appropriate to satisfy the increased role of principals as instructional leaders. The principal as the instructional leader is ultimately responsible for developing a plan to improve instruction, improve each student's standardized assessment scores, and increase the total performance of the school

(Copland, 2001). Transformational leadership is an expansion of instructional leadership because it "aspires, more generally, to increase members' efforts on behalf of the organization, as well as develop more skilled practice" (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 20). Transformational educational leaders truly transform their teachers from workers that require external motivation to workers who are internally motivated by their desire to accomplish the organizational goals

High school principals carry the burden of the school for meeting or not meeting full-term AYP. For schools with lower achievement scores, the attrition rates are higher, which leads many to conclude that methods that reduce teacher attrition are "needed in order to improve student achievement" (Boyd et al., 2009, p. 1). Rockoff (2004) found strong empirical evidence suggesting that quality of teaching is instrumental in improving student outcomes (p. 251). Quantitative research is not definitive regarding the degree of impact of high school principal leadership on student achievement. Nettles (2005), who conducted research on principal instructional leadership and student achievement, found a statistically significant relationship between the two variables. Other researchers have concluded that transformational leadership has a significant correlation to teacher satisfaction and perception of effectiveness, but did not have a statistically significant relationship to student standardized test achievement (Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1996; Layton, 2003;Witziers, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003). Niedermeyers (2003) also found that the transformational leadership style had no effect on student achievement.

Layton (2003) and Niedermeyers (2003) found that transformational principals had a direct impact on teachers' instructional performance and teacher satisfaction. When demographics are similar between schools, other variables can be investigated to

see which account for differences in test results. Schools that experience high academic

achievement are the focus of this research, specifically how transformational school

leaders find a way to retain quality teachers, effectively manage instruction, and build a

positive school environment for students in those schools.

The gap in the literature that this research sought to fill is the lack of evidence

supporting specific practices of principals who were able to combine the role of manger

and instructional leader while improving student academic success. There is a lack of

studies that focus on the strategies, practices, and characteristics of successful principals

in the context of meeting the standards of high-stakes testing and graduation and

retention rates. Chapter Three contains a detailed description of the methodology of the

study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to utilize a questionnaire and participant interviews to gather, examine, and describe the knowledge, beliefs, and actions of selected high school principals who had improved student achievement in six high schools. The study examined the professional characteristics and leadership practices of successful principals to determine their influence on school improvement success. Questionnaires were administered and interviews were conducted in an attempt to make these determinations. Understanding the relationships between these variables will enable district administrators to make more informed principal personnel decisions and encourage principals to work on developing the characteristics that are likely to lead to success in their schools.

Chapter Three begins with a description of the study design and a review of the research questions for this study. Next is the methodology that was followed during the study, including the participants, setting, instrumentation, procedures, researcher's role, how the data will be collected and analyzed, and ethical considerations,

The proposed study explored the experiences, perceptions, and opinions of high school principals who were able to balance the role of instructional leader and school manager while increasing student achievement. The following research questions guided this study:

Research Question 1: What are the professional characteristics of successful high school principals who were able to balance their roles as curriculum leaders and school managers?

Research Question 2: What are the educational leadership practices of successful high school principals who were able to improve best practices in the classroom?

Research Question 3: What are the educational practices of successful high school principals who were successful at establishing shared leadership with their staff?

Research Question 4: What are the educational practices of successful high school principals who assisted in increasing the graduation rate of students over a three year period?

Research Question 5: What are the educational practices of successful high school principals who positively impacted the performance of students on the Scholastic Aptitude Test and state required testing over a three year period?

Design

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) said that a research design "situates researchers in the empirical world and connects them to specific sites, persons, groups, institutions, and bodies of relevant interpretative material, including documents and archives" (p. 36). Quantitative research differs from qualitative research in that variables are identified and measured, a hypothesis is tested, and statistics provide evidence of findings in qualitative methods. Qualitative research is descriptive in its methods by using the vivid details of the contextual setting provided by the participants, which leads to the understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).Other research methods could have been utilized, but this research was meant to explore the perceptions, opinions, and experiences of principals who have affected a positive change in their school, specifically in terms of increasing student achievement. Principal leadership, as it relates to student achievement, has been researched in the past extensively using

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quantitative methods (Hallinger, Bickman, & Davis, 1996; Layton, 2003; Nettles 2005; Niedermeyer, 2003; Witziers, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003). Instead of looking at the established quantitative research, this study used a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology in order to explore the experiences, perceptions, and opinions of high school principals who were able to balance the role of instructional leader and school manager while increasing student achievement. This provided an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the experiences of principals who had increased student achievement. Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggested that the researcher set aside as much prior knowledge as possible to avoid forcing data to answer a theory. The phenomenological theory design enabled the researcher to explore a phenomenon without being restricted by shallow, closed-ended questions.

The researcher sought to understand the nature of the relationship that quantitative research had previously established between transformational principal leadership and teacher satisfaction, which could lead to improved student achievement. For this reason, hermeneutic phenomenology was utilized in this study. Phenomenology as a whole is a qualitative investigation aimed at understanding the voice of the participants. Through hermeneutics, the researcher interpreted the interview responses of the participants (Denzin & Lincoln 2003; Moustaks, 1994).

Although Edmund Husserl brought phenomenology to light as a research practice, the revision of this work through the application of hermeneutics by van Manen is more appropriate to the goals of this research study. Husserl (1927) sought to look beyond quantitative data to find meaning in the actions, thoughts, and feelings of the subjects with the researcher looking beyond their own understanding and ideas.

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Similar to the heuristic principles outlined by Moustakas (1990), van Manen (1997 indicates that it is unlikely that the researcher can – or should – participate in the practice of 'bracketing' or setting aside the researcher's perspective to understand the subjects of a study. Instead the hermeneutic principles outlined by van Manen emphasize the interpretation of an experience rather than the 'pure description of lived experience' sought by Husserl and others (Earle, 2010).

Particularly this approach is appropriate for this research study due to the nature of the research. As a leader within a school system, the particular strengths of principals to affect change in student achievement is of great interest. At the same time, the researcher is able to understand the study from a viewpoint of experience and knowledge, rather than discarding prior knowledge, as indicated by van Manen as a particular strength in hermeneutic phenomenology (van Manen, 1997). Much of the current research shows that there is a need for strong high schools principals, but there is little research that explores how each principal meets the demand to actuate academic improvement in a high school. The research sought to examine the viewpoints of the subjects and their experiences to help determine what type of leadership each of the participants possess, and which of their actions improved student learning. The MLQ survey, participant interviews, and school improvement data were analyzed for patterns and themes.

Participants

The participants were chosen for this study by purposeful sampling, specifically criterion driven decision (Patton, 2002). Criterion driven selections meet predetermined criteria prior to selection (Suri, 2011). The participants in this study were six high school

principals who led schools that made AYP for three consecutive years between 2006-

2011, after having failed to reach AYP for one year prior to the 2006-2011 timeframe.

After the schools which had not met AYP between 2006-2011 were identified, they were

further examined to locate the schools that had experienced the most improved SAT

scores and graduation rates. Further search of the Georgia Department of Education

records was conducted to determine which of the selected schools have had a principal

change or any redistricting events that might have otherwise contributed to a change in

student success. Table 1 summarizes the demographic information of the selected

participants:

Table 1

Demographic Information for Selected Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Years of Experience	Educational Level
Principal 1	Male	48	White	Over 25 yr	Masters
Principal 2	Female	63	White	Over 40 yr	Masters
Principal 3	Male	51	White	Over 25 yr	Doctorate
Principal 4	Male	50	White	Over 15 yr	Specialist
Principal 5	Male	41	White	Over 15 yr	Specialist
Principal 6	Female	56	White	Over 30 yr	Specialist

Georgia AYP scores are based on specific core subject tests of high school juniors. The test scores are compared with the scores of the previous year's juniors. The SAT and graduation rates were chosen as participant identifiers for this study because they provide a comprehensive achievement picture for both the junior class and the senior class. The SAT is usually taken in the second semester by juniors and seniors who are planning to attend college. Graduation is awarded to any student who has completed the required course load as well as passing the required graduation test in each subject prescribed by the Georgia State Department of Education (Georgia State Board of Education Rules, 2002).

Settings/Sites

Principal locations were selected based on students' increased achievement on either SAT or graduation rate or both, which allowed the school to meet the state of Georgia's AYP requirements on each test. There was variance in the degree of each school's specific academic improvement; however, every target school moved from not meeting the minimum requirement for AYP standards with their students to students scores and graduation rates that met the requirements. Information about all state mandated testing in Georgia high schools is published each year on the internet. These results were compiled from 2002 until 2008, and the schools that did not meet state requirements for at least one year were eliminated from consideration for this study. Each high school was evaluated based on enrollment of juniors and how those juniors scored collectively on the Georgia High School Graduation test. Each student is expected to pass a test in each subject area in order to be eligible to graduate. The Georgia Department of Education (DOE) AYP reports contained the specific demographics for each junior class (Georgia DOE, 2013). The determination of the achievement of AYP in this study was based on the collective scores of the students, the percentage of juniors who passed the test, and the percentage of seniors who met the state requirements for graduation. High schools were eliminated from consideration for this study if a change in leadership had occurred either during the year of not making AYP or during the three years making AYP. Each principal selected was in charge of a school that had experienced an increase in SAT scores on the state mandated tests over a three year period. Once the pool of possible candidates was established, schools were eliminated if the current principal had not been in charge of their school over the course of the three

year student achievement increase. Schools were also excluded from the sample if there were changes in the school size due to school openings or closings in the district, or if the district had realigned. The Georgia DOE's AYP reports and The Governor's Office of Student Achievement's report to the state for the 2002 to 2008 school years were used to gather the data needed to identify schools where graduation rates and SAT scores had increased over a three year period.

Based on the previously mentioned inclusion and exclusion criteria, six schools were selected for the study. Table 2 presents the demographic data for those six schools.

Table 2

Demographic Information for Selected Schools

Pseudonym	Grade Levels	Enrollment	County Population	SES	SWD	Race/ Ethnicity
School A	9-12	475	9,897	57%	38%	White7 5% Black 14% Hispanic 4%
School B	9-12	755	14,000	49%	31%	White 50% Black 17% Hispanic 5%
School C	9-12	1092	41,460	42%	28%	White 62% Black 15% Hispanic18%
School D	9-12	1459	96,200	52%	22%	White 93% Black 2% Hispanic 5% Asian 4%
School E	9-12	1939	131,000	51%	32%	White 23% Black 1% Hispanic49% Asian 1% American Indian 1%
School F	9-12	1210	28,000	69%	35%	White 88% Hispanic 11% Asian 1% American Indian 1%

Note. The data is based on reports provided by both the Georgia Department of Education (2011) and the NAEP Report (2011).

Procedures

Participants were purposively selected based on meeting the researcher's criteria: a high school which did not meet the State of Georgia's AYP guidelines for a period of time, then met AYP for at least three consecutive years. Each potential participant was sent an electronic version of the informed consent form. Participants were sent a link to

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the online survey once the consent form was signed and returned. All counties in the state of Georgia were potential areas for recruitment. A formal letter explaining the study and request for permission to research was sent to each of the districts where the selected principals' schools were located. A full review application was submitted to Liberty University IRB before permission was granted to begin the study.

Researcher's Role

The researcher in qualitative research is a human instrument that plays a role in the data collection process (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). The researcher's schooling and work experience have provided a solid understanding of the research topic and helps facilitate the research. The researcher earned a Bachelor of Science in Education in Health and Physical Education in 1998, then earned a Masters Degree in School Administration in 2005, and an Educational Specialist Degree in 2010. The researcher currently is a high school assistant principal in Northwest Georgia. The researcher had worked for several principals over his 11 year career as a teacher.

The motivation for this study was to understand what specific tools are required to be a school principal that improves student achievement. The function of this research was to describe the meaning of the viewpoints of each of the principals. Examining the ideas presented by each of the participants provided understanding and meaning regarding how school principals can affect positive change in student achievement.

The assumption of the researcher was that if principals lead schools properly, they control the outcomes for students. There is curiosity regarding how certain principals can turn a failing school into a successful school, whereas others fail. The practices of principals who were able to accomplish this task were explored. The goal was to

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understand what has worked for these principals so that other principals gain insight into their practices.

Data Collection

Data collection did not begin until the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the research methods and procedures outlined in this section. A copy of that approval can be seen in Appendix B. Upon IRB approval, each participant was provided with informed consent forms (see Appendix C) to read and sign prior to data collection. Data collection occurred in three separate stages: First, the MLQ was administered. Next, interviews were conducted with each participant, followed by second interviews. Finally, the school improvement plan data was collected. Each of these data collections methods are discussed in detail in the following subsections.

Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire. Once each of the participants agreed to be part of the study, they were provided a link via email to complete the MLQ (see Appendix D). Each principal was asked to complete the questionnaire, which was developed in 1985 by Bass (Bass & Avolio, 1995; 2000; 2004). The 63 item assessment was used to assess what type of characteristics each principal possessed while leading. Bass (1985) believed that transformational and transactional leadership are complementary rather than mutually exclusive constructs. Bass integrated the transformational and transactional styles by recognizing that both styles may be linked to the achievement of desired goals and objectives (Bass, Avolio, & Goodheim, 1987).

 For over 25 years, the MLQ has been the principal means to reliably differentiate highly effective leaders from ineffective leaders in research in military, government, educational, manufacturing, and volunteer organization (Bass & Avolio, 1995). The

MLQ scores were used to better understand the leadership styles of the participants in order to more adequately explain the experiences of each contributor (Bass & Avolio, 1993a). The MLQ meets reliability, validity, design, sampling, measurement, and analysis requirements for use in research studies (Trochim, 2005).

The survey was chosen to help understand what style of leadership each of the participants possessed. The literature indicated that many successful school leaders possessed a transformation leadership style. This study examined information about each participant to determine if their leadership style matched the literature.

First interviews. Once results from MLQ were collected, interview appointments were made with each participant. The location, type, and venue of the first interviews were dependent upon the agreement reached by the researcher and each of the six principals. The two interviews were conducted face-to-face and on the telephone. They did not last longer than 90 minutes, and were a minimum of 60 minutes. Each interview was recorded with participant permission. An interview was defined by Bogdan and Biklen (2007) as "a purposeful conversation, usually between two people but sometimes involving more, that is directed by one in order to get information from the other" (p. 103). According to Kvale (2007), interviewing is a specific form of conversation where knowledge is produced through the interaction between an interviewer and an interviewee.

During each interview, the goal was to gather information regarding the factors that might have contributed to the increase of student achievement in each participant's school. An interview guide (see Appendix E) was prepared based on key findings discovered in the review of literature to ensure that all of the needed information was

gathered. The interview guide questions were intended to elicit information to answer the research questions of the study.

Once initial questions were designed, the questions were submitted to the dissertation committee members and three high school principals in the field that had high student achievement, but did not qualify for the study; this served the purpose of verifying the validity of the interview questions. The three principals who elicited to be part of this verification process were principals located in Georgia that the researcher had met over the course of his career and had an average of eight years of experience as a high school principal. Each of the three principals individually discussed possible changes to the interview questions with the researcher by phone. The discussions were used to improve the quality of the data that would be collected from the study participants. A sample of received feedback by those principals can be seen in Appendix F. Each interview was recorded and transcribed with participant permission. The recording device was a Sony ICD-BX digital voice recorder. The researcher was responsible for transcribing all recorded information from the interviews.

Follow up interviews. After the first round of interview data was transcribed and initial coding had taken place, follow up interviews were conducted. The second interview was used to revisit any topics or ideas that were expressed in the first interview, but lacked detail or needed clarity. Due to the fluid nature of the second interview, no guide or protocol was used. Rather, a collection of questions were used to further explore ideas as the researcher deemed necessary. Not all questions were posed to each participant. Those questions have been attached as Appendix G.

School improvement data. The third type of data collection involved school improvement plan data from the six participating schools. The goal was to provide a qualitative description of the six schools, which gave context to the leadership survey and interview results.

NCLB encouraged Georgia high schools to develop a school improvement plan each year. These school improvement plans are based on each school's self-assessment of what specific student needs are not being met by the current direction of the school. Each school develops plans that specifically address the areas that require attention. The content and construction of these plans directly illustrates what type of leadership style each participant possesses. These plans provided context to the interview accounts of the six principals in this study. The principals were asked to provide written responses to the template that collected information (which is contained in their school's improvement plan) that best addressed these questions:

1. What is the mission of your school in regard to student achievement?

2. What is the role of school leaders in your school?

3. What are the academic policies of your school?

4. What teacher development plans or activities are available at your school?

5. What is your school's plan to improve the graduation rate?

6. What remediation tasks are utilized to improve high stakes testing?

The template (Appendix A) provided to each of the participants aided in this process. Each of the participants received the template so that they could provide written feedback on each of these six areas. Each participant had the freedom to include any and all information they felt relevant to this process.

Data Analysis

Data from the MLQ was analyzed based on mean scores of participants and then compared to mean scores from collected norms provided by the survey (Avolio & Bass, 2004). The data collected from the MLQ survey was used to help develop and extend the discussion during interviews with the participants. Once data collection from interviews was complete, they were transcribed verbatim. The transcribed interview discussions are one of the most critical steps in processing information in qualitative research (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007). For the one-on-one interviews, each principal's data was analyzed separately; however, the same procedure was used for all six participants. Tesch (1990) explained that codes are identification of topics and not abbreviations of content. The "topic is what is talked about" and "the content is the substance of the message" (Tesch, 1990, p. 119).

The analysis began by inspecting the transcripts for each of the six participants and using In Vivo coding. In Vivo coding involves searching for words or short phrases throughout the sets of qualitative data (Saldana, 2009; Wolcott, 1994). Important themes and phrases were identified at this point (See appendix H). After the initial reviewing the data and applying In Vivo codes to it, descriptive coding was used to process the responses of the participants (See appendix I).

The constant comparative method was used as "a method of analyzing qualitative data that combines inductive category coding and simultaneous comparison of such units of meaning" (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006, p. 630). School improvement data was analyzed based on the responses to specific areas of the worksheet. When examining the collected data, focus was placed on the wording of the document and how

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the participant developed the school improvement plan. The interview process included a

discussion of how specific areas of the plan were constructed. Questions included: Did

the participant involve others in the process? Where did the principal place emphasis on

each of the areas inside the plan? What were the action words used when developing the

school plan? Did the principal put the responsibility for change on others, or was it a

collective decision and part of an accountability plan? Based on the school improvement

data and the dialogue with each participant in regards to how the data was complied, a

model was constructed of the type of leadership that the participants utilized while

designing the improvement plan.

Each of the data sets collected was compared to the other data sets to check for

commonalities. The survey results were used to determine the participants'

leadership characteristics, and the interviews collected data on the thoughts and feelings

of the principals and how they orchestrated change and maintained the school.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative research allows for a different approach from quantitative research,

but both methods provide trustworthy and credible means of gathering and analyzing data

(Creswell, 2007). Lincoln and Guba (1986) describe trustworthiness as the combination

of credibility, confirmability, dependability, transferability, and authenticity. Each

decision for this research was purposefully made, and consideration given, so that each

step of the research reinforced the trustworthiness of the study.

Credibility

Credibility is truthfulness of observation and the researcher's ability to show a

sound path of data triangulation and reflective process during data collection (Ary et al.,

2006). The research data collection included a survey, two sets of interviews, and school

improvement data. The MLQ was administered and data compiled by Mindgarden.com

Results from all participants were provided to researcher at conclusion of the data

collection. Each participant's results were analyzed by calculating their mean score on

each of the leadership categories. Reflection resulting from discussions with both the

participants and research committee members were recorded in note form. Samples of

those notes taken during the data collection process can be seen in Appendix J.

Triangulation is used to determine the credibility of the collected data. Denzin and

Lincoln (1998) suggested that "the use of multiple methods, or triangulation, reflects an

attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question" (p. 4). Ely,

Anzul, Friedman, and Gardner (1991) described triangulation as "the process of

corroborating evidence from different individuals, types of data, or methods of data

collection in descriptions and themes in qualitative research" (p. 266). Data triangulation

was achieved in this study by using information gleaned from each of the three data

sources in order to derive a group of common themes, which are discussed in chapter 4.

An example of a synthesis of these common themes and patterns that emerged from the

three separate data collection sources can be viewed in their respective appendices:

MLQ-Table 3, Interview Synthesis-Appendix J, Coding of Interview Transcription-

Appendix I & K, and School Improvement Data-Appendix L. The presentation of

themes created a comprehensive presentation of the phenomenon under exploration.

        Member checking occurred at two separate stages of the study: during

transcription and during analysis of the data. Member checks were used after the

transcription of each recorded interview was completed by the researcher. The

transcriptions were sent via email to each participant. Each principal had the opportunity

to review the transcription of his interview for accuracy. This was done to verify the

dependability of the data. At the conclusion of the data collection process, all

information provided to the researcher by the principals was reviewed with them. All of

the comments and corrections that emerged from those discussions were integrated into

the final transcripts. After the data were analyzed, the results of the study were emailed

to the six participants. In the email, the researcher described in detail how data were

collected, how themes were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the

inquiry. The participants were asked for comments pertaining to the results. Similar to

the initial phase of member checking, the comments of the six participants were

integrated into the study. A sample of these comments is attached in Appendix F.

Confirmability

Confirmability was supported by establishing an audit trail which shows how data

was processed and analyzed. Data was checked and rechecked to control for bias. While

transcribing the interview data, reviewing survey data, and reviewing school

improvement data, notes were made in the margins of documents or with track changes to

record personal opinions and other subjective ideas. The reflective action of placing

notes during analysis of data constructed a framework that helped maintain the

confirmabilitity of this research. Table 3 presents the audit trail of data analysis .

Table 3

Audit Trail

- Audit Trail
  - Data Collection
    - MLQ Survey
      - Validated Online survey
      - Researched based questions
    - Interview
      - Semi-structured series using literature driven Interview Guide
      - Reflective notes and refection on MLQ and school data to improve discussion
      - Digital recording device for transcriptions
      - Digital recording
    - School Improvement data
      - State provided templet used by all schools
      - notes and relection with participants looking for comparrison with MLQ results
  - Data Analysis
    - raw data analysis
      - Notes and reflections
      - Categorized by personal reflections and reflections on findings
      - microsoft word with comments
    - Member Checking
      - Used Dropbox online file sharing program
      - Transcriptions and initial biographies signed off by participants
    - Peer Review
      - Review of interview questions based on literature
      - Transcription participant feedback
      - Committee feedback

Dependability

      In qualitative research the dependability of the study is equivalent to the

traditional quantitative notion of reliability (Ary et al., 2006). While reliability focuses on

the ability to obtain the same or similar results in a similar test, dependability rather

focuses on the need to describe not only the reproducibility of the study, but must also

account for the evolving nature of qualitative settings and interviews. Morse (1994)

suggests that researchers can increase dependability in the study by carefully

documenting a work to ensure that others can "reconstruct the process by which the

investigators reached their conclusions" (p. 230). Suggestions include creating an audit

trail that includes components like raw data, data reduction and analysis, reconstruction

and synthesis process, process notes, and instrument development notes and information

(Savenye & Robinson, 2005).

      In ensuring that the results of this study are reproducible, detailed documentation

was developed that showed how interview data and school improvement data were

analyzed. Before beginning the interview process the researcher compiled the

information gathered from the surveys to help inform and shape the interview questions.

Once the interviews were complete the data was compiled into a series of transcripts by a

professional transcription service. Notes from the reading of the transcriptions were

recorded through the use of comments within the original documents in Microsoft Word.

This allowed the researcher to look at the data throughout development of and identify

emergent themes for further analysis and development. In the development of the themes the researcher used both In Vivo and subsequently descriptive coding to analyze the work. Finally, at the end of each analysis the researcher completed rechecking and member checking to attempt to identify and reduce bias in the work.

Transferability

Transferability is detailed explanation of all data collection so the reader can determine if the findings are able to be applied into another setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). The data in this study is presented with detailed descriptions to allow the reader to determine if the findings are transferrable. Samples of each of the data collection methods are also presented so the reader can get a clear picture of how the collection took place.

Authenticity

Authenticity is demonstrated by displaying the range of different viewpoints or realities (Giver, 2008; Lincoln & Guba, 1994). Each participant's data was presented thoroughly, regardless of the compatibility of their opinions with the opinions of the researcher or the other participants. All differences or opposing views are presented throughout the research. The transcriptions from each interview were provided to each of the participants, who were able to verify that no information was deleted during the transcribing of the recorded interview. At that time, participants confirmed that the data was adequately transcribed and that all conversations were correctly included. Appendix K is an example of such correspondence between a participant and the researcher, certifying the authenticity of the transcription.

Ethical Issues

In any research project, ethical issues must be foremost on the mind of the researcher. The safety and consideration of the participants must be placed above the results of the project. In this study, participation was completely voluntary. The participants were provided with informed consent forms and detailed information concerning their involvement in the research. All interview responses were recorded as direct quotes, and the researcher tried not to influence the participants' responses in any way, but only recorded their responses to the posed questions. All responses taken were documented as originally spoken, and not altered in any way. The participants had the right not to answer any question at any time during the research. The personal identities of the participants were protected by using pseudonyms for participants and their schools. Liberty University IRB approval and informed consent was gained prior to any research taking place. All information collected from the MLQ leadership survey, both interviews, and school documents were stored in a secured cabinet that could only be accessed by the researcher. All computer data was password protected. Hard and soft data will be destroyed after seven years have passed from the time of this dissertation's publication. Hard data will be shredded, and soft data will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the researcher's computer.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to gather, examine, and describe the knowledge, beliefs, and actions of selected high school principals who had improved student achievement in their schools. The phenomenological design was considered appropriate (Schwandt, 2000) to ascertain the experiences and feelings of the participants. Nonevaluative qualitative data was collected from a sample of six principals who had increased student performance to meet AYP standards.

This chapter presents the findings regarding the experiences of each principal as they improved student achievement scores and graduation rates in conjunction with meeting state requirements. Each principal reported unique methods of accomplishing school improvement goals, and although their methods of increasing student achievement were different, they shared similar experiences and feelings about the process. This chapter pairs the questions posed by the researcher with the common themes that emerged from each principal's responses. The chapter begins with a review of the research questions, then presents a short biography for each participant. Next, the findings relating to the results of the MLQ are presented. Findings for each research question follow, as well as a summary of the participant responses to the researcher's queries during the interview process. Finally, the common themes that were gleaned from the interviews are presented, followed by the school improvement data. A short summary concludes the chapter.

Participants

Six principals of Georgia high schools were selected as participants for this study. The principals selected were chosen because each had successfully increased their schools' standardized test scores or graduation rate over a three year period to meet state standards after previously failing AYP.

Principal 1 has been a high school principal for less than 10 years, but had been a teacher for over 25 years. He had also served as an assistant principal at two different middle schools in the state of Georgia. His bachelors degree and masters degree are in the field of science education; his second masters degree is in educational leadership. Principal 1 stated that he began his teaching career with the thought that he would never become a school administrator, but when a close friend needed a trusted colleague to turn around a distressed middle school, he took the job of assistant principal. Principal 1 stated that once in the role of administrator, the thought of returning to the classroom ended. He stated that he enjoyed the organizational side of education and found that the drive to discover new ways to increase student achievement was his new passion. The results from the MLQ showed that Principal 1 had results that place his leadership style closer to the transformational leadership side of the continuum of leadership. He received low scores on passive/avoidance leadership. The information provided in the school improvement plan also complements this style of leadership. Different groups were assembled and contributed to the formation of the plan used by the school.

Principal 2 received her masters degree in educational leadership and has worked in education for over 40 years. She has worked as an administrator for eight years at the

at the elementary, middle, and high school levels, and has spent over five years as a high school principal. When she began her teaching career, she was a fine arts teacher in a small rural town. She loved teaching and never planned on becoming an administrator. She was motivated to obtain her masters degree in educational leadership by a friend who always looked to push her past her own expectations. It was this friend who later hired her for her first assistant principal position. She said that she was reluctant to move from the classroom to the assistant principal position because she did not want to lose the personal connection that she had developed with her students. She also stated that she spent a majority of her time, when in her administrative role, building new relationships with her students to overcome her lack of time in the classroom. Principal 2 ranked highest in comparison to the other participants on transactional leadership and would find a position closer to the middle of the continuum. Based on the MLQ results and the definition of transactional leadership, Principal 2 should lead by rewards. Principal 2 provided opportunities for her staff to decide on the school's problems, such as attendance issues, and then decide upon methods that the school could use to address the problems. Each of those items were mentioned on the school improvement plan, constructed by the school, further illustrating that leadership and caring behaviors were shared by stakeholders in the school.

Principal 3 has been in education for over 25 years. He received a bachelors degree in science education and a masters degree in educational leadership, and recently completed a doctoral degree in curriculum and learning. He explained that the best preparation for being a principal was his time as a teacher. Principal 3 scores are low on

passive/avoidant and higher on the transactional and transformational side of the leadership continuum described by Bass and Avilio (1985). Principal 3 would find a position towards the right side of the continuum near transformational leadership.

Principal 4 has been in the education field for 19 years. He received his bachelors degree in social studies education and a masters degree in educational leadership and is currently working to complete a doctoral degree in educational leadership. He has worked mostly at the high school level, but worked at a community college for a few years in an administrative role as well. He worked as a behavioral specialist for less than five years; his certification was in emotional behavioral education. His leadership style was fluid and evolved based on the students' needs. Principal 4 always wanted to be a school leader, and his goal is to become a superintendent before he retires. Principal 4 ranked the highest in passive/avoidant leadership and would appear to land just to the left of center on the continuum. However, Principal 4 described a different style during the interviews and in the school improvement data. Both data sources showed Principal 4 as a leader that empowered his staff and relied on the staff and community to create the changes needed in the school.

Principal 5 has been an educator for less than 20 years. He was a social studies teacher for less than 10 years at the county alternative school prior to becoming an assistant principal of a high school. He received his masters and specialist degrees in educational leadership. The strict structure required to maintain order while in charge of the alternative school has established Principal 5's belief that strong structure in a school helps alleviate many of the problems in the building. Principal 5's scores are low on

passive/avoidant and higher on transactional and transformational. He would find a position towards the right side of the continuum near transformational leadership. The construction of Principal 5's school improvement data matched his MLQ results showing a principal that empowered his staff and encouraged community concerns to help drive the plan of improving student achievement.

Principal 6 began her career as a social studies teacher. She received a masters degree in social studies and a specialist degree in supervision and curriculum. She began her administrative career as an assistant principal in a middle school. She was high school principal for five years prior to retiring after over 30 years in public schools. Principal 6 worked at all levels of education, from elementary teacher to District Coordinator of Social Studies Education. For her entire career, she was driven to improve the curriculum in her school district. Principal 6 had results that place her leadership style closer to the transformational leadership side of the continuum. She received low scores on passive/avoidance leadership and had higher scores on items that were closer to the right side of the continuum. Principal 6's school improvement plan was developed in the style of a leader that is transformational. Staff and community members were used to construct the improvement plan that addressed the short falls identified by each school.

Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire

The MLQ measures a broad range of leadership styles, from passive leaders to leaders who use rewards to motivate the staff to leaders who help transform their staff to be leaders themselves (Bass & Avolio, 2004). Information gathered from the MLQ surveys regarding each principal's leadership style and practices was shared with each of the participants during the first interview to promote communication about their leadership style. Each of the participants had the option of answering all or part of the survey questions. The MLQ was structured so that each participant answered the entire survey. Each category of questions aligns with a type of leadership; transformational leader, transactional leader, or passive/avoidance leader.

A quantitative data collection method was utilized in this qualitative research project to provide greater insight into each participant's leadership style. A better understanding of each principal's specific leadership style led to a better understanding of how the participants were able to increase student achievement in their schools. When the discussion of leadership style was broached with each of the participants, none of them seemed to have ever thought about what type of leader they were. The MLQ results (Table 3) revealed that each participant ranked three or higher on the respective transformational leadership scale, with one being the lowest and four being the highest. Bass and Avolio (1995b) explained that "Transformational leadership is a process of influencing in which leaders change their associates' awareness of what is important, and move them to see themselves and the opportunities and challenges of their environment

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in a new way" (p. 94). Transformational leaders are proactive and look to maximize the

usefulness of their staff. Table 4 presents the MLQ results of the six participants.

Table 4 MLQ Results

Participant	Passive/Avoidant	Transactional Leadership	Transformational Leadership
Principal 1	0.5	3	3.3
Principal 2	1	3.8	3.3
Principal 3	1.2	3.3	4
Principal 4	2	2.5	3
Principal 5	1	3	3.4
Principal 6	0.5	3	4
Mean of participants	1.03	3.1	3.5

The three columns on the table display the three key leadership characteristics that

the MLQ defines. First is passive/avoidant, which Bass and Avolio (2004) describe as a

leader who does not respond to situations and problems systematically. Staff members in

this style of leadership are allowed to make decisions without specific direction from the

leader. The leader is only involved with a problem when failure is the result. This style

of leadership has a negative effect on desired outcomes (Bass & Avolio, 2004). Next, is

transactional leadership, where the leader encourages employees to accomplish tasks by

being supplemented or rewarded at completion. The leader motivates the staff using

contracts and defining agreements to achieve specific work objectives. Transactional leaders focus on actively setting standards and waiting for mistakes to occur before taking action. Active forms of transactional leadership focus on identifying mistakes and allowing for rewards to motivate the members. Finally, transformational leadership moves past rewards for effort. Transformational leaders inspire and intellectually stimulate the individuals that they lead. Transformational leaders encourage staff members to be proactive as well as reactive, but include each of the participants in the planning and implementation of the plan so that each employee is internally motivated to build a successful environment (Bass & Avolio, 2004).

Bass and Avolio's (2004) description of leadership can be described in terms of a sliding scale or continuum. On the left side of the scale is passive/avoidant leadership; on the right is transactional leadership; in the middle is transformational leadership. The research results show how the participants scored in each of the three main areas on the leadership continuum. Principal 1 and Principal 6 had results that place their leadership style closer to the transformational leadership side of the continuum. They received low scores on passive/avoidance leadership and had higher scores on items that were closer to the right side of the continuum. Principal 4 ranked the highest in passive/avoidant leadership and would appear to land just to the left of center on the continuum. Principal 2 ranked highest in comparison to the other participants on transactional leadership and would find a position closer to the middle of the continuum. Based on the MLQ results and the definition of transactional leadership, Principal 2 should lead by rewards. The staff members should only be involved in implementation of plans when it extrinsically

benefits them. However, the description provided by Principal 2 of how she and her staff

developed the school improvement plan paints a different picture. Principal 2 provided

opportunities for her staff to decide on the school's problems, such as attendance issues,

and then decide upon methods that the school could use to address the problems.

Principal 3 and 5's scores are low on passive/avoidant and higher on transactional and

transformational. These leaders would find a position towards the right side of the

continuum near transformational leadership.

Each participant claimed that they lead based on what they had seen in the past as

successful leadership, and were not focused on what specific style of leadership they

used. Many recounted times in their past when they were exposed to what they described

as poor leaders. Based on those experiences, all participants tried to avoid exhibiting

those types of characteristics and tried to stay true to their values.

The participant interviews were guided by the MLQ results and the five research

questions. The MLQ analyzed the specific leadership traits of each participant. The

research questions were designed with the MLQ questions in mind; they paralleled what

the literature supported as the common problems and situations a principal must endure

during the job. The questions were posed to the participants in hopes of determining their

leadership style and characteristics, and to determine how they were able to overcome all

of the challenges that arose. During the interviews with the participants, each principal

shared how they felt about the data gathered by the survey about their leadership style.

Principal 1 expressed that he developed his leadership style from his learned

experiences as an assistant principal. He stated, "I see my job as the guy who needs to

fire up those around me so they can get the job done." He went on to say, "My mentors relied heavily on their staff to run the school. I adopted that style of leadership from them."

Principal 2 described learning how to lead by following those leaders who inspired her and made her feel empowered. She said, "I have always put others first. It is just how I am. I knew my weaknesses and worked to surround myself with people who could fill in those blanks."

Principal 3 discussed that he spent a lot of time planning his actions deliberately, and was very impressed that he showed signs of being a transformational leader. Principal 3 commented, "I use what worked and what didn't work from my past. If you continually make bad leadership decisions you eventually get removed from this job." He went on to say, "I was a little shocked on how the results came back from the survey. I thought I was a little more authoritative in my style."

Principal 4 made it clear that his style evolved from trial and error. Principal 4's responses to interview questions at times made him sound very authoritative and demanding. However, the results from the MLQ showed he led by motivation and empowerment. He stated, "My leadership style most definitely was constructed by past experiences and the leaders I followed. I learned what worked and what didn't."

Principal 5 explained his leadership style by stating,

I think it boils down to supporting them [the teachers] and to truly model being a servant leader to them. I tell them all the time, "Nobody works for me, we all

work together. I am just the guy who, if you are out of paper, can put a box on a hand cart and bring it down to your room."

Principal 6 was very open and excited about the results the MLQ provided to her. She believed that these types of self assessments help leaders become better. She said, "My leadership has evolved over my career, and I have used different tools to look at my strengths and weakness. I have always tried to surround myself with people who fill in my weak points."

School Improvement Data

The state of Georgia requires each school to develop an individualized plan for improvement (Georgia State Board of Education Rules, 2002). Each participant was asked to provide their mission for the school with regard to student achievement, the role of school leaders in the plan, the academic policies of the schools, teacher development plans or activities, graduation rate improvement plan, and remediation tasks to improve high-stakes testing for their school improvement plan. That information showed that their school improvement came as a result of clear direction and detailed planning. Clear direction was evident in the structure of the school improvement plan. Each school wrote out how problems that the school faced would be addressed. One school had less than a 72% average attendance rate. The principal of this school constructed specific steps to target student attendance. The principal set an attainable goal and elicited help from the staff to construct a plan that would increase student attendance. Other issues addressed by the schools' improvement plans were lack of student engagement by different

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demographic groups, poor scores on Georgia high school graduation tests, missing accommodations for students with disabilities, and poor lesson construction.

The participants provided a summary of the school improvement plan that was used when their school actually improved student achievement. Each school constructed their school improvement plan based on self assessments.   They carefully created surveys that best fit their specific school needs. The schools polled their communities using these surveys in order to get an accurate picture of where their specific deficits lay. Those surveys asked all participants to provide areas where improvement was needed. The school improvement plan for each of the six schools focused on designing a mission statement that could capture the direction of the school. The plans also prescribed building an academic structure that would meet the needs of their schools. The information gleaned during this portion of the research helped improve the follow up interview dialogue.

The follow up interviews covered questions about how the school improvement plans were constructed and who the active parties were that helped develop the plans. During this dialogue about school improvement plans, a clear picture of leadership practices began to emerge. Clarification was achieved on concepts discussed in the first interview that were unclear upon reflection. Each participant displayed a leadership style that was consistent with the data gathered from the MLQ during their explanation of the development of the school improvement plan. Every participant had chosen a specific direction and had taken time to utilize a variety of stakeholders when developing their own school improvement plans. The participants found it difficult to rely heavily on their

districts' school improvement plans because of the large amount of generic content contained in them. Many of the participants described the specific initiatives that were developed by the local school as more useful for improving student achievement than making school improvement. Those initiatives included shared leadership, attendance incentives, providing enrichment to increase engagement, and redistributing the best teachers with the lowest achieving students. Each of the participant's initiatives became evident to the researcher while he was reflecting on the dialogue recorded in the interviews. The participants described a method of developing the school improvement plan that allowed multiple sources to provide input on the plan of action.

Interviews

This research was guided by the five research questions. The responses are reported based on the transcribed interviews of six principals whose students increased achievement on the state's AYP measurements. Each principal participated in two interview sessions. Each session was designed to prompt the participants to reveal what actions and steps they took to improve student achievement. The questions guided the process, but the participant was allowed to disclose any information that they felt was relevant. The principals were asked each of the research questions in the first interview, while the second interview was structured to gather further information on the previous discussions. The first session of interviews was used to gather general information based on responses to questions posed by the researcher. The second session of interviews was used to delve more deeply into any topic that needed clarification or required more information. During the interview process, each guiding question was pursued until data

saturation was achieved. Data saturation was realized when the participant's response no longer produced any new information. During the interview data coding process, obvious themes emerged. Some themes were in line with specific questions, and other themes were common across a variety of different questions.

Principal 1 interview. *What are the professional characteristics of successful high school principals who were able to balance their roles as curriculum leaders and school managers*?

Principal 1 described his greatest professional characteristic as having a strong secretary. Principal 1 stated that the secretary's main focus was to protect the principal's time and ensure that a schedule was followed. Principal 1 went on to explain that the secretary was like a gatekeeper that protected time and ensured that extraneous issues and problems did not occupy the principal's attention. The secretary enforced the written procedures of the school and used those procedures to guide staff members when they had questions.

Principal 1 also used a large whiteboard where he charted each facet of the day. He and his secretary were the only people who had access to the whiteboard. On this whiteboard were schedule appointments and upcoming events. Principal 1 stated "This is what kept me grounded during my day". The principal was adamant that the whiteboard remain private due to the fact that it was full of confidential information.

Principal 1 was enthusiastic in his opinion that his past experience trained him to recognize the importance of reflection before reaction. He stated that the experiences

learned from being an assistant principal helped him learn how to handle the unknown situations that develop each day as a principal. Much time was spent in both sessions by Principal 1 describing events or people who demanded his attention each day at his school. He explained that structure and self-discipline enabled him to focus on the tasks needed to improve student achievement. Principal 1 developed and relied heavily on his administrative staff. He spoke at length on how he provided his administrative staff with the direction of the school and then empowered them to make decisions daily without consulting him. Principal 1 stated "I would be very direct with my staff on what I expected of them each and every day. I tried get them to feel they know what I wanted."

What are the educational leadership practices of successful high school principals who were able to improve best practices in the classroom?

Principal 1 described a pattern of reading and researching current educational methods. The pattern he described was one where he selected one or two books per semester from educational leadership journals.

Principal 1attended conferences that were hosted by organizations that focus on educational leadership. He attended these conferences to gain understanding of the new practices and methods that best complemented his school's vision. He admitted that some of the initiatives implemented in his school were not chosen by him, buy by county level administrators. He described implementing those to satisfy the demands of the county, but his focus was on the research-based practices he found that suited his plan.

In the first interview, much of the time was spent describing his leadership style and method of implementing change. During the second interview, questions were posed

to try to gather more information on this question. Principal 1 described best practices as what works with in a specific school.

He described education as a relabeling factory, and that most concepts used were just manipulated names of common educational methods sold to schools to make people money. Principal 1 spent time acknowledging specific educational concepts that had been around as long as he had been in education, but were called different names by different companies.

Principal 1 and his leadership team identified other high schools that had high academic achievement and shared similar demographics as their own. He and his leadership team visited these schools and spent time with the administrators and teachers to determine what really worked. Principal 1stated these trips were invaluable and showed great emotion when describing his different visits. He described these visits as time savers because they were using the experiences of educators who had already succeeded to help answer his schools problems instead of having to go through the trial-and-error process themselves. Principal 1 stated, "It was these visits, where we really picked up the best tools to make our school better." When visiting these successful schools, they would examine each of their schools' focus areas: increasing attendance, success in the classroom, and improving overall school culture. He felt that he could trust the information given by these schools, and was not wary that the information was designed to make a sale.

What are the educational practices of successful high school principals who were successful at establishing shared leadership with their staff?

Principal 1 explained that when he was hired as the high school principal, he noticed that the school was operating, but did not have a true focus. He worked on refining the methods they used to best meet the needs of the students. Early in the planning phase, Principal 1 realized that any plan he developed must include the faculty in the implementation of that plan. Principal 1 described his leadership staff and the faculty he worked with very positively when he said, "I really surrounded myself with people who shared my belief that all kids can have success." He explained that his team worked so well together because they all had different ways of looking at problems. "We would challenge each other," he stated.

Principal 1 thoroughly explained his direction and his expectations to his leadership team. He had one of the largest leadership teams of the participants in this study consisting of 21 participants. The team was comprised of assistant principals, counselors, graduation coaches, head sport team coaches, and department heads. After the development of the school's improvement plan, he allowed each member of the leadership team to find the best ways to make their ideas work. He described himself as the one that made the tough decisions, but not the one who made all of the decisions. Many times he described his leadership team not as leaders, but as problem solvers; he was clear that this was his expectation for the leadership team. The team gathered information on all of the problems in the building so they could begin work on solving them in order to meet the needs of their students.

Multiple times during this portion of the interview, Principal 1 became excited when describing how well he thought this group performed the task of improving

academic success for students. He explained that as the group better understood his

expectations, the number of problems that he had to solve decreased. Problems were

being solved at a quicker rate, and situations were being diffused before they developed

into larger problems.

What are the educational practices of successful high school principals who

assisted in increasing the graduation rate of students over a three year period?

Principal 1 described a strong need to change the opinion of teachers in his

building that only certain students could have success. His related to his staff that

graduation from school was an expectation and not a goal. He relied heavily on feedback

and plans created by his leadership team to help accomplish this new graduation

expectation. The team met as a whole group weekly. The 21 member group was

subdivided by subject area or by job function. Each subgroup then met separately to

develop the best methods of improving success in their own departments.

Principal 1 and his leadership team noticed that the school's best teachers were

only teaching classes that were filled with the highest achieving students. The school

began pairing the best teachers with the students who had the greatest need. Principal 1

described it as "placing the number one resource with our number one need."

The leadership team also developed a method of detecting at-risk students as they

entered the ninth grade. Through the use of demographic data, attendance records,

academic achievement records, and standardized test results, they identified those

students who may struggle. These at-risk students were monitored regularly by the

leadership team to ensure that they were receiving the attention needed to help them overcome any issues that may deter them from graduation.

Principal 1explained that he did receive resistance from some faculty members who felt that graduation was not a possibility for all students. He met with these faculty members privately to discuss their opinion. During these meetings, Principal 1 made it clear that they had a choice to adopt the new ideology and remain at the school or he would assist them in finding a new position.

What are the educational practices of successful high school principals who positively impacted the performance of students on the Scholastic Aptitude Test and state required testing over a three year period?

Principal 1 utilized his leadership team to identify new or alternate methods of reaching the students who had been identified as needing additional help. Students were pulled out of electives and provided with tutoring as their schedules permitted. The expectation of the staff was to meet the needs of the students and not just do what was easiest for the faculty.

The leadership team focused on motivation as a method of increasing achievement. Rewards were used to help motivate students to maintain high efforts during preparation for the state mandated achievement tests. The rewards included candy, ice cream parties, and even t-shirts for students who met the scholastic achievement goals of the school. The faculty allowed the students to earn privileges that encouraged them to apply themselves and work harder than they had in the past. Some of the privileges they were able to earn were grade level picnics and increased time between

classes. This extra time between classes provided more opportunities for the students to socialize, which was a strong motivator.

Principal 1 requested that each subject area department collaborate to develop and incorporate lessons and assessments into their curriculum that better prepared the students for the state mandated standardized tests. He believed that practicing testing in an environment that is similar to the type of environment that would be experienced during the state mandated testing would create a sense of familiarity and help the students become more comfortable in these situations.

Principal 1 summary. Principal 1 expressed that the demands of being the instructional leader of a school, as well as its manager, required a strong commitment to both. He relied heavily on his secretary and support staff to complete required tasks successfully. Principal 1 focused on past experiences to help guide his decisions on current issues; he prided himself on reflection prior to reaction. Principal 1 believed that most new instructional methods are really just old methods with new names. He was driven to actively examine different improvement models to find aspects of those models that best fit his plans. Principal 1 also took his staff to visit successful schools to learn what those schools had done to become effective. Principal 1 believed in and actively utilized share leadership techniques. He increased opportunities for tutoring students and found times during the school day to help remediate lagging students. Principal 1 and his staff worked to find creative ways to engage their students and maximize achievement.

Principal 2 interview. *What are the professional characteristics of successful high school principals who were able to balance their roles as curriculum leaders and school managers*?

Principal 2 responded to this question in a very positive tone. A number of the other principals answered this question by describing how difficult this aspect of the job was. Principal 2, however, did not begin her answer with how difficult the job of running a school was, but by speaking about what she believed to be the qualities of an effective leader. She believed a high school principal must be open minded and deliberate regarding the decisions they make. Principal 2 felt that a strong leader empowers those around them so that they know that their opinion matters and will affect the course that the school takes. She spoke slowly and was careful about choosing her words at all times during her interview. It was clear that Principal 2 was very concerned about properly answering this question. When she finally began answering the question, she qualified her response by stating "this is over 45 long years in education speaking now." Principal 2 stated it was on the job training that was the most important aspect of her training. She stated that being a high school principal only became easier with experience. Principal 2 stated that she reflected on her time as a teacher often to help her respond appropriately to situations that developed during her time as a principal. During her career, her focus always remained centered on her relationship with students.

Principal 2 explained that she divided her day into manageable segments. The amount of time for each segment differed based on that day's tasks. Principal 2 made an effort to find time during each day to address the different activities needed to run the

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school, making sure that the curriculum aspect of the school was included. She was confident that when she scheduled a curriculum meeting, some type of personal need would arise. She was very casual during this part of the discussion and joked that curriculum emergencies did not very often arise during a management meeting.

Principal 2 relied on her leadership staff to help balance her dual roles of school manager and instructional leader. She described how she divided up the different aspects of running the school. Principal 2 assigned specific aspects of management to members of her leadership team, which consisted of her assistant principals and graduation coach. It was the leadership team's job to ensure that their individual areas were handled so that those responsibilities did not fall back on her. For example, Principal 2 had a member of her leadership team that served as her curriculum lead. The main burden of construction and implementation of curriculum plans fell on this administrator. Together Principal 2 and the curriculum lead would make plans and invite others to take part in implementing those ideas. Principal 2 explained that even though she distributed leadership with her leadership team, she still felt compelled to make some decisions on her own.

What are the educational leadership practices of successful high school principals who were able to improve best practices in the classroom?

Principal 2 stated that the focus of the coming school year was decided upon at the end of the previous school year. Student achievement data and faculty input, provided at the end of the year meetings, were used to shape the yearly plan. Principal 2 explained that each classroom had a level of expectation placed upon them. She also explained that the school operated with some nonnegotiables, and that those were

checked by the leadership team regularly through focused walks and ten minute observations. It was these checks that were used to verify that the faculty was implementing the plans that the leadership team had decided upon for that school year.

Principal 2 met regularly with her department heads and the administrator in charge of curriculum to assess progress and continually improve instruction. These regular meetings were used to ensure that the local school improvement plans were being followed. Principal 2 explained that some of the instructional practices implemented at the school were decided upon by the district leadership team. The district leadership team was composed of school level administrators as well as teachers and district level personal.

In both interviews, Principal 2 spent a great deal of time discussing how many of the programs or educational methods implemented by the leadership were received poorly by the staff. Many of the staff members were stubborn and fought against new initiatives. She explained that the leadership team would routinely show the faculty student achievement data to demonstrate that the initiative the school was undertaking was improving student learning. If the data showed that a specific program or method was not helping students reach the desired goal, the staff worked together to make an adjustment.

What are the educational practices of successful high school principals who were successful at establishing shared leadership with their staff?

Principal 2 stated,

The shared vision that the school is moving in must be shared with the staff. Each

person must have a firm grasp of what their role is in making this vision a reality.

From the administration to the students, each participant must be aware of their

expectations and be held accountable for meeting the needs of the school.

Principal 2's assistant principals shared the management aspect of the school and

helped with assessing classroom instruction. Principal 2 set up a protocol for the office

staff to send walk-in parents to the assistant principals first so that they could try to solve

any problems prior to reaching her directly. She felt this provided the assistant principals

the ability to develop the necessary skills to become a principal, as well as protect her

time so that she could focus on getting into the classrooms and supporting the teachers.

Principal 2 felt that her main focus was the role of instructional leader, and that the job

required constant attention to ensure each classroom teacher was making strides in

improving instruction.

Principal 2 relied on her subject area department heads as leaders within the

school. She explained that department heads were given the responsibility of being what

she described as "first responders." The department heads were required to field

questions or concerns that their department members might have. Any parental

concerns that could not be handled by the classroom teacher were first routed to the

department heads prior to being referred to the assistant principals. Principal 2 felt that

faculty members would be more invested in the direction of the school if each

department had local control. She also felt that classroom teachers worked harder on

solving their own problems in order to prevent their department heads from having to fix them.

What are the educational practices of successful high school principals who assisted in increasing the graduation rate of students over a three year period?

Principal 2 explained that community involvement was necessary to increase student achievement. Prior to her becoming principal, community members did not believe that graduation was for all students. Principal 2 felt that her community had lost focus on what was important. The community celebrated sporting success; the town shut down and the townspeople traveled across the state to support their school's teams on the day of an important sporting event. However, very little celebration occurred after an academic success. Principal 2 explained, "You could feel the community reacted weird when we would talk about grades or achievement at sporting events. They were like, 'why would we talk about this here tonight' or 'could you do this somewhere else?'" Each week, Principal 2 and her leadership team met and discussed ways of recognizing academic success in front of the community. Principal 2 explained that it took time, but the community eventually began to recognize the academic achievements of the students.

Principal 2 also tried to involve faculty members in encouraging the students. She used her senior advisors as transition coaches; they met regularly with their group of students to monitor progress. These coaches also helped develop clear plans that the students could follow after high school. Principal 2 acknowledged that not all of the

students planned on going to college. The transition coaches' responsibility was to show students that by graduating high school more options were available to them.

What are the educational practices of successful high school principals who positively impacted the performance of students on the Scholastic Aptitude Test and state required testing over a three year period?

Principal 2 relied on her department heads and graduation coach to build in academic reviews and practice situations throughout the school day so that the students were well prepared when the actual tests were administered. Each academic department set up tutoring programs that were offered before, during, and after electives to ensure that all of the students had an opportunity to attend tutoring.

Unlike other principals interviewed, Principal 2 used the graduation coach cautiously. Her graduation coach was not listed as part of her leadership team. Other Principals relied heavily on their graduation coach to develop curriculum for the school. However, Principal 2 only allowed her graduation coach to continually check the academic progress of the students and meet with any at-risk student. Students were classified as at-risk based on grade point average, failure rate in attempted classes, and socio-economic factors. Principal 2 utilized her special education teachers, graduation coach, and transition coaches to maintain contact with at-risk students to ensure that they were taking advantage of all remediation activities.

Principal 2 summary. It was evident from my conversation with Principal 2 that she felt that the rigors associated with leading both the managerial and academic aspects of a school are too difficult for one person to manage. As such, she developed the leaders

around her to help share the responsibilities and decisions necessary to operate the school efficiently and effectively. Patience and courage were attributes that Principal 2 pointed out as important personal characteristics of a high school principal. She was very involved with the academic programs that were intended to improve student performance. Principal 2 relied on her leadership staff to verify that the faculty was implementing the school chosen strategies and assisting where needed. She celebrated academic success to emphasize high graduation rates and improved results on standardized tests.

Principal 3 interview. *What are the professional characteristics of successful high school principals who were able to balance their roles as curriculum leaders and school managers*?

In the second interview, questions were specifically posed to try to draw out methods used by Principal 3 in balancing the dual roles. Principal 3 stated that the job of being a high school principal is very stressful. He explained that it requires purposeful planning of each school day to ensure adequate time is spent on both school management and curriculum. He described moments during which stress levels would rise due to the demands of both of the aforementioned aspects of the job. Experience as a school administrator provided Principal 3 with the necessary skills for staying focused on student achievement regardless of what crises developed. He relied on his staff to handle the problems that developed during the day while he was visiting classrooms. He stated that each person must find his or her own way of dealing with the stress and demands of this position.

Principal 3 explained that he entrusted his assistant principals with areas of curriculum and distributed administrative duties evenly to his staff. He trusted them to handle the situations in the areas in which they were assigned. Principal 3 stated that his assistant principals understood the intended direction of the school and what the expectations were in running their areas. The assistant principals were expected to handle those aspects independently and not rely on him to make decisions.

What are the educational leadership practices of successful high school principals who were able to improve best practices in the classroom?

Principal 3 became excited while speaking about searching for better methods to instruct students. The volume of his voice was elevated and his speaking speed increased, indicating that he was truly excited about this topic. It was very clear that he felt accomplished in this area of his leadership. He described this area as his "driving force" and that "without this time spent trying to improve teaching, the schools never would have made the strides they did." Principal 3 routinely visited classrooms, so he was confident that the teachers in the classrooms were not just putting on a show when he walked in. He said, "I wanted to be absolutely sure what I was observing when I was in the classroom was actually happening when I was not in the classroom." Principal 3 would question students about procedures and actions that he had witnessed and tried to build the most accurate picture of what was happening in the classroom. Once all data from the room was assessed, he and his assistant principals met with the teachers individually and provide positive feedback and constructive suggestions.

Principal 3 used district level and local improvement methods to improve classroom instruction. The district improvement plans were chosen based on the recommendations of the district's curriculum team. Each year during preplanning, departments were trained in the areas that the district curriculum team had chosen. Principal 3 was candid during this portion of the interview and described many of these types of programs as a waste of time. He acknowledged that anytime teachers collaborate, they find some method of improving teaching, but as a whole these district wide improvement methods were useless in terms of improving classroom instruction.

Principal 3 read many books each year trying to identify simple methods of improving instruction. He believed that his staff knew what they were doing and that they did not need to implement school-wide improvement plans each year. He and his assistant principals participated in book studies that described researched-based methods of improving student achievement. Principal 3 also encouraged the teachers in various departments to collaborate and attend conferences that would benefit their specific subject areas.

What are the educational practices of successful high school principals who were successful at establishing shared leadership with their staff?

Principal 3 would routinely ask his staff to volunteer to be a part of the decision making process of the school. Morning meetings would be announced to the staff so that they could plan on attending. During those meetings, different academic and procedural decisions were made. Principal 3 explained that the faculty members who wanted to participate in making decisions for the school attended these meetings. He felt that there

would be more staff buy-in if he opened up discussions with the faculty and asked them for input prior to the final decision being made. Principal 3 said, "If they felt they did not have a voice in the decisions of the school, it was their own fault."

Principal 3 utilized his assistant principals and department heads to manage and oversee their areas of responsibility. He explained that the concept of shared leadership was not difficult for him and that he shared the areas of leadership in which he felt he was weak. The stress of leading a school was described as overwhelming by Principal 3. He commented that sharing leadership created a unified environment where the stress and responsibilities were shared by all invested parties. Principal 3 expressed that his rationale for sharing leadership was that one person could not handle all of the responsibilities of the school. He assembled a leadership team to help manage and run the school. His leadership team consisted of his assistant principals, department heads, and lead counselors. The team explained new initiatives and encouraged the rest of the school to get on board with programs and ideas that were developed to increase academic performance.

What are the educational practices of successful high school principals who assisted in increasing the graduation rate of students over a three year period?

Principal 3 explained that graduation was not just something that was talked about one month before school ended; graduation preparation began at the start of each student's freshman year. Class meetings were used to discuss and celebrate academic and athletic achievements. Principal 3 held meetings with all four academic classes at the end of each grading period to discuss each class's progress and what was needed for each

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class to meet their goals. The leadership team compiled the achievements from that grading period and created a short celebration program so that the students knew that every aspect of school success was going to be celebrated.

The school had two graduation coaches. Principal 3 met daily with these two teachers to check progress and determine student needs. Principal 3 described how his graduation coaches monitored student performance in the classroom to target students who might need additional help. He felt that the job of the graduation coach was not just to help the juniors and seniors graduate, but to motivate the underclassmen as well.

The graduation coaches also focused on improving student attendance. Principal 3 and his staff believed that if the students attended school regularly, they had the best chance of mastering the information needed in order to graduate. The school used all types of rewards to encourage student attendance; they even awarded gifts each year for any student that had perfect attendance.

What are the educational practices of successful high school principals who positively impacted the performance of students on the Scholastic Aptitude Test and state required testing over a three year period?

Principal 3 explained that the process of increasing test scores hinged upon scheduling assessments that were used as periodic performance checks. He relied on his staff to develop and utilize regular assessments to determine which concepts the students were not learning adequately. These assessments were utilized by the school's academic departments to align their curriculum to the needs of their students. Each department administered common assessments in order to gather data that identified concepts that

needed to be retaught. Principal 3 made several sports analogies during his response to this research question. These analogies revolved around repeated incremental assessment of student progress. For example, he said, "A football team doesn't just wait until the final game of the season to make changes, they work each day making slight adjustments so they can improve for each game." He also explained that the teachers did not abandon the curriculum just to teach the test, but that the faculty utilized these periodic assessments to verify that the students were learning the concepts that had been taught.

Principal 3 summary. Principal 3 relied heavily on his leadership staff to perform the majority of the management tasks necessary to operate the school daily. Principal 3 conveyed the emotional side of being a principal, and explained that the job never left him at the end of the day. He was clear that researching other methods of improving education in his school was important. He strongly believed in shared leadership and depended on his leadership team's ability to lead and provide emotional stability in the school. Principal 3 believed that improving attendance was the most effective method of improving student achievement; if the students were at school, the faculty could work on filling in their learning gaps. Frequent assessment of student learning was used by Principal 3 to provide feedback to teachers that helped guide their instruction.

Principal 4 interview. *What are the professional characteristics of successful high school principals who were able to balance their roles as curriculum leaders and school managers?*

Principal 4 explained that being a principal of a high school means that the leader must be a task master. He was very casual when discussing this question, and commented that the expectation of a principal is to handle over one hundred situations every day. He explained that one must be efficient in switching from operation to operation. Principal 4 said, "At one moment you may be working on student achievement scores and you will be called to the lunch room to break up a fight. You cannot afford to be slow to react in this position." He further explained that once the discipline from this type of distraction was handled, the principal must get back on track and try to finish the last project that he was working on.

Principal 4 described massive turnover in his assistant principal staff during the school improvement process. Promotions and district office moves were the reason Principal 4 lost his assistant principals. He believed that that the burden of running the school fell entirely on his shoulders because of this change in assistant principals. Principal 4 felt that the ultimate priority of his job was the safety of the students. He leaned heavily on his assistant principals to maintain a safe and orderly school. The instructional aspect of the job was shared with his academic leadership group.

When he first took over as principal, it was his opinion that the former principal had spent too little time as the instructional leader of the school. Principal 4 felt that the principal is not just instructional leader, but should also help develop the teachers in the building to be stronger in their classrooms. The primary focus was delivering effective education to the students, and he wanted to make sure his staff was putting forth a quality product.

Principal 4 relied on his secretary to help him balance the role of instructional leader and school manager. He commented that his secretary blocked for him on issues and situations dealing with school management. This interference was beneficial so he was able to spend more time on the curriculum development of the school. Principal 4 explained:

My secretary was big on that one . . . don't schedule any meetings unless it was a dire emergency. And most of the time it worked, but superintendents have their schedules also. For the most part, you have to discipline yourself to that and organize that as part of your day.

What are the educational leadership practices of successful high school principals who were able to improve best practices in the classroom?

Principal 4 explained that one of the methods he used to improve classroom practice was visiting other schools with his staff. He felt that those visits provided a multitude of different opportunities for his staff to grow and improve. Principal 4 commented that teachers saw different teaching methods on those visits; ideas they liked and ideas they did not like. He felt that the visits validated many of the programs they had already implemented in their own school. Principal 4 stated, "By using school visits to evaluate process this encouraged some teachers to explore outside their own classrooms and use more peer orientated learning in our own building."

Principal 4 and his administrative team made frequent visits to his school's classrooms to assess the educational techniques that were being used. Principal 4's administrative team consisted of the assistant principals in the school. After the visits,

the team provided feedback to help teachers make small modifications to their current plans in order to maximize learning. Principal 4 said, "Getting into the classrooms is always a challenge during the school day. We used these visits to get a quick snapshot of things."

What are the educational practices of successful high school principals who were successful at establishing shared leadership with their staff?

Principal 4 was very clear on his view of shared leadership. He believed that only one true leader can manage a school. He was very emphatic that he did not believe in shared leadership. His answers to this portion of the interview reflected that stance. At times during this question he sounded very arrogant and strong-willed.

However, in the second interview, while describing how the school had improved academically, he mentioned a time when he relied on a small group of teachers for help. The group consisted of a graduation coach, counselors, a special education teacher, a math teacher, and a science teacher. The group did not include any assistant principals due to the high rate of turnover in these positions. He felt that these teachers were rising stars and just needed an opportunity to lead other teachers to improve learning in the school. He met with this group often and their feedback helped shape the decisions that influenced school improvement.

Principal 4 did not like to assign or nominate teachers to his curriculum team. He felt that teacher volunteers produced better results. He wanted people who were committed to working hard and thinking outside their classroom to join him on his journey to improve the whole school.

What are the educational practices of successful high school principals who assisted in increasing the graduation rate of students over a three year period?

Principal 4 had daily meetings with his graduation coach, counselors, and the special education lead teacher. He explained how his leadership team targeted the lowest academically achieving 35% of the student body. When speaking of this targeted program, it was clear that Principal 4 was proud of this area of improvement because his voice became louder and more excited, and his pace of speech increased. Principal 4 divided the school into groups of no larger than 25 students each and assigned a faculty member to monitor their progress. The faculty members were to ensure that problems in student achievement were addressed before the problems became too large to fix. One solution that he found to be very effective was scheduling the students who needed the most intensive remediation with the teachers who had the most to offer. At his high school, those teachers had previously been reserved for gifted students and high achieving students.

Principal 4 admitted that improving the students' schedules was one of the most important actions taken by his leadership team to promote student achievement. While answering this question, a lot of time was spent describing a fully customizable schedule that his high school implemented to maximize student achievement. Prior to Principal 4's tenure, the school had a traditional seven period day with 50 minute long periods. During Principal 4's tenure, the school adopted a modified schedule that offered both 90 minute block classes and traditional 50 minute classes. He laughed several times during this portion of his response, remarking that he "drove his scheduler nuts." Principal 4

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attributed the school's student achievement increases to his leadership team's ability to pair students with the correct teachers based on academics and personality.

Tutoring was implemented by Principal 4's leadership team for the bottom 35% of students, based on achievement scores on past standardized tests. His school started a peer tutoring class where students were trained to be mentors. Those students were used in the high school, elementary school, and middle school at certain times of the day. Principal 4 found peer tutoring to be very helpful for students struggling in math and language arts.

The school also started a food and clothes pantry to supplement many of the low achieving students who received inadequate resources at home. Principal 4 explained that once students saw that the school was not just giving academic support, but providing social support as well, they wanted to be at school and wanted to do well. Principal 4 reported that a problem that arose from this level of student support was that teachers became too involved with students' personal lives.

What are the educational practices of successful high school principals who positively impacted the performance of students on the Scholastic Aptitude Test and state required testing over a three year period?

Principal 4 explained that he and his leadership team downplayed the term "high stakes test." He said, "We did not want to pressure them . . . I always felt if we were doing a good job in the classroom, our kids will do good on the test." The teachers made time to review specific materials one week before the test, as well as introduce testing tips and strategies for the students. The school provided meals to the students prior to

testing. Principal 4 also provided reward parties, picnics, and motivational speakers to encourage students to pass all portions of the state mandated tests.

In addition, Principal 4 implemented a program that provided low level readers remediation time with certified reading teachers. He found elementary school teachers who had experience teaching reading skills to nonreaders and utilized them to work with his high school students. Principal 4 relied heavily on the school's graduation coach to create an environment conducive to allowing every high school student to graduate.

Principal 4 summary. Principal 4 described the responsibility of leading a school as very difficult. His emotional investment in being a principal was evident when he spoke about balancing the role of instructional leader and school manager. Safety was a driving force in any and all decisions he made as a principal. Principal 4 encouraged groups of teachers to visit other schools as professional learning opportunities and as a means to initiate conversations concerning methods to improve student learning. Based on Principal 4's answers to the question on shared leadership, he was adamantly opposed to describing his style of leadership as shared. However, when looking at how structured change occurred at his school, Principal 4 did share leadership, but did not share the consequences for failure; those he kept for himself. Principal 4 believed that his school's graduation rates increased because he paired the neediest students with the most qualified teachers. He utilized celebrations and rewards to build a positive climate for academic achievement in his school.

Principal 5 interview. *What are the professional characteristics of successful high school principals who were able to balance their roles as curriculum leaders and school managers?*

Principal 5 believed that the first responsibility of the principal was to visit the classrooms in his school. He described the role of the principal as "reactive." Principal 5 described his workday as evolving, each day began with known tasks, but many unknown situations developed and required his attention. Principal 5 compared leading a school to a juggling act when he said that he was charged with "keeping each aspect in front of your eyes so nothing falls out of focus."

Principal 5 worked closely with his four assistant principals as well as his secretary. Each week they met and discussed school needs and each area of concern was divided up by the assistant principals. Principal 5 included his secretary in the weekly meeting so that she was aware of upcoming concerns and obligations and could protect his time. He explained, "I used to meet with the other administrators without my secretary, but felt I wasted time filling her in with what was up and coming. I started having her attend the meeting to help keep on top of all that was needed to be accomplished."

Principal 5 succeeded a principal who allowed drop-in visits at anytime during the school day. He originally had difficulty setting up boundaries while establishing new procedures on how parents could access available times in his schedule. Most of the contacts described by Principal 5 were discipline related, and parental concerns were the most time consuming part of his day. The discipline issues described by Principal 5

ranged from relationship issues between students to problems with student behavior during class. He stated, "Each situation that involves humans takes time to sort out and resolve in a way that it will not continue to take away from learning. A school disruption that lasts only a few minutes may take hours to work out between the students, parents, and staff."

What are the educational leadership practices of successful high school principals who were able to improve best practices in the classroom?

Principal 5's leadership team consisted of his assistant principals, department heads, and teachers that had the charisma and drive needed to assess teaching and make needed suggestions for improvement. During the interview, Principal 5 talked a great deal about how he and his leadership staff made routine classroom visits and provided feedback to teachers. He admitted that he was not strong in all of the academic content areas, but he was able to gauge student engagement when it was present. Unlike the other principals, Principal 5 maintained in both interviews that there was no secret method that he used to improve student achievement.

He felt that his school's student achievement gains were a result of constantly monitoring the needs of his teachers and providing feedback regarding how they were managing their classroom environments. He said, "The number one priority is the classroom, direct instruction, and how much of the information the students receive from the teachers." Principal 5 believed that evaluating the instructors was the most effective method of improving teaching in his building. He stated, "I think you have to inspect what you expect." The goal was for teachers to gain an understanding of what was

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needed to improve instruction. Principal 5 explained the value of the constant visits to the classroom this way: teachers could receive his feedback and then work to improve their instruction.

What are the educational practices of successful high school principals who were successful at establishing shared leadership with their staff?

Principal 5 expressed that his leadership style was inviting, but he was quick to establish that he was not afraid of making decisions. He explained that he asked for feedback from his staff on many, if not all, of his decisions. He tried to lead the school based on teacher feedback and consider the ideas and thoughts of his staff. Principal 5 explained, "We always open our department head positions each year to allow other teachers the opportunity to get more involved. The county also provided opportunities for teachers to help develop and design our educational direction." Principal 5 supported and celebrated any staff member who accepted leadership roles, and he felt leadership became contagious with other teachers as well. When meeting in groups, Principal 5 routinely publicly praised staff members who took leadership roles. He also provided certificates and tokens of appreciation to those staff members that took on additional responsibilities. He believed all of his staff possessed some role in the school's leadership.

What are the educational practices of successful high school principals who assisted in increasing the graduation rate of students over a three year period?

Principal 5 and his staff constantly reinforced the idea that all academic work was for the purpose of walking across the stage at the end of high school and receiving a

diploma. When Principal 5 began his job as principal, the school relied exclusively on

afterschool tutoring as a support to help students graduate. However, Principal 5

recognized that the students who needed tutoring had many obligations before and after

school. To address this problem, programs of remediation were set up during the school

day to meet the needs of the lower achieving students. Each academic department in the

school constructed review curricula that were used by students for remediation during the

school day. This meant that teachers needed to donate time during the day to work with

students in need. Principal 5 had to convince certain portions of the faculty to give up

planning times in order to provide this needed remediation. He admitted that he

struggled getting teachers to relinquish their planning time.

Principal 5 relied on his graduation coach to develop different programs to

motivate students. The counselors and the graduation coach targeted the students who

were behind in credits and might not graduate. Once those students were identified,

regular meetings were held with them and plans were developed that allowed each

student the opportunity to graduate.

Principal 5 also implemented a hybrid schedule in his school in order to provide

additional opportunities for students who had failed classes to regain credits that they

needed to graduate. He commented that his school scheduler worked very hard to

develop a schedule that met the needs of the students. Principal 5 found other ways for

students to recover missing credits while at school. He utilized local funds that the

school generated from athletics to provide online opportunities for students to recover

credits for classes that they had failed. Students who had failed multiple classes that they

needed to graduate were placed in computer labs where they had the opportunity to make up multiple classes in a single class period.

What are the educational practices of successful high school principals who positively impacted the performance of students on the Scholastic Aptitude Test and state required testing over a three year period?

Principal 5 referred to his answer on question four during both interview sessions. He explained that the school increased student achievement on standardized tests through the same tutoring and remediation methods that were used to increase the graduation rate. One initiative used by the school to improve improvement on the standardized tests was using review material and study guides. Academic departments developed review CDs and posted reviews on the internet so students could work on reviewing concepts on their own time.

Principal 5 encouraged all of the school's teachers to expose their students to representative questions that they would likely find on the Scholastic Aptitude Test and the state mandated tests. Each of Principal 5's academic departments developed benchmark assessments that they used to assess which concepts the students needed to practice. Principal 5 admitted that he and his staff identified specific demographics that showed lower signs of success and targeted those subgroups for remediation. The demographic groups that demonstrated a high need were then provided the opportunities and resources needed to succeed. Principal 5 explained that whether his students were black, white, economically disadvantaged, Hispanic, male, or female, he and his staff strived to create a culture where all students could learn and be successful.

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Principal 5 summary. Principal 5 spent much time in both interviews describing how he believed in being a leader that served his staff. Principal 5 did not spend much time researching best methods for improving learning and instruction, but simply instituted county initiatives. He and his staff made it a point to constantly evaluate current classroom practices and make suggestions to teachers. Principal 5 utilized shared leadership and made sure his staff always had input on decisions that effected instruction. He and his staff attempted to implement multiple methods of improving the graduation rate and test results. The school utilized tutoring and specialized student schedules to increase the opportunities for the students to earn needed credits for graduation.

Principal 6 interview. *What are the professional characteristics of successful high school principals who were able to balance their roles as curriculum leaders and school managers?*

Principal 6 believed that a high school principal should be both a curriculum leader and school manager; however, a principal's first priority must be instructional leader. She stated, "There should not be any question by anyone associated with the school that the principal is the instructional lead." Principal 6 admitted that there are many management issues to address while operating a school, but the instructional aspect of school management should never be neglected.

Principal 6 routinely visited classrooms and questioned students; she even participated in classroom discussions. She also explained how an administrator is responsible for providing a school that is safe and secure for the students. Principal 6

acknowledged that if a crisis or emergency arises during the school day, that it is the responsibility of the school administration to handle it.

Principal 6 spent a lot of time during the summer, and other instances when students were not at school, discussing situations with her assistant principals and preparing them to handle any problems that developed during the school day without having to call her. Other than accidents with injuries, Principal 6 attempted to take care of problems before or after school hours even though it meant putting in a tremendous amount of time outside of the regular school schedule.

Principal 6 relied on her secretary to schedule appointments at times that would not interfere with her involvement in the instructional aspects of the school. When she was conducting her classroom visits, she relied on her assistant principals to manage any situation that developed. Principal 6 laughed a few times when answering this question and commented that learning how to balance all of the expectations of being a principal was never taught in any class she attended.

What are the educational leadership practices of successful high school principals who were able to improve best practices in the classroom?

Principal 6 spent a great deal of time evaluating various professional learning opportunities for her teachers. She explained that one method of improving classroom instruction was taking the teachers to a variety of different educational conferences. She also offered school-based professional learning opportunities during the school day for her teachers and conducted reading strategies workshops during their planning periods. Principal 6 applied for several grants and used the money to send large groups of her staff

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to intensive curriculum training centers. Principal 6 constructed a leadership council she called a "cadre." It was from the cadre chairpeople that she received the most feedback on professional learning. She tried to engage her staff in professional learning that they decided was relevant.

What are the educational practices of successful high school principals who were successful at establishing shared leadership with their staff?

Principal 6 identified shared leadership as the factor that allowed her to balance her roles as instructional leader and school manager. She stated strongly, "I am a firm confirmed believer in shared leadership."

Principal 6 explained that she believes all real change comes from the bottom up. She worked hard trying to empower school staff to participate in shared leadership. Principal 6 divided the school into four cadres/groups. Every teacher served on one of those groups, and each of the groups was composed of teachers of different subjects. Each group focused on a specific area of improvement that was identified through local school assessments. Engagement, attendance, rigor, and test taking methods are examples of different areas that Principal 6's cadres would address. Principal 6 recognized that the cadre system did not have complete teacher buy-in, but she felt that shared leadership peer pressure became very important because it influenced those teachers that did not buy in. The school's four cadres set goals and developed strategies that they presented to the school as a whole, and then the entire school voted on those goals and strategies.

What are the educational practices of successful high school principals who assisted in increasing the graduation rate of students over a three year period?

Principal 6 explained that the entire school worked together to target the graduation rate. One of the cadres' responsibilities was to improve the graduation rate. Principal 6 posted the names of all the new ninth grade students on a chart in the data room, and if any of them dropped out, an "x" was placed over their name. Principal 6 described this method as a strong reality check for the staff; they could actually see the drop out as a person. The staff closely monitored this list and strived to keep as many names active as possible.

Principal 6 had a graduation coach who she described as "wonderful," but felt that the responsibility of helping students graduate fell on everyone in the building. One method Principal 6 used to get the students focused on graduation was having ninth grade home room teachers put caps and gowns on all of the students and then take their picture. The school would then use these pictures to remind the students of the ultimate goal each day. The school also offered a number of opportunities for credit recovery. The credit recovery options were offered in every class throughout the school year. Teachers were encouraged to grade students on their understanding of the concepts that were taught in the class. This meant that if a student showed understanding of a concept later in the semester than his peers, the student still received credit once that understanding was reached. Credit recovery opportunities were also offered on the day after each semester ended in order for students to have one final opportunity to demonstrate that they understood the concepts taught during the semester. Additionally, online classes were

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offered to students to allow them the chance to achieve credits in classes that they had previously failed.

Principal 6 explained that the school staff spent a lot of time on the concept of student engagement. The school implemented inquiry projects in every subject, every semester, and at every grade level. These projects were even offered in career and technical classes. Principal 6 helped her staff make the inquiry assignments relevant so that students could understand the purpose of doing this work. She focused her staff on standards based instruction and not just teaching the text book. Principal 6 met with a group of seniors who had not passed the graduation test by the beginning of the year to ensure they were taking advantage of all the tools that the school provided to help them graduate.

What are the educational practices of successful high school principals who positively impacted the performance of students on the Scholastic Aptitude Test and state required testing over a three year period?

Principal 6 attributed her school's success at improving on the Scholastic Aptitude Test to raising the expectations of the students in her school. Principal 6 declared that the school's improved results on this test were due to getting the students excited about school and finding ways to increase engagement.

The school was able to keep students enrolled longer by partnering with the local technical school to provide classes and programs that the students needed. They received training and often became successful in a specific job.

Principal 6 described discipline problems as a large cause of many of her students' failure to complete high school. She relied on her staff to make every effort to show the students that making the right choice would benefit them in the future.

Principal 6 summary. It was obvious from my conversation with Principal 6 that she spent most of each school day working on improving the curriculum. She spent long hours after school each day working on management items. Principal 6 strongly believed in shared leadership and constructed cadres within the school to identify areas that needed improvement and then developing methods to accomplish the improvement. It was clear that she believed that substantial change in a school did not occur until the school culture was changed. She relied on shared leadership to provide all stakeholders with an opportunity to become involved in the school improvement process. Principal 6 believed that "you can change tests scores with a new program, but real substantial change that will last must come from changing a culture."

Summary of Question Responses by All Participants

The participants' responses to the research questions were individual and were made without knowledge of the answers of the other participants. However, several common themes emerged during these discussions, and those themes are addressed later in this chapter. Following is a further examination of the ideas that the participants discussed in relation to each research question. This section presents the responses from the participants in order to further develop an understanding of how these principals managed their roles as instructional leaders.

What are the professional characteristics of successful high school principals who were able to balance their roles as curriculum leaders and school managers?

The necessity of being flexible was repeatedly mentioned by the participants as an important ability. They recognized the need to be able to alter their schedule and adapt to whatever situation was put in front of them. Principal 2 said, "Just when you get working on a project a crisis will always pop up and you have to switch gears to tackle it." Many of the participants admitted that balance between management and curriculum was difficult to achieve while operating a school.

Each of the principals acknowledged that every employee in their buildings has free will and could have chosen to deviate from the principal's plan at anytime. Principal 5 explained that "plans must be well thought out and careful attention must be made in ensuring that expectation and consequences are toughly explained to the staff."

It was unanimously believed that one person cannot operate a school. Each 4, Principal 5, and Principal 6 all utilized their secretary to protect their time and to try to principal outlined different methods they used to protect their time. Principal 1, Principal minimize the hours they spent on smaller issues. Principal 2 and Principal 3 primarily depended on strict scheduling of their day to succeed, but also relied heavily on their assistant principals to help complete all of their daily tasks. Each principal used different people in their building to help manage the large amount of work that they were expected to accomplish.

The participants also expressed the common theme that principals are not taught in school how to be successful principals. They all expressed that past experience within

the school best prepares a high school principal for success. Some of the participants

laughed when retelling situations that they never thought they would have had to deal

with as a high school principal. Principal 6 remarked that their leadership training taught

the concepts behind excellent leadership; however, none of the classes she took taught

how to manage all that was required of this job. Principal 1 said, "I didn't learn any of

the management aspects of this job in any school." Principal 4 explained that "without

past experiences in education, it would be impossible to imagine what problems develop

in a school." Prior experience in their schools helped develop the necessary skills that

would later be used to balance all of their roles. Principal 5 stated, "Much of what I do

today is in contrast to what I saw my predecessors do. I found myself in difficult

situations thinking what he would do here and I do the opposite." Principal 3 said, "Each

day I am confronted with a new problem . . . I think about past situations where I have

seen principals I admired, and try to react similar to how they did." Many of the

principals attributed their leadership success to their ability to laugh at themselves and at

stressful situations.

What are the educational leadership practices of successful high school

principals who were able to improve best practices in the classroom?

A best practice consistently identified by the participants was finding details to

work on in order to take small steps toward improving instruction. Principal 4 said, "You

eat an elephant one bite at a time. All large tasks must be worked out a piece at a time."

Each participant commented that their school contained successful teachers. They also said that one way to improve instruction was to rely on those teachers to improve teaching practices.

All of the participants explained that their school used school improvement strategies that were decided upon by some type of local leadership team. Principal 5 relied heavily on county initiatives, while the other five principals placed more focus on local initiatives. The local schools that the participants led did not have the ability to decide upon, to accept, or to reject the district wide initiatives, but each school placed emphasis where they felt it was needed.

What are the educational practices of successful high school principals who were successful at establishing shared leadership with their staff?

The idea of shared leadership is the interview question on which the participant's responses varied the most. Each principal used purposeful descriptions of how they chose to lead their schools. All of the principals except Principal 4 described how they shared leadership with their staff, despite the fact that they varied on how much control was given to their support team. Principal 4 was against describing his leadership style as shared, but during his explanation of how he improved graduation rates and test scores, he expressed that he did allow others to help him make decisions about improving student achievement. Each principal shared some aspect of their leadership with staff, yet each principal called that process by different names; shared leadership, teachers as leaders, or cadre leaders. Regardless of the words that the principals used to describe how they implemented change, the basic concept of shared leadership was very similar. Each

participant relied on a small group of employees that outwardly expressed belief in the vision that the leader had for the school. All six principals encouraged these smaller groups of employees to meet with larger groups within the school to implement the improvement plan.

What are the educational practices of successful high school principals who assisted in increasing the graduation rate of students over a three year period?

The participants all identified the action of pairing the best teachers with the most needy students as the most important precursor to their school's performance improvement. All participants explained that this process was not received well. They stated that there was initial resistance by a majority of the effective teachers, who did not want to teach the lower level students. Principal 4 went even further in trying to match teachers and students. He tried to match the specific personality traits of students with teachers that he felt would maximize learning for those students.

Another common practice that the participants used to improve graduation rates was removing the subject area distinction attached to each teacher. As a result, better collaboration occurred amongst the faculty as a whole. Teachers who had success with specific types of students began sharing their methods with the entire staff. The principals described these breakthroughs as some of the strongest catalysts of successful change.

The third major practice that emerged was encouraging nontraditional students to remain in school. Each principal described a different demographic group that had caused the school to fail AYP. By targeting the specific problems that led members of

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each group to drop out, the principals were able to reduce the number of dropouts and increase graduation rates.

What are the educational practices of successful high school principals who positively impacted the performance of students on the Scholastic Aptitude Test and state required testing over a three year period?

The interviews revealed that each principal relied on the whole school to improve student performance. Principal 6 said, "We had to make a cultural change to improve our school and this takes the whole school working together." Principal 2 commented that for change to occur, "the entire faculty has to be on the same page working in unison."

The leadership teams in each school were constructed differently; however, they functioned essentially the same. First, the leadership team created a plan, then that plan was slowly implemented. Each School would make decisions based on the success of each implemented program, and necessary changes were made to increase the impact of student achievement.

Altering student schedules was another method that principals shared as a means of creating opportunities for students to receive needed attention and remediation. Each principal developed schedules that addressed the time constraints of their students who were having difficulty meeting state requirements. Principal 4 and Principal 5 felt that utilizing scheduling to meet the needs of their students was crucial for improving student success. In addition, one principal created specific tutoring sessions to deal with students' different schedules and life expectations. Changes included early morning tutoring sessions and pulling students out of elective classes for remediation.

Themes

Phenomenology reduces rich descriptions of human experience to underlying common themes. The themes are short descriptions in which every word accurately depicts the phenomenon as described by the study participants (Blodgett-McDeavitt, 1977). The data was analyzed, and the experiences of the study participants were organized into the dominant themes that emerged during this study. In the phenomenological data analysis, the invariant constituents of the phenomenon were clustered into themes that represent the various dimensions of the phenomenon.

The MLQ provided information describing the principal's leadership based on the observed frequency of specific characteristics of the three leadership styles: passive/avoidant , transactional, and transformational. The data showed that all six study participants possessed each of the three leadership styles, but made most of their decisions in a way consistent with either the transactional or transformational leadership style. The participants most often described their leadership behaviors as transformational (Bass & Avolio, 2004).

When the researcher reviewed the MLQ results, the school improvement data, and the conducted interviews, certain themes emerged. These specific themes were consistent with the traits of a transformational leader (Bass & Avolio, 2004). The review of data by the researcher identified seven thematic patterns that were relevant to the research topic. The six predominant themes that emerged were:

1. Principals found it difficult to meet the requirements of leading the school.
2. Principals relied on a strong support staff to help answer problems.

3. Principals utilized shared leadership groups to help improve the entire school.

4. Principals came to researched-based decisions.

5. Principals involved the community in the improvement process.

6. Principals celebrated the school's test results.

The characteristics and beliefs of the study participants do not automatically translate into academic improvement. It is important to take the time to explain how this happens so unsuccessful schools have a template for leadership that leads to academic success. First, the employment of transformational leaders as principals inspires and invigorates teachers to perform at their highest level. In turn, that instructional excellence in the classroom leads to increased (and lasting) academic performance on the part of the students (Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2011). Secondly, principals that have definite and specific plans about how to attack difficulties as they arise prevent panic and feelings of insecurity, not only among staff, but also among students and parents. Challenges are sure to arise, whether the origin is governmental, community, staff, or student; it is essential for a principal's ability to structure his daily schedule in a way that makes him or her available to attack the problems whenever they occur. The stability that that type of problem management creates leaves the teachers and students to do the important work of teaching and learning, leading to the improved academic results that might not occur in a more unstable, insecure environment. Third, the creativity and flexibility of a principal leads to improved academic performance because they have the ability to alter established processes to meet the needs of the students. When a principal knows how and when to change teacher assignments, reschedule students, and establish

reward programs, the emerging needs of the school get met, even when those needs do not fit within the school's routine.

Principals Found it Difficult to Meet the Requirements of Leading the School

One of the most frequently occurring themes was the difficulty of time management for a principal. It was a common statement for a participant to say that the day of a principal is reactive. Each principal developed specific protocols in order to ensure that they remained on task for at least some part of their workday. Many of the participants described the impossibility of completing all of their necessary tasks on any given day.

Principal 6 remarked that her leadership training taught the concepts behind excellent leadership; however, none of the classes she took taught how to manage all that was required of this job. Principal 1 said, "I didn't learn any of the management aspects of this job in any school." Principal 4 explained that "without past experiences in education, it would be impossible to imagine what problems develop in a school." Prior experience in their schools helped develop the necessary skills that would later be used to balance all of their roles. Principal 5 stated, "Much of what I do today is in contrast to what I saw my predecessors do. I found myself in difficult situations thinking what he would do here and I would do the opposite." Principal 3 said, "Each day I am confronted with a new problem . . . I think about past situations where I have seen principals I admired, and try to react similar to how they did." Many of the principals attributed their leadership success to their ability to laugh at themselves and at stressful situations.

Time management. It was unanimously believed by the participants that one single person cannot operate a school. Principals 1,4, 5, and 6 all utilized their secretary to protect their time. Principal 2 and Principal 3 primarily depended on strict scheduling of their day to succeed, but also relied heavily on their assistant principals to help complete all of their daily tasks.

Principal 1 expressed that the demands of being the instructional leader of a school, as well as its manager, required a strong commitment to both. He relied heavily on his secretary and support staff to complete required tasks successfully. The secretary's main focus was to protect the principal's time and ensure that a schedule was followed. Principal 1 went on to explain that the secretary was like a gatekeeper that protected time and ensured that extraneous issues and problems did not occupy the principal's attention. The secretary enforced the written procedures of the school and used those procedures to guide staff members when they had questions.

Principal 4 used his secretary to help him balance the role of instructional leader and school manager.

Principal 4 explained:

My secretary was big on that one . . . don't schedule any meetings unless it was a dire emergency. And most of the time it worked, but superintendents have their schedules also. For the most part, you have to discipline yourself to that and organize that as part of your day.

Principal 6 relied on her secretary to schedule appointments at times that would not interfere with her involvement in the instructional aspects of the school.

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immediate action required. The necessity of being flexible was repeatedly

mentioned by the participants as an important ability. They recognized the need to be

able to alter their schedule and adapt to whatever situation was put in front of them.

Principal 2 said, "Just when you get working on a project a crisis will always pop up and

you have to switch gears to tackle it." Many of the participants admitted that balance

between management and curriculum was difficult to achieve while operating a school.

Principal 1 shared the following regarding a typical day as a principal, "Balance is hard

at this job. The hot fire always gets your attention; it seems that once you get started on

a project or task, which is when all hell breaks loose." Principal 1 focused on past

experiences to help guide his decisions on current issues; he prided himself on reflection

prior to reaction

This concept of tasks that require immediate action was stated repeatedly by the

participants. Principal 6 stated,

> Safety and security always comes first. If there is a crisis or an emergency that
>
> comes up, you had to deal with those things . . . most of the other management
>
> kind of things I tried to deal with after school hours.

Principal 6 acknowledged that if a crisis or emergency arises during the school day, that it

is the responsibility of the school administration to handle it.

Principal 5 said,

> Certainly I would think discipline and personal issues that jump up and require
>
> you to drop everything and deal with those situations . . . if you do not drop

everything and address these things they will just go up to the county office and

you will just have to deal with the situation then.

Principal 4 described the onerous requirement of the working day:

You are going to be doing more than a hundred things in a day. Switching form

operation to operation . . . so as far as tasks . . . little bit of everything each day.

My main concern was for safety of the students. No one sends their child to

school to die. I was serious about that. Nobody dies under my watch.

 A few of the participants covered how the day typically felt to them while trying to

balance the role of school manager and instructional leader. Principal 3 stated,

When I first started [his job], I used to feel as if my chest was going to explode

almost every day. It is amazing when you are able to rely on those around you;

what a difference it makes. The other thing is I got used to the speed of all the

problems.

Principal 5 described his main contacts during the school day as discipline

related, and parental concerns were the most time consuming part of his day.   He

stated, "Each situation that involves humans takes time to sort out and resolve in a

way that it will not continue to take away from learning. A school disruption that

lasts only a few minutes may take hours to work out between the students,

parents, and staff."

multiple items needing to be addressed. Principal 1 used a large whiteboard

where he charted each facet of the day. This whiteboard is where he scheduled

appointments and upcoming events. Principal 1 stated "This is what kept me grounded during my day".

Principal 3 stated the job of being a high school principal requires purposeful planning of each school day to ensure adequate time is spent on both school management and curriculum. Principal 3 commented "there are times in each day that I am overwhelmed and wonder how anyone can expect me to do it all."

Principal 2 stated that she reflected on her time as a teacher often to help her respond appropriately to situations that developed during her time as a principal.

Principal 4 explained that being a principal of a high school means that the leader must be a task master. Principal 4 said, "At one moment you may be working on student achievement scores and you will be called to the lunch room to break up a fight. You cannot afford to be slow to react in this position."

balancing responsibilities. A best practice consistently identified by the participants was finding details to work on in order to take small steps toward improving instruction. Principal 4 said, "You eat an elephant one bite at a time. All large tasks must be worked out a piece at a time."

Principal 2 explained that she divided her day into manageable segments. The amount of time for each segment differed based on that day's tasks.

The difficulty of dealing with pressures and expectations was expressed by multiple participants. The ultimate responsibility of the principal is to ensure that students learn. The participants discussed tools that they used to manage their time so that they had the opportunity to be in the classrooms while still fulfilling their role as

school leader. One principal used a large board where he charted each aspect of the day in order to remain cognizant of the duties that he had to perform each day. Two other principals relied heavily on their secretaries to keep them moving along during the day and to prevent them from being distracted by minor problems. Others credited their daily success to a strong team of assistant administrators who shared the workload.   Many expressed that experience was their biggest ally in terms of time management. They claimed that it took time to develop the coping skills needed to be successful in the role of the principal. Principal 2 said, "Until I had experienced all the requirements and pressures placed on this position, I never would have been able to prepare . . . things got better after the first year."

Principal 1 stated, "my leadership is based on what I have seen while working at school. Principals I have worked for in the past have helped me handle the situations I face as a leader."

personnel management and curriculum lead. Each of the principals acknowledged that every employee in their buildings has free will and could have chosen to deviate from the principal's plan at any time. Principal 5 explained that "plans must be well thought out and careful attention must be made in ensuring that expectation and consequences are thoroughly explained to the staff."

Principal 4 claimed "the burden of running the school fell entirely on his shoulders due to the turnover of my assistant principals. I had to do most of the planning and curriculum areas on my own. I allowed my assistant principals to handle the day to day management stuff."

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The principals reported that their main responsibilities were to focus on curriculum and what is being taught to the students. Principal 2 made an effort to find time during each day to address the different activities needed to run the school, making sure that the curriculum aspect of the school was included. She was confident that when she scheduled a curriculum meeting, some type of personnel need would arise. She was very casual during this part of the discussion and joked that curriculum emergencies did not very often arise during a management meeting.

Principal 6 routinely visited classrooms and questioned students; she even participated in classroom discussions. Principal 6 believed that a high school principal should be both a curriculum leader and school manager; however, a principal's first priority must be instructional leader. She stated, "There should not be any question by anyone associated with the school that the principal is the instructional lead."

Principal 3 became excited while speaking about searching for better methods to instruct students. He believed that this area was his "driving force" and that "without this time spent trying to improve teaching, the schools never would have made the strides they did."

When Principal 4 first took over as principal, it was his opinion that the former principal had spent too little time as the instructional leader of the school. Principal 4 felt that the principal is not just instructional leader, but should also help develop the teachers in the building to be stronger in their classrooms. The primary focus was delivering effective education to the students, and he wanted to make sure his staff was putting forth a quality product.

Principal 5 believed that the first responsibility of the principal was to visit the classrooms in his school.   He said, "The number one priority is the classroom, direct instruction, and how much of the information the students receive from the teachers."

Principal 6 spent a lot of time during the summer, and other instances when students were not at school, discussing situations with her assistant principals and preparing them to handle any problems that developed during the school day without having to call her. Other than accidents with injuries, Principal 6 attempted to take care of problems before or after school hours even though it meant putting in a tremendous amount of time outside of the regular school schedule.

Principals Relied on a Strong Support Staff to Help Answer Problems

Each principal used different people in their building to help manage the large amount of work that they were expected to accomplish. Principals 3, 4 and 5 assigned specific areas of responsibilities to people in the building. Those people had the responsibility to develop and be responsible for those areas. Examples of the areas delegated were grade level discipline, parking and attendance initiatives. Principal 2's assistant principals shared the management aspect of the school and helped with assessing classroom instruction.

Principal 1 stated "I would be very direct with my staff on what I expected of them each and every day. I tried getting them to feel they knew what I wanted."

Principal 2 relied on her subject area department heads as leaders within the school. She explained that department heads were given the responsibility of being what she described as "first responders."

Principal 6 explained that "the school had to work together to share the responsibilities. No one person can lead and deal with all of the problems that develop in a day."

        strong staff. Experience as a school administrator provided Principal 3 with the necessary skills for staying focused on student achievement regardless of what crises developed. He relied on his staff to handle the problems that developed during the day while he was visiting classrooms. He stated that each person must find his or her own way of dealing with the stress and demands of this position.

Principal 2 explained that she was able to work through the day's problems by sharing decisions with her staff. She stated, "I should be the last resort on fixing a problem in the school. I think it comes down to empowering people to know what decisions they can make. When people don't fear decisions, more things get done."

Principal 3 explained, "I do not think everything that comes up in a school needs to come across the principal's desk. Things will always come up . . . one person does not run a school." The participants discussed how sharing leadership allows for the job to be emotionally manageable. Protection of time was a theme expressed by many of the participants. Each day, different issues arose and required immediate reaction by the school staff. Principal 2 explained how she protected her time in these situations: "My front office workers knew I only met with appointments [laughing] . . . unless it was the superintendent, then I dropped everything."

One participant did not agree with shared leadership and claimed that a true leader does not delegate authority. Principal 4 shared, "I believe that there really is only one

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leader, someone who is ultimately held accountable . . . I do not think you can delegate

responsibility." Despite his claim that he did not share leadership with his staff, he

described several times during the interviews how he used some teachers and other key

people to disseminate his educational plans.

The participants addressed how they were able to align their faculty with their

plan and then utilize that faculty to improve student learning. When describing the areas

of leadership that should be shared, Principal 2 stated,

> The shared vision that the school is moving in must be shared with the staff.
>
> Each person must have a firm grasp of what their role is in making this vision a
>
> reality. From the administration to the students, each participant must be aware of
>
> their expectation and be held accountable for meeting the needs of the school.

Principal 1 explained that collaboration among all stakeholders is critical for the

successful implementation of a school improvement plan. Principal 1 stated,

> I would try to meet daily with my counselor, graduation coach, and special
>
> education lead . . . we would look at our approach, was it meeting the needs of
>
> the students . . . do we need to redirect?

collaboration among all. Several of the participants described their method of

unifying faculty and getting them in line with the vision of the school. They explained

that they needed to teach the faculty new ways to improve student learning. All of the

participants accomplished the task by assembling small groups of teachers and assistant

principals to help facilitate this goal. Principal 6 stated, "The school was divided into

four cadres. Every teacher in the school served on one of those groups . . . each group

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had a target area based on our needs survey." Principal 6 worked to educate his staff on issues and build solutions to address problems. Other principals used the shared leadership or group sharing to make plans to improve student academic success. Principal 2 relied on her leadership staff to help balance her dual roles of school manager and instructional leader. She described how she divided up the different aspects of running the school. Each participant stressed the point that all parties must have a strong understanding of what the problems are in their schools and which methods are being used to address them.

Another common practice that the participants used to improve graduation rates was removing the subject area distinction attached to each teacher. As a result, better collaboration occurred amongst the faculty as a whole. Teachers who had success with specific types of students began sharing their methods with the entire staff. The principals described these breakthroughs as some of the strongest catalysts of successful change.

A few of the schools used their leadership teams to develop a method of detecting at-risk students as they entered the ninth grade. Through the use of demographic data, attendance records, academic achievement records, and standardized test results, they identified those students who may struggle. These at-risk students were monitored regularly by the leadership team to ensure that they were receiving the attention needed to help them overcome any issues that may deter them from graduation.

emotional shared leadership. The participants also addressed the emotional side of shared leadership and allowing others to share the burden of the principal's daily

workload. A few participants expressed nervousness at the idea of depending on others in their school. They explained that it was difficult to get the staff to not only understand the new direction or vision, but to begin implementing it. Principal 3 shared that "a vast majority of the staff were close to retirement and were not interested in making any changes. I used my newly hired teachers to help get the new strategies sold to the staff." Many of the participants described the feeling of trust as a crucial component of success. They relied on their ability to choose successful assistants to implement their plans for school improvement. Principal 5 mentioned that teachers improve when they get involved with leadership. He said,

> I think that is a great perspective on leadership. We encourage our teachers to be
> involved in those type things . . . all of a sudden it is contagious; other teachers
> want to be involved and want to start taking on more leadership roles."

Involve all parties. Principal 3 explained that he entrusted his assistant principals with areas of curriculum and distributed administrative duties evenly to his staff. He trusted them to handle the situations in the areas in which they were assigned. Principal 3 stated that his assistant principals understood the intended direction of the school and what the expectations were in running their areas. The assistant principals were expected to handle those aspects independently and not rely on him to make decisions.

Principal 4 admitted that improving the students' schedules was one of the most important actions taken by his leadership team to promote student achievement.

Principal 6 constructed a leadership council she called a "cadre." It was from the cadre chair people that she received the most feedback.

using other to help encourage others. Principal 2 stated that the focus of the coming school year was decided upon at the end of the previous school year. Student achievement data and faculty input, provided at the end of the year meetings, were used to shape the yearly plan. Principal 2 explained that each classroom had a level of expectation placed upon it and classrooms were checked regularly by the leadership team using focused walks and ten minute observations to assess progress.

Principal 2 met regularly with her department heads and the administrator in charge of curriculum to assess progress and continually improve instruction. These regular meetings were used to ensure that the local school improvement plans were being followed. Principal 2 explained that some of the instructional practices implemented at the school were decided upon by the district leadership team. The district leadership team was composed of school level administrators as well as teachers and district level personnel.

Principal 3 explained that graduation was not just something that was talked about one month before school ended; graduation preparation began at the start of each student's freshman year. The leadership team compiled the achievements from that grading period and created a short celebration program so that the students knew that every aspect of school success was going to be celebrated.

Principals Utilized Shared Leadership Groups to Help Improve the Entire School

The idea of shared leadership is the interview question on which the participant's responses varied the most. Each principal used purposeful descriptions of how they chose to lead their schools. All of the principals except Principal 4 described how they shared leadership with their staff, despite the fact that they varied on how much control was given to their support team. Principal 4 was against describing his leadership style as shared, but during his explanation of how he improved graduation rates and test scores, he expressed that he did allow others to help him make decisions about improving student achievement. Each principal shared some aspect of their leadership with staff, yet each principal called that process by different names; shared leadership, teachers as leaders, or cadre leaders. Regardless of the words that the principals used to describe how they implemented change, the basic concept of shared leadership was very similar. Each participant relied on a small group of employees that outwardly expressed belief in the vision that the leader had for the school. All six principals encouraged these smaller groups of employees to meet with larger groups within the school to implement the improvement plan.

Principal 6 spoke of the need for a supportive staff by explaining,

The top needed trait for successful leaders to have is the willingness to

share the leadership. I am a firm/confirmed believer in shared leadership. I

know there are successful people who do not believe that [shared

leadership], but that is what I believe.

Each of the six participants utilized shared leadership groups in order to improve the teaching practices in their schools. Tasks assigned to these groups ranged from

identification of specific problems to implementation of the remedies that answered the schools' needs. Principal 4 described how he elicited the teacher's help: "We whipped out the subject specific names of teachers. Yeah, that's what you are certified in and you teach something in that area, but as far as the leadership extension of that, you are a teacher."

The teachers were used to improve classroom instruction school wide. Each school had successful teachers who explained the techniques they employed to have success with their students. Principal 3 stated, "We had experts in our building. We did not need to look outside our school for assistance; we just needed to use the teachers we knew were good at teaching our students." Each principal examined the methods that their successful teachers used to reach the students. Then they used those methods to educate the other teachers regarding effective instructional practices. Principal 5 summarized this process by saying, "We needed to know what worked with our specific kids . . . we had good teachers reaching those specific problems; we learned from those successes to work on fixing the whole school."

Principal 1 explained that he realized that any plan he developed must include the faculty in the implementation of that plan. Principal 1 said, "I really surrounded myself with people who shared my belief that all kids can have success." He explained that his team worked so well together because they all had different ways of looking at problems. "We would challenge each other," he stated.

Principal 6 identified shared leadership as the factor that allowed her to balance her roles as instructional leader and school manager. She stated strongly, "I am a firm confirmed believer in shared leadership."

using groups to help lead. Principal 1 thoroughly explained his direction and his expectations to his leadership team. He had one of the largest leadership teams of the participants in this study consisting of 21 participants. The team was comprised of assistant principals, counselors, graduation coaches, head sport team coaches, and department heads. After the development of the school's improvement plan, he allowed each member of the leadership team to find the best ways to make their ideas work.

Principal 2 stated,

The shared vision that the school is moving in must be shared with the staff. Each person must have a firm grasp of what their role is in making this vision a reality. From the administration to the students, each participant must be aware of their expectations and be held accountable for meeting the needs of the school.

Principal 3 utilized his assistant principals and department heads to manage and oversee their areas of responsibility. He explained that the concept of shared leadership was not difficult for him and that he shared the areas of leadership in which he felt he was weak. Principal 4 had daily meetings with his graduation coach, counselors, and the special education lead teacher. He described this group as "my go to heavy hitters in the building. I relied on these guys to help make all the tough decisions."

Principal 6 explained that she believes all real change comes from the bottom up. She said "I worked very hard trying to empower my staff to be a part of our leadership groups. True change only lasts if the staff and teachers believe in it."

Principal 2 relied on her department heads and graduation coach to build in academic reviews and practice situations throughout the school day so that the students were well prepared when the actual tests were administered. Each academic department set up tutoring programs that were offered before, during, and after electives to ensure that all of the students had an opportunity to attend tutoring.

Principal 3 would routinely ask his staff to volunteer to be a part of the decision making process of the school. Morning meetings would be announced to the staff so that they could plan on attending. During those meetings, different academic and procedural decisions were made. Principal 3 explained that the faculty members who wanted to participate in making decisions for the school should attend these meetings. He felt that there would be more staff buy-in if he opened up discussions with the faculty and asked them for input prior to the final decision being made. Principal 3 said, "If they felt they did not have a voice in the decisions of the school, it was their own fault."

Principal 4 did not like to assign or nominate teachers to his curriculum team. He felt that teacher volunteers produced better results. He wanted people who were committed to working hard and thinking outside their classroom to join him on his journey to improve the whole school.

Principal 5 explained, "We always open our department head positions each year to allow other teachers the opportunity to get more involved. The county also provided opportunities for teachers to help develop and design our educational direction."

The results from the MLQ show that all of the Principals showed tendency to lead while involving others on decisions. Transformational leaders inspire and intellectually stimulate the individuals that they lead. The leaders in each of the schools included various members of the staff and community in the preparation of the school improvement plan. Transformational leaders encourage staff members to be proactive as well as reactive, but include each of the participants in the planning and implementation of the plan so that each employee is internally motivated to build a successful environment (Bass & Avolio, 2004).

Principals Came to Researched-Based Decisions

When it came to best practices in the classroom, the participants described two distinct avenues leading to program adoption-district adoption and local school decisions. The district decisions were out of the control of the participants. The expectation was for all schools to implement any initiatives that were adopted at the district level. The local initiatives were decided upon by the principals of the school. Each of the participants stated that all local decisions were made collectively by the school improvement committee. Each school was required to form a school improvement committed based on NCLB legislation. These local school improvement committees decided on specific initiatives that were used to improve instruction. Principal 1 described a pattern of

reading and researching current educational methods. The pattern he described was one where he selected one or two books per semester from educational leadership journals.

Principal 3 used district level and local improvement methods to improve classroom instruction. The district improvement plans were chosen based on the recommendations of the district's curriculum team. Each year during preplanning, departments were trained in the areas that the district curriculum team had chosen. Principal 3 was candid during this portion of the interview and described many of these types of programs as a waste of time. He acknowledged that anytime teachers collaborate, they find some method of improving teaching, but as a whole these district wide improvement methods were useless in terms of improving classroom instruction.

district driven changes.

A best practice consistently identified by the participants was finding details to work on in order to take small steps toward improving instruction.   The idea that school improvement does not need to be complicated was a common theme expressed by the participants. Their first step to tackling the problem was understanding the academic deficiencies within their schools. Many of the participants utilized results from standardized tests to gather information regarding shortfalls, while others used teacher-created assessments and surveys.

local school changes. Many of the participants explained that their biggest academic successes came as a result of making better use of their assets. For example, the participants described how many of the most successful teachers had only worked with the best students in the past. To remedy this situation, each principal paired their

most effective teachers with their least successful students. This course of action was not always received well by the staff. Principal 3 expressed, "Some teachers just came out and said I do not like teaching those kids. I had to convince them that those kids are the ones who need you the most!" Principal 6 said, "We had to create a cultural shift in our school. Every student who attends needs to have access to our greatest resources . . . if the teachers are those resources, we must make them available."

Altering student schedules was another method that principals shared as a means of creating opportunities for students to receive needed attention and remediation. Each principal developed schedules that addressed the time constraints of their students who were having difficulty meeting state requirements. Principal 4 and Principal 5 felt that utilizing scheduling to meet the needs of their students was crucial for improving student success. In addition, one principal created specific tutoring sessions to deal with students' different schedules and life expectations. Changes included early morning tutoring sessions and pulling students out of elective classes for remediation.

Principal 1 and his leadership team identified other high schools that had high academic achievement and shared similar demographics as their own. He and his leadership team visited these schools and spent time with the administrators and teachers to determine what really worked. Principal 1stated these trips were invaluable and showed great emotion when describing his different visits. He described these visits as time savers because they were using the experiences of educators who had already succeeded to help answer his schools problems instead of having to go through the trial-and-error process themselves. Principal 1 stated, "It was these visits, where we really

picked up the best tools to make our school better." When visiting these successful schools, they would examine each of their schools' focus areas: increasing attendance, success in the classroom, and improving overall school culture. He felt that he could trust the information given by these schools, and was not wary that the information was designed to make a sale.

The leadership team focused on motivation as a method of increasing achievement. Rewards were used to help motivate students to maintain high efforts during preparation for the state mandated achievement tests.

Principal 2 spent a great deal of time discussing how many of the programs or educational methods implemented by the leadership were received poorly by the staff. Many of the staff members were stubborn and fought against new initiatives. She explained that the leadership team would routinely show the faculty student achievement data to demonstrate that the initiative the school was undertaking was improving student learning. If the data showed that a specific program or method was not helping students reach the desired goal, the staff worked together to make an adjustment.

Principal 3 read many books each year trying to identify simple methods of improving instruction. He believed that his staff knew what they were doing and that they did not need to implement school-wide improvement plans each year. He and his assistant principals participated in book studies that described researched-based methods of improving student achievement. Principal 3 also encouraged the teachers in various departments to collaborate and attend conferences that would benefit their specific subject areas.

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Principal 4 explained that one of the methods he used to improve classroom practice was visiting other schools with his staff. He felt that those visits provided a multitude of different opportunities for his staff to grow and improve. Principal 4 commented that teachers saw different teaching methods on those visits; ideas they liked and ideas they did not like. He felt that the visits validated many of the programs they had already implemented in their own school. Principal 4 stated, "By using school visits to evaluate process this encouraged some teachers to explore outside their own classrooms and use more peer orientated learning in our own building."

Principal 4 and his administrative team made frequent visits to his school's classrooms to assess the educational techniques that were being used. Principal 4's administrative team consisted of the assistant principals in the school. After the visits, the team provided feedback to help teachers make small modifications to their current plans in order to maximize learning. Principal 4 said, "Getting into the classrooms is always a challenge during the school day. We used these visits to get a quick snapshot of things."

Principal 5's leadership team consisted of his assistant principals, department heads, and teachers that had the charisma and drive needed to assess teaching and make needed suggestions for improvement. During the interview, Principal 5 talked a great deal about how he and his leadership staff made routine classroom visits and provided feedback to teachers. He admitted that he was not strong in all of the academic content areas, but he was able to gauge student engagement when it was present. Unlike

the other principals, Principal 5 maintained in both interviews that there was no secret method that he used to improve student achievement.

Principal 5 expressed that his leadership style was inviting, but he was quick to establish that he was not afraid of making decisions. He explained that he asked for feedback from his staff on many, if not all, of his decisions. He tried to lead the school based on teacher feedback and consider the ideas and thoughts of his staff.

Principal 6 had a graduation coach who she described as "wonderful," but felt that the responsibility of helping students graduate fell on everyone in the building. Additionally, online classes were offered to students to allow them the chance to achieve credits in classes that they had previously failed.

The participants all identified the action of pairing the best teachers with the most needy students as the most important precursor to their school's performance improvement. All participants explained that this process was not always received well. They stated that there was initial resistance by a majority of the effective teachers, who did not want to teach the lower level students. Principal 4 went even further in trying to match teachers and students. He tried to match the specific personality traits of students with teachers that he felt would maximize learning for those students.

Principals Involved the Community in the Improvement Process

The interviews revealed that each principal relied on the whole community to improve student performance. Principal 6 said, "We had to make a cultural change to improve our school and this takes the whole school working together." Principal 2

commented that for change to occur, "the entire faculty has to be on the same page working in unison."

The leadership teams in each school were constructed differently; however, they functioned essentially the same. First, the leadership team created a plan, then that plan was slowly implemented. Each School would make decisions based on the success of each implemented program, and necessary changes were made to increase the impact of student achievement.

get community to help. A problem addressed by the participants was the community members' ideas about what type of person should stay in school and receive an education. In many areas, it was common for students in certain demographic categories to drop out at a certain age. All of the participants discussed similar cultural views within their communities and described this specific problem as one of the hardest issues to overcome. Principal 3 stated, "Building a plan to change was easy, but going against the cultural norm was very hard. These people grew up thinking that only certain people should graduate from high school." The participants recounted negative articles written in local papers and hate mail delivered to their home because of their attempts to change the cultural expectations of certain students.

Principal 6 explained that the school staff spent a lot of time on the concept of student engagement. The school implemented projects that required students to find mentors in the community and work through the project with a mentor. This aided in building a connection between the school and the community.

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identify specific areas of problems. Another sub-theme that was addressed by the participants was the necessity of making the community aware that changes were needed, and that those changes would be positive. Principal 4 remarked, "I had to get out and sell the idea that education was for all kids and that we all needed to support our students. In the past, the community only encouraged the elite to have success in school." Principal 5 described the process that he went through to obtain community support. He stated,

> We met with business and community leaders often and let them know what we were planning and to ask for help. Where you think we need to improve and how can you help us drive the idea home that school is important. We use surveys and collaborative meetings. The communities needed to know that what we were asking them was to celebrate scholastic success.

Principal 2 explained that community involvement was necessary to increase student achievement. Prior to her becoming principal, community members did not believe that graduation was for all students.

publicly recognize achievements in the community. Each of the principals used nonstandard events to recognize scholastic achievements. Athletic events, which were mainly focused on athletic success, were used to recognize scholastic achievement. At these events, time was taken to focus on the academic achievements of the students; awards and recognitions were made during stops in play or during halftimes. Participants explained that using these nonstandard events to recognize academic success was one key

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method in getting the community to understand that academics were the school's main focus. Principal 2 explained,

> You could feel the community reacted weird when we would talk about grades or achievement at a football game. They were like . . . "Why would we talk about this here tonight?" Or "could you do this somewhere else?" Each week my administration team would meet and we would work to try to find ways to work recognitions in . . . we hoped the community would start supporting . . . making it a priority.

Principal 2 and 4 felt that the community had forgotten that academics were of importance. The principals worked hard to incorporate academic achievements in all type so community events. Principal 4 explained, "We put our best kids in front of our community every chance we could." The school recognized scholastic achievement at many different sporting events.

Principal 5 worked with his sports coaches and club sponsors to reward high achieving students. "I believe that the school leaders are involved in one or more activities if we can support these students the other students will begin to try harder."

Principals Celebrated the Test Results

The participants stated that their success at improving student results on standardized tests came as a result of urging the entire school to make the test a priority. The theme that emerged from each participant was making academic knowledge, not the action of taking the test, a priority for every student. The participants explained that they had to be dedicated financially to improve student achievement and celebrate the

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tests. They were purposeful about allocating funds (that in the past were spent on other operational items) to fund the improvement process that they were undertaking. The principals also constructed an environment where students were encouraged to try to learn all that they could.

be creative with rewards to students. The principals all developed reward plans that promoted engagement with the students. The rewards included candy, ice cream parties, and even t-shirts for students who met the scholastic achievement goals of the school. The faculty allowed the students to earn privileges that encouraged them to apply themselves and work harder than they had in the past. Some of the privileges they were able to earn were grade level picnics and increased time between classes. This extra time between classes provided more opportunities for the students to socialize, which was a strong motivator. Principal 1 provided certificates to students who attended volunteer review sessions and those certificates were placed in a drawing to win large prizes like music gift certificates and even IPods.

Principal 2 said "We gave the kids stuff they could use, movie tickets, free lunch or ice cream from the cafeteria.   Principal 3 put together gift packages for students who showed improvements. "We collected all the names of the students who had made improvements and gave them sports packages. They would get spirit gear as well as sports tickets as a reward."   Principal 4 provided reward parties, picnics, and motivational speakers to encourage students to pass all portions of the state mandated tests. Principal 5's school hosted a spring fling for all of the students who met the scholastic goals for that school year. Each spring prior to that day the students were

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given their invitation to attend the day of celebration. The spring fling consisted of carnival type games and activates, those who were not invited attended classes like normal. He explained that "this was a great way to reward our kids. The students who missed out really picked it up the next year. No one wanted to miss out on the fun."

Summary

In this chapter, the answers from the MLQ survey, the interview results, and the information gathered from the school improvement data revealed actions taken by participants in their attempt to improve student success and meet state achievement requirements. The MLQ provided information that indicated a common management style used to administer their specific plan for improvement. The leadership styles that were evident in the MLQ results as transformational leadership were also clear in the spoken words of the participants. Each participant described their different methods of leadership, and those methods were closely aligned with the management style reflected in their MLQ results. In the first interview, the MLQ revealed the characteristics of the leader. Then, using the data gathered by the first interview, deeper understanding of the principals' characteristics emerged. Prior to the follow up interview, the school improvement data was reviewed to gain understanding on how each principal structured a school specific plan on improving student achievement.

Participants used varying methods, such as attendance incentives, increased engagement opportunities, improved teaching, and improved scheduling to improve the success of their students. These methods produced successful students, and subsequently, successful schools. All of the principals who were responsible for this success employed

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characteristics of the transformational leadership style. While the principals used

different vocabulary and explained their methods differently, planned intervention was a

common thread heard throughout their interviews. All of the participants, with feedback

from their staff and community, identified problems such as poor attendance, drop outs,

poor teaching, and ineffective use of resources within their schools; then they constructed

plans to solve them. The participants relied on others in their building to reduce stress

and share the responsibilities of implementing change. The school improvement plans

that they developed to increase student achievement showed skilled planning and detailed

preparation. The school improvement plans were a useful tool that helped facilitate

understanding during the follow up interview. Each school improvement plan provided

by the participants was a structured plan that addressed deficits that were identified by the

school.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The previous chapter of this phenomenological study presented the thoughts and feelings of high school principals that were able to improve student achievement in their respective schools. Data was presented in the form of the MLQ and face-to-face interviews in order to identify the principal characteristics and practices that actuated the academic improvement.

The purpose of this chapter is to review the study findings and discuss them in light of related literature and the theoretical framework that guided this study. This chapter is divided into the following sections: summary of the findings, discussion and implications, delimitations and limitations, recommendations, and conclusion.

Summary of the Findings

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 sought to identify the professional characteristics of successful high school principals who were able to balance their roles as curriculum leaders and school managers. The data indicated that each principal developed a strong plan to deal with the stresses of the two jobs that they were charged with. While those plans differed in detail, the principals were unanimous in stating that such a plan had to be in place in order for them to be successful.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 attempted to determine the educational leadership practices of successful high school principals who were able to improve best practices in the classroom. It was found that these successful principals were all transformational leaders who empowered their staff. None of them exhibited characteristics consistent with a laissez-faire leadership style. The participants were not authoritarian in the way they led, but did have clear expectations and were involved in ensuring that classroom instructional practices led to improve academic performance.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 sought to identify the educational practices of successful high school principals who were successful in establishing shared leadership with their staff. Each principal described how they built a team to help solve problems and improve curriculum. They assembled a core group of staff who were adherents to their philosophies and encouraged them present those philosophies and ideas to the other staff members in a positive light.

Research Question 4

Research Question 4 attempted to determine the educational practices of successful high school principals who assisted in increasing the graduation rate of students over a three year period. It was found that every one of the target schools actively promoted consistent attendance. There was an emphasis on the importance of the relationship between attendance and graduation rate. It was also found that the

strongest teachers were often paired with the weakest students in an attempt to utilize the schools' best resources effectively and increase graduation rates.

Research Question 5

Research Question 5 sought to identify the educational practices of successful high school principals who positively impacted the performance of students on the Scholastic Aptitude Test and state required testing over a three year period. The findings indicated that each principal worked with the community to promote the school and to stress the importance of learning to each student's future success. It was also found that the schools often reworked the schedules of both students and teachers to help students succeed.

<div align="center">

Discussion and Implications

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The theoretical framework developed for this study stated that learners will follow the lead of educators when the appropriate environment for learning is present (Vygotsky, 1934). The academic and social atmosphere created by the principal sets the tone for teaching and learning, and the teaching and learning culture largely determines the level of academic success experienced by the students (Macneil, Prater, & Busch, 2009). Using Vygotsky's theory, it can be easily discerned that successful schools are reliant upon the leadership of the school administrator. Vygotsky's (1986) contention, which was based on the childhood learning theories of Piaget (1969), was that the interaction of students with their environment plays a role in their progress and development. The findings of this study indicate that the success of the individual students, and thus the entire school, was dependent upon the culture that the principal's

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leadership created. Macneil et al. (2009) said, "The principals' impact on learning is mediated through the climate and culture of the school" (p. 73). Thus, it makes sense to ensure that every school has the benefit of an excellent principal who is both the instructional leader and an effective school manager, who can inspire his staff to greatness, and whose philosophies and actions result in academic success (Hughes & Jones, 2010; Vidoni et al., 2008). The participants in this study realized that a successful school is most likely to result when they can create a culture that encourages, expects, and celebrates teaching and learning excellence (Butler, 1997, Marzano, 2010).

The results from the MLQ indicated that all of the principals exhibited each of the four aspects of transformational leadership (Burns, 1978). They gave each teacher and student individual consideration, they provided them with intellectual stimulation, they inspired them with an articulate and focused vision to pursue, and they gained their respect and trust by becoming an ideal model of ethical behavior (Bass, 1985). This transformational leadership style is strongly correlated to the improved success of the six target schools.

The results of this study also indicated that the principal's philosophies and directives were elaborately interwoven into every aspect of the school. In other words, they were not laissez-faire leaders. When asked to discuss their leadership style, none portrayed themselves as purely authoritarian, but their ideas, philosophies, routines, and directives permeated the school, both in the big picture vision that guided the staff and students and the daily operational details that were in place to meet the tenets of that vision. This realization of the leadership style was confirmed by the results of the MLQ.

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Each participant showed high levels of leadership that a transformational leader possessed. This meshes perfectly with Cotton's (2003) contention that high-achieving schools employ principals who are present and active on a daily basis. This character description was not just how the participants described themselves but what the MLQ was able to diagnosed about each of the participants. All showed high levels of transformational characteristics. The participants all scored very low on Laissez faire leadership confirmed by the school improvement plans that were constructed by each of the participant schools were constructed proactively and addressed the tough problems.

Another important finding of this study was that each principal assembled a core group of faculty who were not only adherents to the vision put forth by the principal, but were willing to proselytize, in a sense, among the rest of the staff who may not have already bought in to the direction that the principal was leading the school. This dynamic was mentioned by most of the principals as important to the success of the school because they were not personally able to be present in every place, and involved in every situation, in which the school's vision was being challenged or disregarded. The MLQ confirmed these participants posed the skills and beliefs as leaders that empower those around them and provide both direction and freedom to take charge. Sharing their leadership in a meaningful way, and in a way which lessened the workload of all stakeholders, endeared the participants to their staff and helped create an environment where everyone felt empowered to do the difficult work of educating students (Blase & Kirby, 2009; Davis, 1998; Gaziel, 1995; Gullatt & Lofton, 1996; Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000. This study demonstrates that delegation of authority is a necessity for effective

means of solving problems and improving curriculum for successful school principals (Blase & Kirby, 2009). Each of the school's improvement data that was provided had multiple examples where the principals had specifically constructed goals to provided school members opportunities to lead. Examples of this was providing opportunities for teachers to reflect on past academic achievement data to help construct professional learning programs for the next school year.

Another theme that was commonly mentioned by the principals was that they all had developed a strong plan to deal with stresses of job. Balancing the responsibilities of school manager with the important duty of instructional leadership was a difficult endeavor for the participants. They often mentioned their individual plans of action to accomplish this balancing act, such as use of assistants to handle minor duties. In the current educational atmosphere of high standards, many principals find it difficult to spend the time needed to improve learning on the important task of instructional leadership (Bartell, 1990). The administrative duties of the job take up 86% of their time (Education Week's Research Center, 2004). Principals often express their desire to spend more time in the classrooms encouraging and promoting academic success (Gullatt & Lofton, 1996). The evidence, both anecdotally and statistically, clearly indicates that principals who lead successful schools are strong instructional leaders.

The findings of this study also indicated that successful improvement at the target schools on students' state mandated testing and the graduation rate were dependent upon creative scheduling, school attendance, and the promotion of the value of education in the community. During the interviews, the participants described how they often reworked

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the schedules of teachers and students so that the strongest teachers were free to work with the students who were struggling academically or at risk for not graduating on time. The effect of an excellent teacher on student achievement is a strategy that has been proven both anecdotally and through research (Alton-Lee, 2003; Darling-Hammond, 2004). Promotion of the school and the value of learning within the community was another aspect of improving student success. Research has shown that parent and community involvement increases academic success in local schools (Bartell, 1990, Cotton, 2003). Community education has the effect of involving parents and making them stakeholders in the educational achievement of their children (Spera, Wentzel, & Matto, 2009). The study participants also indicated that emphasizing school attendance was an important part of their school improvement plans, which certainly aligns with published research on the subject (Gottfried, 2010).

Delimitations and Limitations

The content of this study was selected because a gap in the research was identified. This gap was a lack of research that clearly explains how principals positively impact student achievement (Supovitz, Sirinides and MayHow, 2009 & Waters et al., 2003). The research on the impact of school-level leadership on academic improvement and success is growing exponentially, but the connection between leadership and academic success is still largely unknown.

Delimitations

The study was delimited to a relatively small number of principal participants so that the researcher could devote as much time as possible to assessing and interviewing

each subject. The small number of participants also made the act of analyzing all of the data achievable. Thus, the study intentionally excluded from the study many principals who may lead schools that have improved their academic achievement and graduation rate during the time frame required by the guidelines of the research. .

The study also intentionally excluded potentially impactful academic and school management issues, such as evaluating the impact of teacher quality, various curricula, and community demographics. While these are all important issues, they were peripheral to the interests of this study. In order to reach stronger findings, the scope of the study was delimited to include only the elements that would precisely answer this study's research questions. Qualitative interpretations can be made with more certainty when there are fewer variables under scrutiny.

The study was further delimitated to include only schools in Northeast Georgia. The purpose of this delimitation was twofold. First, it was done to limit the amount of travel and expense for the researcher. Second, the researcher desired results that would be transferable to the region in which he works. Studying the characteristics and practices of principals in a larger geographical area would limit that transferability and subsequently decrease the interest of local educators and administrators.

Limitations

Limitations exist in this study because it may contain weaknesses in research methodology, design, analysis, or sample. There are three limitations that apply to every qualitative study. There are also limitations that apply specifically to this study, and those are explained in this section as well. According to Marshall and Rossman (1995),

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validity in qualitative studies usually pertains to the integrity of the results. The results of this study were not intended to be generalized to a larger population because the interview responses of the participants were based on subjective experiences, opinions, and perceptions that were unique to their schools.

Limitations due to qualitative design. Phenomenological studies are valuable in that they investigate one specific phenomenon in-depth and provide a wealth of information from the people who had participated in the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). However, qualitative research has flaws inherent in its nature. For example, it lacks the certainty that comes from conducting statistically based quantitative analyses. The subjectivity of the qualitative inquiry makes reliability and validity difficult to establish, both in the approach taken to the research and in the information gathered (Key, 1997). Data triangulation and member checking were used in this study to establish the credibility and transferability (external and internal validity, respectively) and dependability (reliability) of the research approach and data.

Qualitative inquiries are also naturally limited by the nature of human interaction. Each participant's answers were taken at face value. However, the veracity of those answers may have been tainted by the memory, interpretations, or honesty of the participants. For a variety of reasons, research participants sometimes give answers that do not truly reflect their real views on the research topic. They may want to protect a colleague from being viewed in a bad light, protect their own reputation, or simply not

recall occurrences with complete accuracy. For this reason, their answers may not reflect the truth in every situation.

In addition, researcher bias is difficult to prevent or detect. The researcher naturally has personal views on the research topic and, even when careful to limit bias, it can still seep into the findings. If the researcher cannot maintain objectivity, the results are predetermined by the bias. Johnson (1997) said, "The problem with qualitative research is that researchers find what they want to find, and then they write up the results" (p. 284). In this study, the researcher controlled for bias by using reflexivity. The act of reflection enables the interviewer to consider and speculate on the ways the interviewer-interviewee interaction may have been influenced by presumptions arising from obvious sources, such as demographics, socio-economic status, or political orientation.

Finally, qualitative research is limited in scope due to the volume of information that must be gathered and processed. If the scope of the study is too broad, the message of the findings can be lost. The researcher limited the scope of this study by delimited in such a way that only six participants in only one geographical area were chosen, thus ensuring that each piece of data received attention and was treated with integrity.

Limitations due to study sample.   Because of this study's use of purposeful sampling and the small sample size, the results of the study may not be generalized to all principals in the United States (Creswell, 2007). The emphasis of this qualitative research was the detailed exploration of successful public high school principals in Georgia. The emphasis of this qualitative research was the detailed exploration of

successful public high school principals in Georgia. The sampling yielded a participants population that was all Caucasian

Limitations due to study instrumentation. The use of the MLQ relies on accurate and honest answers from the participants. This is a limitation of this study because only the participants know if their answers were completely accurate. Another limitation of survey research is that some terms may be ambiguous and/or undefined. When a participant answers on a Likert scale, it is someone difficult to determine what every individual number represents, and each principal's interpretation may differ in that regard. The researcher could not control for this limitation other than to choose an instrument that has been proven to be reliable and valid during use in past research. The MLQ is valid and reliable, according to the Mental Measurements Yearbook 14 (Pittenger, 2001).

The use of participant interviews also presents this study with limitations. There can be bias, as previously mentioned, if the researcher does not agree with, or has preconceived interpretations about, the words of the participants. There is also an open-endedness that belies the original goals of the research. The participants' words may contradict each other, tempting the researcher to shape one of the interviewee's words into a meaning that was entirely unintended in order to report a consensus that does not exist.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Future Research

This research sheds light on the personal characteristics and professional practices of principals who had improved student academic achievement in their schools. However, it also illuminates some research needs related to the issues that have been discussed. These recommendations for future research include suggestions to extend the current study as well as ideas for entirely separate research that is now necessary because of gaps, weaknesses, or revelations identified during this study.

This study only examined the thoughts and emotions of principals, not a statistical analysis of how their actions affected change. A quantitative study could be conducted that correlates the test scores or graduation rates of students with the implementation of certain policies or programs. This would also allow more participants to be included.

It would also be useful to investigate the leadership styles of principals who served during the same time period as this study, but did not have success and compare them to the leadership styles of the principals from this study who did have success. This could help determine how much the principals' leadership styles contributed to their school's success.

Future research could also be conducted which replicates this study, but does so in a section of the country that has entirely different demographics. That would determine how well the findings of this study hold up under different demographic circumstances. It would be especially interesting to conduct a similar study in an area of the country where authority figures are not as respected as they traditionally are in the southeastern part of the United States.

A final recommendation for further research is to conduct a similar qualitative study that examines how leaders, with similar characteristics and practices as the principals in this study, impact schools and students that were already meeting the required testing standards and graduation rates. The findings of this study may or may not hold true if the student population has less room for improvement.

Recommendations for Practical Application

Several implications have been drawn from the results of this research. These implications lead naturally to several practical applications of the findings that can be implemented in failing schools.

- Principals should be trained to be transformational leaders. An example of this would have principal take a leadership evaluation and find areas in their behavior that are not transformational and focus on those areas to closer align with behaviors that are transformational.

- Superintendents should do whatever it takes to free principals to be active in instructional leadership; reduce the amount of management duties that are required of administrators. An example of this would include hiring more employees that can elevate the management duties of the principal.

- Principals should establish shared leadership groups within the current structure of their schools that can focus on curriculum and learning issues.

- Principals should develop a plan to deal with the normal stress and tension of the position and adhere to the plan even when demand for their time is high.

- Every school should work to establish school-community relationships through traditional and nontraditional administrative roles, principals and teachers should volunteer in the community, coach sports teams, and visit student homes.

Conclusion

This qualitative phenomenological study sought to investigate the beliefs of school principals regarding how they had improved the academic success at their schools. While it was clear that these principals were successful based on their student achievement results, the reasons for the schools improved were not clear prior to this study. Therefore, the researcher identified the problem of identifying the personal characteristics and daily practices that lead to school improvement. In an attempt to discern these characteristics and practices, research questions were posed that investigated the professional traits of successful high school principals who were able to balance their roles as curriculum leaders and school managers, the educational leadership practices of successful high school principals who were able to improve best practices in the classroom, the educational practices of successful high school principals who were successful in establishing shared leadership with their staff, and the educational practices of successful high school principals who assisted in increasing the graduation rate of students over a three year period. The researcher felt that answering these questions would provide failing schools with a framework which they could use to search for, identify, and hire principals who are likely to lead a successful school improvement process.

The Sociocultural Theory and the theory of the Zone of Proximinal Development provided the theoretical foundation for this study. The researcher utilized those theories to launch a review of the literature related to school leaders who had improved their school's academic standing. The review indicated the importance of transformational leadership and how an excellent leader can improve academic results at his school. However, an obvious gap emerged as a result of the investigation of literature. Up to this point, research has not identified the professional characteristics and personal habits that are exhibited by a principal who has the ability to lead his school from academic failure to academic success.

In an attempt to fill this research gap, the researcher administered a survey and two sets of interviews and analyzed school improvement plans. The goal of this methodology was to determine the qualities that allowed transformational leaders to accomplish their school improvement goals and how the school improvement process reflected the personal characteristics and beliefs that made the transformation possible. The interview answers informed the questions that were subsequently asked by the researcher. The researcher then looked for patterns in the interview responses that would help answer the research questions.

The key results demonstrate that principals can have an enormous impact on academic achievement when certain personal characteristics and practices are in place. The most important findings from this study suggest that principals should be transformational leaders, active as instructional leaders, and committed to the success of their school in regards to state mandated testing and graduation rates.

These results provide pertinent information for schools that are currently experiencing academic failure and are looking for a way to transform their school culture. As more requirements are heaped upon the nation's schools, leaders who can bring about academic success while maintaining a positive school environment will become increasingly important. District leaders that are searching for leaders who are likely to transform the schools in their district from academic failure to academic success can now pinpoint definitive personal characteristics and daily practices that will help them to more easily identify those principals to fill these 21st positions.

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APPENDIX A: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLAN DATA

	DATA
Mission	
Job description involving :tasks, duties and job responsibilities of principals	
Academic policies	
Staff development plans and outlines or programs.	
Graduation rate improvement plan	
Scholastic Aptitude Test/ state mandated test. Improvement plan	

APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVAL

LIBERTY
UNIVERSITY.

The Graduate School at Liberty University

May 10, 2012

Jason Faklaris
IRB Approval 1283.051012: A Phenomenological Study of Transformational
Principals Who Lead a Positive Impact of School Change

Dear Jason,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the
Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection
proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to
human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms
for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB and we wish you well with your
research project.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.
Professor, IRB Chair
Counseling

(434) 592-4054

LIBERTY
UNIVERSITY.

Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971

A phenomenological study of transformational principals who lead a positive impact of

school change

Jason Michael Faklaris Ed.D Candidate

Liberty University

Education Department

You are invited to be in a research study looking to understand the impact a high

school principal has on student achievement. You were selected as a possible participant

because your school has shown a dramatic increase in student achievement during your

time as high school principal. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you

may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Jason Michael Faklaris Ed.D Candidate at

Liberty University

Background Information

The purpose of the proposed phenomenological study is to gather, examine, and

describe school district leaders' knowledge, beliefs, and actions of selected high school

principals that improved student achievement.

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Research Question 1: What are the professional characteristics of successful high school principals who were able to balance their roles as curriculum leaders and school managers?

Research Question 2: What educational leadership practices of successful high school principals contributed to research based methods of improving best practices in the classroom?

Research Question 3: What are the educational practices of successful high school principals in increasing shared leadership with their staff?

Research Question 4: What educational practices of successful high school principals assisted in increasing the graduation rate of students over a three year period?

Research Question 5: What educational practices of successful high school principals impacted the performance of students on the Scholastic Aptitude Test and State required testing over a three year period?

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

1. Take part in the MLQ leadership characteristics survey.

2. Take part in two separate phone interviews that will last no longer than 90minutes to complete. Complete questions will be provided prior to interview. The interview will be tape recorded and transcribed so that both parties can look over responses to determine that they are correct.

3. Provide written feedback on basic demographic and descriptive data questions.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

The study has a risk: First, will be minimal and would not be any more dangerous than that the participant would encounter in everyday life. All information that will be collected will be logged under pseudonym and kept under lock and key.

The participant will not have a direct benefit other than adding to the body of knowledge on this topic.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records.

All audio and video data collected will be stored in an online storage site www.dropbox.com. This will provide easy access for each of the participants to view transcribed conversations to check for accuracy. Passwords will be used to secure all data and participants will only be provided passwords to data that directly pertains to them.

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All digital data will be transferred to an external hard drive that will be stored under lock and key at the researcher's home. All hard copy data will also be stored under lock and key in the researcher's home. After seven years all data will be disposed of properly. Hard copy data will be shredded while digital data will be reformatted and erased from hard drive storage devices.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the Liberty University or Jason Michael Faklaris. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is: Jason Michael Faklaris. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at 15 Red Bud Lane Dallas, Ga., 678-643-4220, jmfaklaris@liberty.edu. The Doctoral Chair of this research is Dr. Edward Moore, Lu Buisness Dept. emmoore3@liberty.edu, 434-592-4812

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Fernando Garzon, Chair, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1582, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at fgarzon@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature:_____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator:_____ Date: _____

APPENDIX D: EMAIL TO PARTICIPANTS FOR MLQ

Participation Information from Jason Faklaris

Dear

Jason Faklaris has invited you to participate in an online leadership evaluation. All questions about selecting your raters for your evaluation or about this program should be addressed to Jason Faklaris (jmfaklaris@liberty.edu). If you have technical problems, please contact Mind Garden, Inc..

To complete your self rating and select raters to evaluate your leadership behaviors, please:

Click or copy into your browser address bar to access Web page:

https://www.mindgarden.com/welcome/151105/145859/16761;

If you are new to Mind Garden, you will be asked to create a password.
Use the email address to which this message was sent.

It is important that you respond by: 5/25/2012

You should save this email to get back to this important page or bookmark it in your browser.

Thank You.
Mind Garden
www.mindgarden.com

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

1. What is your educational background?

2. What was your employment background related to education prior to being a

principal?

3. How long have you been a principal in your current school?

4. When you received your results from the MLQ survey were you expecting the

feedback you received?

5. Do you think this information is a true reflection of your leadership characteristics?

INTERVIEW PROPER

Research Question 1: What are the professional characteristics of successful high school

principals who were able to balance their roles as curriculum leaders and school

managers?

    1. What are your tasks as a manager?

    2. What are your tasks as an instructional leader?

    3. How do you balance the job of being a manager and instructional leader?

    4. What are the important qualities of a successful principal?

5. What are the difficulties and challenges of balancing the role of a manger and instructional leader?

Research Question 2: What are the educational practices of successful high school principals in improving the retention of qualified teachers?

    1. What are your views on the relationship of principals and teachers?

    2. What is the role of teachers under your leadership?

    3. What are the specific strategies that you use to improve teacher teaching methods?

    4. What are the common issues that arise during professional development opportunities?

Research Question 3: What are the educational practices of successful high school principals in increasing shared leadership with their staff?

    1. How do you encourage your staff to increase their leadership roles in the school?

    2. What tasks and responsibilities do you encourage your staff to collaborate on?

    3. What are your specific strategies that you use to balance leadership throughout your building?

Research Question 4: What are the educational practices of successful high school principals in increasing the graduation rate of students over a three year period?

1. What is your specific role in increasing the graduation rate of students?

2. What are the specific strategies that you implement in increasing student graduation rate?

3. What are the challenges in increasing the graduation of students?

Research Question 5: What are the educational practices of successful high school principals in improving the performance of students on the Scholastic Aptitude Test and State required testing over a three year period?

1. What is your specific role in improving the performance of students in high-stakes testing?

2. What are your views on high-stakes testing?

3. What are the specific strategies that you implement to improve the performance of students in high-stakes testing?

APPENDIX F: COMMENTS FROM MEMBER CHECK

Tue 6/5/2012 6:49 PM

Inbox

To: ██████████████████ @ ████████ .com>

████████████

      I have attached the transcription of the interview. Please open the document in Microsoft word and use the track changes option in the Review tab to make corrections of any errors you see. Please feel to add comments though out the document using the review tab and select the New Comment option.

      Faklaris, Jason Michael;

Principal 3 Interview

4. When you received your results from the MLQ survey were you expecting the feedback you received?

5. Do you think this information is a true reflection of your leadership characteristics?
        Yes I think about those type of things all the time. When I react is something I ask myself quite a bit. I want to try not to be reactive. I want to try to see what is coming next. I know it will not always work but we try…(laughter). I think when you stop trying to be one step ahead of the kids, teacher and parents it is time to get out.

(Faklaris) Research Question 1: What are the professional characteristics of successful high school principals who were able to balance their roles as curriculum leaders and school managers?
        Balance is so hard at this job. The hot fire always gets your attention. It comes down to having good people working for you. If you get stuck with a lazy or not motivated person on your leadership team it is hard…you cannot have success with people you cannot trust. When something starts to boil a good assistant principal should do what they can to keep it out of my office. I should be the last resort to fix the problem. I think it comes down to empowering people to know what decisions they can make. When people don't fear decisions and commitment more things get done.
        1. What are your tasks as a manager?
 I tried to keep things in perspective. Keep the kids alive, feed and climate controlled was always a focus. The rest is just perspective. Things will always come up. I do not think everything that comes up needs to come across the principals desk. One person does not run the school. A good principal gives authority to make the daily decision so everything does not back up on his/her job. Everyday someone and something will need attention. Each person on the team needs to know their job and know what can be done to fix the problems in their area. This does not happen overnight. Time must be spent talking about what needs to be done… once people know their role…things just don't fall on the principal entirely.   The community and parents will always want to stop everything to be heard and this is where I had to set boundaries. My front office workers new I only met with appointments…(laughter) unless it was the superintendent, then I dropped everything. Teachers are people and they are going to mess up and make mistakes. I learned early on in my career that it is how you handle your faculty will determine your success. If they mess up try to help them fix it. If it is to badly gone try to help them get somewhere else.

        2. What are your tasks as an instructional leader?
        I saw myself as the coach of the team. My job was to get the right people into the right positions. I would talk to the staff during their planning time so we could see what they thought about how things are going. Early on I would send teachers to other schools that were having success and have them bring back ideas. Over time we pooled some great ideas back. Once we started developing a plan that would fit our school we let the faculty know what were doing. I tried to involve as many of my teacher as possible get involved with the planning. I thought that if they believed in the plan they were more likely to stick with it when it got hard. It was my job to get the direction of the school. What was our motivation, direction and ultimate goal. Our goal was simple get kids the knowledge they needed to graduate and be successful. My job was to increase student learning and I felt that my staff needed to try some new strategies to meet our goals. I allowed input on the plan and then saw to it that we stuck to the plan and stayed on track.

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APPENDIX G: FOLLOW UP INTERVIEW GUIDE

SECOND INTERVIEW PROPER

This interview will be adjusted based on the responses of each of the participants. This interview will be used to gather deeper understanding on ideas expressed during the first interview that need clarification. Supplied are ideas covered during second interview. Each interview was different and required different amounts of questions from attached guide.

Research Question 1: What are the professional characteristics of successful high school principals who were able to balance their roles as curriculum leaders and school managers?

1. What were some of the reasons you became a high school principal?

2. Describe your typical day

3. Research shows that a major problem principals complain of is lack of time in a school day to take care of all of the managerial duties (such as facilities and human resource issues) and instructional leadership duties each day. Are there specific events that have help define how you manage your school day?

4. How have you been able to manage both duties successfully?

5. How much of your day is reactive?

6. How much of your day has planned activities?

7. How much daily time is spent as the instructional leader?

Research Question 2: What educational leadership practices of successful high school principals contributed to research based methods of improving best practices in the classroom?

1. How much of your day do you spend mentoring or aiding teachers you feel lack in some area of teaching

2. Teacher retention is a concern based on literature how do you work towards keeping your teachers?

   1. Are there harder teaching positions to keep than others?

   2. If so what subjects, why?

   3. What do you do to keep those teachers?

3. Teacher training is also shown by the literature as an important component in student success, what do you do in this area to ensure improvement?

   1. What do you do when you find an ineffective teacher?

   2. What methods do you use to improve teaching?

   3. How does your school use staff development?

   4. What plans do you have to make improvements in this area of your school?

Research Question 3: What are the educational practices of successful high school principals in increasing shared leadership with their staff?

1. Research shows that students who enjoy school achieve more than those who do not enjoy school. How do you positively impact school culture and climate?

2. How much interaction do you have with parents and community members?

3. What methods do you implement to increase their participation in your school?

Research Question 4: What educational practices of successful high school principals assisted in increasing the graduation rate of students over a three year period?

1. How does what you do affect what goes on in your classrooms?

2. Describe some of the situations you feel are the most productive in improving the instruction of your school?

3. How do other instructional leaders improve instruction at your school?

   1. Who are they?

   2. What methods do they use direct or indirect?

Research Question 5: What educational practices of successful high school principals impacted the performance of students on the Scholastic Aptitude Test and State required testing over a three year period?

1. How does what you do affect what goes on in your classrooms?

2. Describe some of the situations you feel are the most productive in improving the instruction of your school?

3. How do other instructional leaders improve instruction at your school?

    1. Who are they?

    2. What methods do they use direct or indirect?

Research Closing Question: Closing Questions

1. What information can you provide about your school improvement plan that I have not asked?

2. Vision questions: do you believe the school is in line with you particular school vision?

3. Do you feel there are barriers keeping you from reaching your vision?

Emergent Themes

I. Difficult meeting requirements as a principal

  A. Time management

    1. Immediate action required

    2. Multiple items needing to be addressed

  B. Balancing responsibilities

    1. Personal management & Curriculum lead

II. Relying on staff

  A. Strong staff

    1. Collaboration among all

  B. Emotional shared leadership

    1. Involve all parties

    2. Using others to help encourage others

III. Shared leadership to help lead

  A. Using groups to assign tasks

  B. Use teachers to change school

IV. Researched based decisions

  A. District driven changes

  B. Local school changes

V. Involve the community

  A. Get community to help

    1. Identify specific area problems

2. Publicly recognize achievements in community

VI. Celebrate tests

   1. Be creative with rewards to student

APPENDIX I: SAMPLE IN VIVO CODING

First Cycle In Vivo Codes
*To start the coding process I decided to randomly select an interview and begin some descriptive coding. These were some of the codes that emerged.
Interview 4 – 1 (Participant 1, Interview 1, Question 1)

Numbered/Descriptive Code	Comments/ Quotes
1 TASK ASSIGNED TO OTHERS	Those who you do not set up meetings with but if you know if you do not drop everything and meet with them they will just go up to the county office and you will just have to deal with them/ the situation then.
2 MAKE A LIST OF DUTIES	Each day list what is important and what must be accomplished.
3 PRIORATIES	I would probably say Parents…parental concerns: phone calls, or showing up.
4 DROP EVERYTHING ITEMS	"Well Certainly I would think discipline and personal issues that jump up."
5 BALANCING TASKS	"first responsibility is to get into the classroom in my mind"

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6 SWITCHING TASKS	"Things just jump up"
7 PUTTIONG OUT FIRES	"Teachers making a poor chose in something or a parent who show up unexpectedly"
8 PERSONAL ISSUES	"I am going to give you some feedback on some things but I am not out to get you."
9 DISCIPLINE	The discipline concerns far outnumber the academic concerns…you have them but as far as it is concerned majority of concern is discipline.
10 SAFETY AND SECURITY	Kids come home safe every year
12 PREPERATION FOR TEACHING	The number on priority is classroom… direct instruction and how….but certainly being a teacher is more entailed.
13 SECRATERY HELP	Used secretary to protect time.
14 SUPPORTIVE STAFF	"speaking the truth in love". The goal is for you to get things out of it to make you a better classroom teachers. The professional development will directly impact your student achievement.

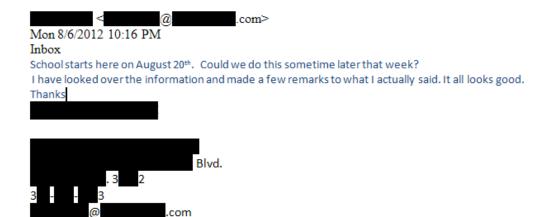|	
15 EMPOWERING STAFF MEMBERS	I am going to give you some feedback on some things but I am not out to get you
16 SHARING VISION	"staff to feel that and not just me standing up front of them(the staff) telling them this but doing things over and over to display servant leadership…"
17 UNIFYING STAFF	Getting the staff to feel that and not just me standing up front of them(the staff) telling them this but doing things over and over to display servant leadership
18 SHARING THE BURDEN	Used assistant principals as well as department head to work out daily problems

(Faklaris) Research Question 1: What are the professional characteristics of successful high school principals who were able to balance their roles as curriculum leaders and school managers?

    1. What are your tasks as a manager?

P1.   I believe from the bottom of my heart that a principal first must be an instructional leader. And of course that comes from my background. That everybody in the building and the parents, students should see you as the instructional leader. Obviously you have to do all kinds of management things. All of those stakeholders should not see you necessarily see you doing all of the management type things. They should see you during the instructional pieces. I will give you a couple of examples; I often went into classrooms and asked questions of students. I would sometimes join if they were having some type of discussion. I would just jump in. I would ask questions…All of the teachers knew that I was going to do this. This was just a part of who I was in the classroom. So I did things like…we were encouraging reading so would go around during lunch and ask people to tell me about something they were reading or recently read. If they could talk to me about that I would give them a piece of candy. Those things were just very important to me.

> **Comment [JMF1]:** What else was done to help in managing the school?
> 1. Office staff
> 2. Teachers?

> **Comment [JMF2]:** This answer is about motivating students not managing

F   2. What are your tasks as an instructional leader?

P1. Planning the curriculum for the school. Helping the teachers best meet the needs of those students.

> **Comment [JMF3]:** Need more information of what she did to work with curriculum

    3. How do you balance the job of being a manager and instructional leader?

APPENDIX K: EXAMPLE OF CORRESPONDANCE WITH PARTICIPANTS
OF TRANSCRIBED DATA

███████ <███████@██████.com>
Mon 8/6/2012 10:16 PM
Inbox
School starts here on August 20th. Could we do this sometime later that week?
I have looked over the information and made a few remarks to what I actually said. It all looks good.
Thanks
███████

█████████████ Blvd.
. 3 ██ 2
3 █ █ █ 3
█████@██████.com

Faklaris, Jason Michael
Mon 8/6/2012 4:49 PM
Please find the attached copy of the transcription. Let me know when is good for you to schedule the next interview. The second interview should not take more than 30 minutes of your time.
Thanks

Jason M Faklaris

Words and descriptors used by schools on school improvement plan excerpt of Section 1

	S 1	S 2	S 3	S4	S 5	S6
1. Mission's main Focus						
provide a high quality education for all	1	1	1	1	1	1
students in a safe environment	1	1	1	1	1	1
use of all human resources in preparing graduates	1	1	1	1	1	
use of all technological resources in preparing graduates	1	1				1
enable each student to become a lifelong learner	1	1	1	1	1	1
Prepare students to enter the work force with necessary skills	1	1			1	1
Prepare students to enter the work force with personal potential		1		1		1
students have the opportunity to believe, achieve, and succeed everyday	1	1	1	1	1	1
provide all students a rigorous, relevant, and personalized learning experience	1		1		1	1
Discipline issues	1	1	1	1	1	1
Attendance problems	1		1	1	1	
Classroom walk through	1	1	1			1
Participation on development of question 1.						
Principal	X	X	X	X	X	X
Assistant Principals	X	X	X	X	X	X
Teachers	X	X	X	X	X	X
Parents	X	X		X	X	X
Community members		X		X		
Students	X	X	X	X	X	X