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Examining the Phenomenon of Elementary School Principal Succession Through the Perspectives and Experiences of Novice Principals

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Examining the Phenomenon of Elementary School Principal Succession Through the
Perspectives and Experiences of Novice Principals

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by

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Abstract

School districts across the United States are confronted with a shortage of highly qualified principal applicants, a situation compounded by a haphazard approach to leadership succession planning. While the vast majority of principals and superintendents endorse the promotion of assistant principals as the most effective way to develop successful school leaders, few structures exist to support that endeavor. Despite their essential role in the school's operations and escalating demands for accountability for high standards and performance at the school level, assistant principals have been rendered virtually invisible in the scholarly literature. This study sought to fill the glaring gap in knowledge of the socialization experiences of assistant principals. Through a qualitative, in-depth phenomenological interview study of eight novice elementary school principals, this study focused on how the leadership practices of principals are influenced and informed by their prior experiences as assistant principals, as well as identified and defined the assistant principal's roles and responsibilities. Themes that surfaced from the data analysis process were narrowed to relationships, leadership development, and job responsibilities for assistant principals and principals. The findings indicated that assistant principal roles and responsibilities are more managerial than instructional, districts are providing less professional development opportunities for assistant principals than they are principals, and preparedness for the role of principal is largely dependent on the leadership opportunities provided by the principals mentoring the assistant principals. It is recommended that school districts take a strategic approach to succession planning that includes opportunities for assistant principals to experience multiple leadership styles as well as distributing instructional leadership responsibilities as training for the principalship. School districts also need to assure that principals are equipped to develop assistant principals' leadership capabilities through techniques

such as mentoring, coaching, training, and providing them with opportunities to exercise leadership.

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I am grateful for the eight principals who graciously shared their experiences with me. Your commitment to building leadership capacity in your assistant principals is inspirational.

Dedication

First, I dedicate this work to my family. To my parents, Gary and Kay Baxter, for their unconditional love and support throughout my life. Thank you for always believing in me and making countless sacrifices to ensure I would achieve my dream. Thank you for showing me the importance of commitment and hard work.

To my husband, Mark, for allowing me the opportunity to complete this work. Thank you for helping with the children and chores so I could make this goal a reality.

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Next, this work is dedicated to my best friends who have supported and encouraged me throughout this process. Thank you for believing in me.

Finally, I dedicate this work to my mother-in-law and grandpa, both of whom went to be with Jesus while I was working on my dissertation. I know they are proud of me for completing this journey.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

For more than half a century, the relationship between educational leadership and student achievement has been a prominent topic in educational scholarship (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). From a simplistic assumption that the school principal was directly and exclusively responsible for learning outcomes, the body of knowledge has evolved to recognize that the impact of principal leadership is in fact important but indirect (Day & Sammons, 2013; Day et al., 2010; Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). The indirect impact of effective school leadership comes from establishing conditions for an organizational culture designed to optimize teaching and learning. Sustaining a culture of excellence for all constituents requires multiple leaders (Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011).

Compelling evidence from large-scale research projects in the United States and the United Kingdom shows that the highest performing schools practice collaborative or distributed leadership (Day & Sammons, 2013; Day et al., 2010; Leithwood & Mascal, 2008; Louis et al., 2010; Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011). Indeed, the educational literature is replete with references to the expanding roles of teacher leaders and teacher leadership teams. However, principals and assistant principals are often grouped together under the broad heading of “school leaders” or “administrators” in spite the difference in status and formal authority. Assistant principals have been rendered virtually invisible in the scholarly literature despite their essential role in the school’s operations and escalating demands for accountability for high standards and performance at the school level.

According to Marshall and Hooley (2006), the assistant principal position represents the inception of a socialization process that is likely to culminate in a principalship or

superintendency. Most studies find that the majority of assistant principals aspire to becoming full principals (Chan, Webb, & Bowen, 2003; Edwards, 2010; Singletary-Dixon, 2012; Turnbull, Riley, & MacFarlane, 2013). Principals and superintendents overwhelmingly support the promotion of promising vice principals and teachers as the best strategy for cultivating a force of highly effective school leaders (Coggshall, Stewart, & Bhatt, 2008). The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) has delineated a series of “critical actions” for principal succession planning at the state, district, and building levels calling on principals to develop leadership talent from within the school (Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011). It may not be a coincidence that the assistant principalship and leadership succession planning are both neglected topics in educational research.

The nature and scope of an assistant principal’s role lies primarily under the principal’s control (Beltramo, 2014; Workman, 2013). Some principals, described as “principal-makers,” strive to ensure that their assistant principals have ample opportunities for professional growth and advancement by acting as mentors, coaches, and sponsors (Retelle, 2010). On the other end of the spectrum are principals who fail to prepare their assistant principals for taking the helm of the school by deliberately thwarting their ambitions by denying them professional learning experiences (Oliver, 2005).

Paradoxically, as novice assistant principals gain confidence in their leadership capabilities and professional expertise, they often become disillusioned with their ability to help their students (Houchens, 2012). In many cases, that was the driving force in their desire to enter school leadership. Highly critical of education administration programs that fail to prepare leadership candidates for the assistant principal’s role and of principals and superintendents who

diminish the quality of that role, Houchens (2012) positions the men and women who serve as assistant principals as the future of excellence in school leadership.

Often framed in the media as a principal shortage, it is more apt to say that school districts are facing shortages of candidates who are both willing and qualified to be effective school leaders (Eadens, Bruner, & Black, 2011). A haphazard approach to leadership succession allows less capable individuals to bypass more talented candidates (Turnbull, Riley, & MacFarlane, 2015). The most idealistic vice principals may also be the most vulnerable to disillusionment (Houchens, 2012). At the same time, many vice principals find their work personally satisfying and valued by others, and enjoy good relationships with principals and teachers (Dunleavy, 2011; Singletary-Dixon, 2012). Those who fit this profile are most likely to sustain their ambitions for the principalship.

A decade ago, Marshall and Hooley (2006) observed that amidst an abundance of research on principals and superintendents in the educational leadership literature there was a scarcity of material on the assistant principal. Not only is this gap still apparent, but it may be even more pronounced as the implementation of the Common Core Standards and increasing pressure to improve academic achievement schoolwide have drawn more attention to the campus leader. Interestingly, the education reforms of the 1980s and 1990s generated a surge of interest in the assistant principal's role (Glanz, 1994; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Mertz, 2000; Michel, Cason, Jennings, Palmer, & Pressley, 1993). This coincided with the ascendance of instructional leadership as the dominant leadership paradigm, as assistant principals began to assume roles as instructional leaders (Marshall & Hooley, 2006).

This study sought to add to the growing literature on the socialization experiences of assistant principals. This qualitative phenomenological study was designed to explore the

succession of elementary school principals through the experiences and perspectives of novice elementary school principals who had previously served as assistant principals.

Context

The professional trajectories of most current school principals follow a similar path; they begin their careers as classroom teachers, serve as assistant principals, and finally they advance to the principalship (Eckman & Kelber, 2009). Through their classroom experience, these future principals acquire knowledge of effective teaching practices. As assistant principals, they are charged with maintaining school discipline, the task most closely associated with the assistant principal's role (Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett, 2012; Workman, 2013). As an integral part of their managerial duties, they are immersed in the everyday operations of the school organization to a greater degree than any other school personnel (Hutton, 2012; Marshall & Hooley, 2006). However, each role transition has challenges, and the activities performed by assistant principals do not necessarily prepare them for the principalship.

The transition from teacher to administrator can be difficult. In their first administrative position, new vice principals no longer have the camaraderie they enjoyed from being one of the teachers (Grodzki, 2011; Workman, 2013). Indeed, conflicts may arise that place them on opposite sides from their former colleagues. Furthermore, from being confident in their classrooms they are forced to grapple with new roles and responsibilities that are often poorly defined. Role conflict and role ambiguity are endemic to the assistant principalship (Celik, 2013; Marshall & Hooley, 2006).

By the 3rd year, most vice principals have become confident in their knowledge and skills and are more satisfied with their work (Houchens, 2012). As they gain expertise they develop their personal leadership styles (Workman, 2013). The question at this point is the

extent that they are supported in their leadership aspirations. The principal plays a decisive role in whether or not the assistant principal is sufficiently prepared for upward promotion (Brown-Ferrigno, 2007; Chan et al., 2003; Oleszewski et al., 2012; Retelle, 2010).

The activities of the assistant principal can be broadly divided into two categories: instructional and organizational (“Role of the Assistant Principal,” 2008). Activities related to instruction were largely absent from the assistant principal’s role before the mid-1980s when they gained precedence with the drive for effective schools and the rise of instructional leadership (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Instructional leadership is often the most satisfying feature of the assistant principal’s role (“Role of the Assistant Principal,” 2008).

Other activities that gained prominence in the 1980s include tasks related to school policy and public relations and providing incentives and motivation for teachers (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). These fall under the heading of organizational tasks, which may also be categorized as managerial tasks. Indeed, the assistant principal’s role can be viewed from the perspective of management versus leadership. Being relegated to performing mundane administrative duties and expected to maintain the status quo with few opportunities to lead innovation and change is a major source of frustration for many vice principals (Muijs & Harris, 2003). Studies in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia consistently find that vice principals desire a more active role in planning, policymaking, staff and curriculum development, and working with families, community members, and other stakeholders beyond the school (Muijs & Harris, 2003). In the highest performing schools, assistant principals, along with teachers and teacher leaders, are all involved in these rewarding activities (Day et al., 2010; Leithwood et al., 2008).

It can be said that assistant principals desire opportunities to exercise both transactional leadership (often equated with management), which is essential for maintaining a stable and

organized school environment, and transformational leadership, by which stakeholders are encouraged to work collectively to achieve a shared vision and goals (Pepper, 2010). Across organizations, the most effective leaders adeptly balance aspects of transformational and transactional leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006). As novice assistant principals gain expertise, they develop their own leadership styles (Workman, 2013). The pivotal issue is that they have opportunities to exercise leadership (Muijs & Harris, 2003).

Findings from the extensive investigation of educational leadership reveal that no single leadership style or model predicts school success (Day et al., 2010; Leithwood et al., 2008). According to Hallinger (2011), the concept of *leadership for learning* best captures the synthesis of elements of instructional, transformational, and distributed leadership that is a hallmark of the most effective schools. As transformational leadership emerged alongside instructional leadership as the predominant styles of educational leadership, Leithwood and Jantzi (2009) developed a model of transformational leadership specific to the unique conditions of the school setting. Instructional leadership is embedded within the model.

Notably, one of the key components of Leithwood and Jantzi's (2009) model is *developing people*, which taps into individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation inherent in Bass's model of transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Intellectual stimulation involves seeking ideas, opinions, and novel solutions from followers to drive innovation and creativity. Individualized consideration means being sensitive to each person's needs for growth and recognition, creating opportunities for new learning experiences and encouraging followers to aspire to higher levels of self-actualization. Mentoring and coaching are associated with individualized consideration.

Principal-makers display intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration, and embody the best features of a leader who is dedicated to developing people (Retelle, 2010). The actions of an excellent transformational leader are geared toward improving the organization as well as cultivating the talents and skills of the people within it (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2009). In the case of school leadership, this means creating an optimum environment for teaching and learning. Assistant principals whose principals are committed to their professional and career development not only enjoy higher job satisfaction, but emerge as proficient instructional leaders who are capable of assuming the principalship when the incumbent principal leaves. A major issue confronting school districts is an ad hoc approach to career progression that allows ambitious but questionably capable leadership candidates to ascend to the principalship while the leadership talent of others with greater potential is squandered (Turnbull, Riley, Arcaira, Anderson, & MacFarlane, 2013a; Turnbull, Riley, & MacFarlane, 2013; Turnbull et al., 2015). This study sought to increase the visibility of the assistant principal as a future school leader and simultaneously draw attention to leadership succession planning, which is severely neglected in the educational context (Pounder & Crow, 2005; Rhodes & Bundrett, 2005, 2012; Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011; Thompson, 2010).

Problem Statement

The overwhelming majority of assistant principals share two key features. First, most aspire to ascend to the principalship (Chan et al., 2003; Edwards, 2010; Singletary-Dixon, 2012; Turnbull, Riley, & MacFarlane, 2013). Second, they are motivated by a strong desire to make a difference and help their students succeed, but instead they often feel overwhelmed and lacking the knowledge, skills, and supports they need to achieve their goals (Grodzki, 2011; Houchens, 2012). Many were highly effective classroom teachers. Not only do they have to master new

skills and competencies, but they suddenly find their authority questioned by former colleagues (Workman, 2013). Traditionally, the assistant principal's role has been paradoxically narrowly circumscribed but poorly defined. Role conflict and role ambiguity are common consequences with the potential to escalate into burnout (Celik, 2013). Assistant principals who are not socialized for leadership are thwarted in their intrinsic motivation to serve the needs of their students and their extrinsic needs for recognition and accomplishment.

A problem inherent in the school organization is the absence of structures geared to the socialization and support of assistant principals (Houchens, 2012; Oleszewski et al., 2012). While the literature is replete with references to the importance of teachers' professional development, attention to the professional development of assistant principals is scant. Moreover, with the exception of a brief period during the education reforms that swept through the 1980s and 1990s, assistant principals are almost invisible in the educational leadership literature. A review of the literature from the 1970s into the 1990s disclosed that the breadth of the principal's role was mainly controlled by the principal (Scoggins & Bishop, 1993). This is still the case in most schools, meaning that the principal plays a pivotal role in determining whether the assistant principal is prepared to assume the role of school leader (Oleszewski et al., 2012; Retelle, 2010).

The issue of vice principal leadership preparation is further compounded by the absence of a cohesive approach to leadership succession planning in kindergarten-12th grade education (Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011; Turnbull, Riley, Arcaira, et al., 2013; Turnbull, Riley, & MacFarlane, 2013; Turnbull et al., 2015). In advocating a strategic approach to succession planning, the SREB in particular argues that principals should develop leadership talent internally, assuring that at least one individual is prepared to assume leadership of the school

(Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011). Given scant research attention, there is limited knowledge of the succession from assistant principal to the principalship as experienced by novice principals who have made the upward transition. This study was intended to fill that gap in the empirical literature.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the question of how, or whether, the role of assistant principal prepares job incumbents to be effective principals. Specifically, this study focused on elementary school principals in Central Arkansas. Like many states, Arkansas faces a potential shortage of qualified school administrators or, as framed by Eadens et al. (2011), administrators who are both willing and qualified. Knowledge of the experiences of novice principals who had been promoted from the assistant principal position should help to illuminate the nature of the assistant principalship, the extent it prepares assistant principals to assume the school leadership role, and the succession from assistant principal to building principal.

One of the goals of this study was to compare the assistant principal and principal job responsibilities. This should provide insight into whether or not assistant principals are engaged in activities that effectively prepare them to assume leadership of the school. An additional goal was to discover how principals use their positions to develop the leadership capabilities of their assistant principals. The use of a phenomenological research design, which aims to elucidate the phenomenon under study as it is perceived and experienced by the participants, was selected to give expression to former assistant principals, whose experiences and perspectives are notoriously scarce within an immense body of educational leadership research.

High Leverage

School districts across the United States are confronted with a shortage of highly qualified principal applicants, a situation compounded by a haphazard approach to leadership succession planning (Turnbull, Riley, Arcaira, et al., 2013; Turnbull, Riley, & MacFarlane, 2013; Turnbull et al., 2015). While the vast majority of principals and superintendents endorse the promotion of vice principals and teachers as the most effective way to develop successful school leaders (Coggshall et al., 2008), few structures exist to support that endeavor. The Principal Pipeline Initiative, an innovative, ongoing project involving six large school districts, represents a rare large-scale attempt to outline a strategic career progression continuum for developing school leaders (Turnbull, Riley, Arcaira, et al., 2013; Turnbull, Riley, & MacFarlane, 2013; Turnbull et al., 2015). Of particular relevance to this study, the overwhelming majority of new principals (86%) had been assistant principals and a comparable proportion of assistant principals (84%) sought to become principals in their districts (Turnbull, Riley, & MacFarlane, 2013).

One of the districts involved in the Principal Pipeline Initiative is New York City, the site of a study investigating the relationship between attributes of school principals and school-wide academic achievement. Findings revealed that the principal's educational preparation and preprincipal work experience had minimal impact (Clark, Martorell, & Rockoff, 2009). One notable exception was that schools led by novice principals who had been the assistant principal at that school outperformed other schools led by novices. Although the highest performing schools were generally led by veteran principals, turnover is an inevitable aspect of any organization. The advantage demonstrated by schools helmed by former assistant principals

highlights the significance of developing assistant principals who are prepared to move into the leadership role.

In their classic theory of socialization, Van Manaan and Schein (1979) distinguished between professional and organizational socialization. Professional socialization refers to the development of a role-based identity encompassing attributes that are applicable across various settings where the profession is practiced. Organizational socialization, in contrast, involves induction and immersion into the organizational culture. Two studies reviewed for this project used Van Manaan and Schein's socialization theory as a framework, focusing respectively on the professional socialization of school leadership candidates (Brody, Vissa, & Weathers, 2010) and the experiences of novice assistant principals who had recently made the transition from teaching (Workman, 2013). These studies are unusual in the literature.

Knowledge gained from this study can be used to guide the development of systematic approaches to the professional and organizational socialization of elementary school principals. This extends to succession planning. A strategic approach would assure that principals are equipped to develop assistant principals' leadership capabilities through techniques such as mentoring, coaching, training, and providing them with opportunities to exercise leadership. This in turn would create a cadre of assistant principals who are prepared to serve successfully as school leaders. With input from principals who had previously served as assistant principals, the two school administrative positions can be effectively aligned to maximize leadership talent at the school level.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

- How are school districts mentoring and training assistant principals to prepare them for future principalships?
- How do novice principals perceive their roles regarding the career development of assistant principals?
- How do novice principals perceive their leadership practices have been influenced by their past experiences as assistant principals?

Subjectivity Statement

This project was inspired by the researcher's experience as a classroom teacher for 17 years, an assistant principal for 2 years, and a principal for 6 years. Each of these career stages has produced rich and varied experiences. Classroom teaching involved teaching in six elementary schools in three states: Arkansas, Texas, and Louisiana. Experience as an assistant principal included placements at two different elementary schools as assistant principal before being promoting to principal at one of those campuses. These experiences allowed the researcher to study and learn from multiple school leaders.

It was especially striking to observe the contrasting ways each principal structured the assistant principal's job responsibilities and roles. One principal practiced distributive leadership, while the other delegated special education and discipline duties to the assistant principal. The issue of delegating versus distributing has been framed as a subtext of the broader issue of management versus leadership in demarcating the assistant principal's role (Muijs & Harris, 2003). In the context of educational leadership, delegating usually means tasking assistant principals with administrative, supervisory, and auxiliary duties that limit opportunities to practice leadership skills. Distributing denotes shared responsibility for school leadership,

which is a source of much greater satisfaction for assistant principals as well as much more effective preparation for becoming a building principal.

The researcher's school district provides a monthly Assistant Principal Academy whereby assistant principals from all elementary and secondary campuses meet and discuss topics decided on by the director of administrative services. The researcher currently attends monthly principal's meetings, where the superintendent and directors present professional development on a variety of topics, including but not limited to teacher evaluation, curriculum and instruction, technology, and state initiatives. Professional development opportunities of this type are highly recommended aspects of a continuum of ongoing professional learning (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007). However, a review of the literature suggests that they may not be available to a substantial proportion of principals and vice principals.

In the initial stage, this research was intended to focus on principals, motivated by a desire to validate the frustrations experienced as a result of moving from assistant principal to principal and feeling unprepared for the challenges ahead that first year. This perspective changed as the researcher gained a wealth of experiences and felt confident as an effective school leader. This experience includes working with a career assistant principal, who has since retired, and working presently with a young assistant principal who aspires to becoming a principal. To fulfill those aspirations, it is the principal's obligation to provide him with the educational experiences and leadership opportunities needed to lead a school, not simply manage one. Novice principals are the focus of study, as they can reflect upon their roles and responsibilities as assistant principals and articulate how those experiences are aligned with their duties as principals.

The researcher is currently enrolled in the Educational Leadership doctoral program at the University of Arkansas after having completed a master's degree in Educational Leadership at the same institution. This study fulfills the dissertation requirements of the doctoral program.

Definition of Key Terms

The following terms are defined for the purpose of this study:

- *Administrative internship or leadership apprenticeship*: Leadership development program strategically designed to provide future school leaders with numerous opportunities to practice leadership under the expert guidance of veteran principals (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007).
- *Delegation*: The managerial practice of allocating less important or less desirable tasks to subordinates; in the case of educational leadership, this refers to the administrative, supervisory, and support tasks that have traditionally been part of the assistant principal's role (Muijs & Harris, 2003).
- *Distributed leadership*: School leadership practice denoting shared responsibility for learning outcomes and active participation by multiple stakeholders, including principals, vice principals, teacher leaders, teachers, other school staff, and in some schools, students, parents, and community members (Day & Sammons, 2013; Day et al., 2010).
- *Novice*: A school leader with three years or less experience in his or her current position (Barnett, Shoho, & Oleszewski (2012).
- *Organizational socialization*: The process of acquiring knowledge, skills, and dispositions required for performing an occupation role in a particular setting (Crow, 2006).

- *Principalship*: Term used to capture the full range of roles, responsibilities, activities, and goals of the building leader.
- *Professional socialization*: The process of developing a role-based identity that includes values, norms, knowledge, skills, competencies, and attitudes requisite for fulfilling a particular occupational role (Brody et al., 2010).
- *Succession planning or succession management*: A strategically designed system for cultivating leadership talent within the school organization by identifying and developing individuals with the potential to assume the principalship upon departure of the incumbent (Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011).
- *Vice principal or assistant principal*: Terms used interchangeably to denote a school administrator who assists the principal and fulfills duties assigned by the building principal.

Brief Review of the Literature

Role socialization. Two studies reviewed for this project focused on the socialization of school leaders exploring, respectively, professional socialization (Brody et al., 2010) and organizational socialization (Grodzki, 2011). Brody et al. (2010) used Van Maanan and Schein's (1979) theory of socialization as a framework for examining how an educational program, the Educational Leadership Program for Aspiring Principals (ELPAP) at the University of Pennsylvania, used *focused observation* to facilitate the role conceptualization and identity development of leadership candidates. The program approaches leadership development from the perspective that principals who successfully lead school improvement efforts exercise four leadership behaviors drawn from best practices of effective school leaders. The effective school leader is

expected to be an *instructional leader* who consistently conveys high expectations for student performance; an *organizational leader* who practices collaborative leadership and cultivates a learning community committed to transformation and reform through problem solving; a *public leader* who builds partnerships with other schools, families, and the community; and an *evidence-based leader* who adopts a data-driven approach to ongoing school improvement. These features of effective school leadership are reflected in the repertoire of behaviors identified by Day et al. (2010) as characteristic of the most successful school leaders.

The ELPAP program is also structured to develop five interrelated competencies: *intrapersonal and interpersonal growth, habits of mind, reflective practice, communication skills, and professionalism* (Brody et al., 2010). These competencies are both implicit and explicit in Leithwood and Jantzi's (2009) model of transformational school leadership. Through focused observations, leadership candidates are directly exposed to the practice of instructional leadership in the school setting (Brody et al., 2010). Their qualitative responses demonstrated that their firsthand experience with school culture inspired them to envision themselves as members of the learning community which, in turn, helped them to apply theories learned from coursework to real-world school problems. Notably, a major theme that emerged was how the students began to clarify role conceptions and assume identities aligned with those conceptions, which is the essence of professional socialization.

Grodzki (2011) presented the case study of a Canadian school district aimed at illuminating the interaction, association, or misalignment between the organizational socialization of new principals and vice principals, how they make sense of their work, their self-efficacy belief, and their eventual role-identity development. The research was conducted to improve the quality of professional development and leadership preparation and succession

planning programs. Interestingly, participants at all administrative levels found it difficult to clearly define the school administrator's role, which Grodzki ascribed to the complexity of the role. Several themes arose that are commonly found in the literature. While instructional leadership was universally favored, the novices felt they were not fully prepared to practice it and, as a group, they felt overwhelmed by competing demands and unrealistic expectations, which lowered their confidence. A number of administrators felt their work was undervalued and underappreciated, a common experience for assistant principals (Marshall & Hooley, 2006).

Some participants struggled with the transition from teacher to administrator (Grodzki, 2011). Workman (2013) also observed this struggle in new vice principals and, as a former teacher who became an assistant principal, she experienced it firsthand.

Furthermore, the lack of a clear definition of their new professional roles often induced feelings of ambiguity (Grodzki, 2011). Role ambiguity is ubiquitous among vice principals (Celik, 2013; Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Vice principals can be aptly described as *boundary spanners*, especially those whose professional roles call on them to balance teaching with leadership duties (Beltramo, 2014). Although the novice administrators had sources of formal and informal support, they expressed a need for more formal supports, such as mentoring (Grodzki, 2011). The district adopted various socialization techniques to facilitate the transition of the former teachers into their new professional roles. Their socialization experiences and more significantly, how they perceived them and made sense of them, was the foundation on which the new administrators built their professional identity.

Based on the existing literature and the findings of the case study, Grodzki (2011) created a conceptual framework for succession planning and socialization of new school administrators. The initial framework was based on interactions between organizational socialization,

sensemaking and developing a sense of self-efficacy, and the development and performance of new role identities. To this, Grodzki added a description and analysis of the conditions affecting this interaction. This important addition reflects Hallinger's (2011) assertion that the pivotal factor in successful school leadership is the context. This extends to programs designed to promote the professional development of school leaders.

Barnett et al. (2012) explored the ways novice and experienced vice principals perceived the realities of their professional roles and responsibilities. Consistent with Hallinger's (2011) emphasis on context, the qualitative study was framed within the context of public policy pressures for accountability. Regardless of experience, the administrators cited numerous challenges including workload and task management, student issues, parent issues, teacher and staff issues, curriculum and instruction issues, personal expectations, and external demands. For the most part, the two groups reported similar challenges. However, the veteran vice principals reported more challenges related to instructional leadership (probably due to more responsibility for that role and more pressure to improve student learning), as well as greater psychological and emotional strain and a stronger sense of personal responsibility. These psychological perceptions suggest vulnerability to burnout, which is not unusual in assistant principals (Celik, 2013; Marshall & Hooley, 2006).

An important finding was that both the novice and veteran assistant principals felt they had good interpersonal skills and felt comfortable working with others and building relationships (Barnett et al., 2012). Strong relationship-building skills are critical for successful school leadership (Leithwood & Azah, 2014). Supervising, critiquing, and evaluating teachers can be especially intimidating for vice principals who were or are still teachers (Beltramo, 2014; Workman, 2013). However, with learning and work experiences that prepared them for working

with other adults, many vice principals felt no problem with activities such as conducting classroom observations, completing teacher evaluations, and delivering staff development (Barnett et al., 2012). According to Hutton (2012), knowledge of the principles and practices of adult learning should be a requisite competency for assistant principals.

Feeling comfortable working with people did not extend to dealing with conflict, which many felt poorly prepared to do (Barnett et al., 2012). Even many veteran vice principals felt they lacked understanding of certain job expectations, especially related to curriculum and instruction, and many felt deficient in organizational and managerial skills, which are critical for maintaining a stable learning environment (Pepper, 2010). Barnett et al. (2012) proposed that educational leadership programs should be designed to help aspiring school leaders improve their organizational skills, especially time management and prioritizing, and give greater priority to conflict resolution and instructional leadership. Several of these recommendations are incorporated in the ELPAP (Brody et al., 2010). Furthermore, as part of a continuum of professional growth and development, Barnett et al. advocated mentoring and job-embedded professional development, which are consistently recommended for developing high quality school leaders (Gray, Fry, Bottoms, & O'Neill, 2007; Hall, 2008; Hutton, 2012; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Oleszewski et al., 2012; Turnbull, Riley, Arcaira, et al., 2013; Turnbull, Riley, & MacFarlane, 2013; Turnbull et al., 2015). To Hutton (2012), job-embedded professional development is essential for preparing assistant principals for the principalship.

Career progression. The Principal Pipeline Initiative is sponsored by the Wallace Foundation, which also sponsored the Learning from Leadership Project (Leithwood & Mascal, 2008; Louis et al., 2010) and the Stanford study of exemplary leadership development programs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). The project (which issued its final report in 2018) involves six large

school districts: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, North Carolina; Denver Public Schools, Colorado; Gwinnett County Public Schools, Georgia; Hillsborough Public Schools, Florida; New York City Public Schools; and Prince George's County Public Schools, Maryland (Turnbull, Riley, Arcaira, et al., 2013). Designed to create a career progression continuum for school leaders, the project has four major components: leader standards, high-quality training, selective hiring, and on-the-job evaluation and support.

The Principal Pipeline Initiative stands out for its recognition of the important role played by assistant principals in leading the nation's schools. However, even this visionary program is not immune to the secondary status historically given assistant principals. A disappointing finding is that the assistant principals appraised the support they received less positively than the novice principals (Turnbull, Riley, & MacFarlane, 2013). According to the district leaders, the biggest challenge they faced was reframing the assistant principalship (Turnbull et al., 2015). In contrast to the conventional practice of allowing principals to shape the responsibilities of their assistant principals, the district leaders sought to deploy assistant principals strategically, as "both apprenticeship and proving ground for future principals" (p. 15). To most assistant principals, that perspective represents a welcome and long overdue change.

At the same time, in all the districts but Gwinnett County, the district leaders voiced concerns about assistant principals who had not shown high potential to meet expectations for district principals (Turnbull et al., 2015). As a result, the district leaders proposed lateral moves for some assistant principals such as central office positions. However, the districts varied considerably in their approaches to leadership preparation for assistant principals. Given the assistant principals' feelings that they received less than ideal support, the question arises of whether many assistant principals actually lacked leadership talent or whether the district

programs were inadequately designed, even if they were purportedly modeled after best practices. The application of a conceptual framework such as Grodzki's (2011) would probably strengthen the program. The most recent report, *The Principal Pipeline Initiative*, suggested that developing the leadership talent of assistant principals may be the weakest program component (Turnbull et al., 2015).

Career aspirations. Edwards (2010) examined the career aspirations of 177 assistant principals from elementary, middle, and high schools in a large urban North Carolina school district. Using a modified version of the Assistant Principal Career Stability Survey, the study focused on their career plans over the next 10 years. Prospective career paths included: becoming a principal, taking another administrative position, returning to classroom teaching, leaving education entirely, or other (self-reported) career alternatives. Notably, roughly 85% of the respondents sought upward promotion, with more than three quarters (77.4%) of the assistant principals interested in becoming full principals, a pattern observed earlier by Chan et al. (2003). Only a tiny proportion (2.4%) preferred to remain assistant principals, and none desired to return to teaching.

Interestingly, the assistant principals with the shortest tenure were the most eager to be promoted (Edwards, 2010). This may be due to novices being given the least desirable assignments. Most who thought of leaving education were contemplating retirement rather than changing careers. Apart from age or experience, factors related to work conditions and role conflict influenced the assistant principals' projected career aspirations (Edwards, 2010). In particular, being given assignments without adequate human resources to accomplish them was a major motivation for desiring upward promotion.

Dunleavy (2011) explored ambitions to become principals among New York City assistant principals. Aspiring principals were most likely to be female, hold positions in elementary schools, and under age 50; whereas, those who intended to remain assistant principalship had the opposite profile: male, secondary school assistant principals, and over age 50. The interaction of gender and age may reflect the relatively recent influx of women to the assistant principalship (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). A decade earlier Chan et al. (2003) found that male assistant principals were more likely to desire upward promotion.

Another factor affecting the desire to become a principal was the extent the assistant principals felt their work was respected and valued, which served as powerful motivation for seeking upward promotion (Dunleavy, 2011). The principal may play a key role. All the vice principals in Retelle's (2010) qualitative study agreed that the principal was expected to train and mentor assistant principals. However, there was a tremendous degree of variation in how (or whether) they performed this developmental role. Some actively dissuaded assistant principals from participating in professional development activities. That would seem to imply that they saw their vice principals as subordinates with scant respect for their personal and professional growth and potential. This behavior represents the antithesis of a good transformational leader (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2009).

A second group of principals supported the vice principals' career aspirations by entrusting them with a variety of leadership responsibilities and involving them in activities and events that helped them build leadership knowledge, skills, and expertise (Retelle, 2010). The third group were the principal-makers, who went out of their way to provide mentoring, training, guidance, and sponsorship. Not unexpectedly, vice principals who worked with principal-makers were most likely to be promoted. However, this relationship was complex. Principal-

makers tended to be influential with district leadership. According to Retelle, this raised the possibility that vice principals viewed as more talented leadership candidates might have been more likely to be assigned to a principal-maker. Especially striking was the discovery of the powerful role of district politics in the upward promotion of vice principals. While the importance of interpersonal skills is universally recognized, it is fair to say that aspiring leaders need to develop networking skills as well as the skills to deal with the political aspects of educational leadership. The reports from the Principal Pipeline Initiative illustrate how variations in the operations of district leadership affect the support given assistant principals (Turnbull et al., 2015).

Overview of Methodology

This phenomenological study was designed with a twofold purpose. First, this study sought to illuminate how the leadership practices of novice principals are informed and influenced by their past experiences as assistant principals. Second, the study sought to identify and define the assistant principal's roles and responsibilities. The research design was based on the characteristics of qualitative research as defined by Plano Clark and Creswell (2009). This entailed gathering data through in-depth interviews and field notes collected during the interview process. Upon completion, the interviews were transcribed and both interview and field note data were analyzed to discern underlying meanings. First- and second-cycle coding methods were utilized to develop themes about and descriptions of the phenomenon under study.

According to Creswell and Miller (2000), qualitative investigators must demonstrate that inferences derived from their research are grounded in data. Establishing credibility demands ensuring that the participants' thoughts, feelings, and statements are accurately represented. This was accomplished by several techniques. First, the researcher diligently searched the material

for discrepant evidence. Second, the findings were reviewed and discussed with professional colleagues. Furthermore, the researcher was careful to keep reliable records that tracked the processes and procedures used to collect and interpret data so as to establish dependability. Field notes were used as a source of ongoing reflection. If there was any ambiguity with respect to a participant's intended meaning, that participant was contacted in order to clarify meaning and assure that the information was not misinterpreted. Thick, rich descriptions of the participants and the context contributed to the transferability of the results.

Methodology. Detailed, in-depth information was derived from individual, in-person semistructured interviews. Each interview consisted of a series of open-ended questions. The participants were given time to reflect upon and articulate their responses. The atmosphere was fairly informal so the participants felt at ease.

Sampling strategies and techniques. The richness and depth of qualitative research findings is contingent on the selection of participants who are capable of elaborating their thoughts, perceptions, and experiences (Polkinghorne, 2005). Purposive sampling techniques were used to select participants who could clearly describe and expound upon the question of how well they perceived their assistant principal experiences prepared them for the principalship. All participants were guaranteed complete confidentiality and anonymity. Beyond this being an ethical imperative, it was expected that the privacy guarantees encouraged the participants to respond honestly and openly to all of the questions.

The participants were eight novice principals from elementary schools in five Central Arkansas school districts. The school districts varied in size from approximately 3,400 to 25,000 students. They also varied in student demographics, with four districts that are predominately

White and one that is predominately African American. Percentage of students receiving free or reduced price meals also varied from 37% to 71% in the five school districts.

Data analysis and synthesis. Audio recordings of each interview were transcribed into writing, which allowed the researcher to interpret each transcript individually. The transcripts were subjected to multiple readings so themes and ideas could emerge. Comparisons of responses between and within the participants facilitated the emergence of distinctive and common themes. The computer software VoiceBase was used to store and organize data. In presenting the data in narrative form, direct quotes from the participants were included to portray their experiences and perceptions as vividly and authentically as possible. The material might have been edited for clarity and conciseness, but care was taken to ensure that the participants' meaning was not altered in any way.

Assumptions. The main assumption guiding this study was that the participants had personal and professional interest in the topic and, as such, they were willing to share their perceptions, ideas, and experiences for the benefit of current and future generations of educational leaders. This study was voluntary, confidential, and designed to assure the anonymity of the participants. Knowing these privacy safeguards were in place, the participants were expected to be honest and open in portraying their lived experiences. An additional assumption was that the participants appreciated the significance of this study and responded without biases or other influences. It was assumed that the participants were truthful in their responses regardless of whether their experiences had been positive, negative, or neutral.

Delimitations. This study was not intended to provide school districts with an ideal solution to the problem of leadership succession, nor did it presume that succession management is a panacea for underperforming schools. By design, this study explored socialization practices

from the perspectives of novice elementary school principals from five school districts in Central Arkansas. Principals with greater than two years of experience were excluded in order to present the perspectives of principals who can vividly recall their prior experiences as assistant principals and are best able to describe how those former roles and responsibilities inform their current work as their schools' instructional leaders. Quantitative research methods were deemed inappropriate for this study, which was designed to explore the issue of assistant principal socialization in depth as opposed to quantifying elements of that experience, such as the proportion of principals who felt their leadership development was inadequate or that experienced mentoring. Quantitative analysis would have revealed strengths and weaknesses in current practices, but would not have provided insight into how they were experienced or how and why they were effective or ineffective in shaping school leaders. In keeping with the selection of qualitative methods, this study did not involve surveying a large participant sample to determine overall patterns, but rather concentrated on open-ended, detailed responses from a small group of select participants to gain a conceptual understanding of the phenomenon based on differences and commonalities in their experiences and perceptions.

Limitations. The study was restricted to the experiences and perceptions of eight building principals from elementary schools in five Central Arkansas school districts. By design, qualitative research involves a small number of purposefully chosen participants whose experience is not necessarily representative of the larger population or professional group.

School level (elementary or secondary) affects the workload and support sources of principals (Leithwood & Azah, 2014). Furthermore, elementary schools tend to have a more collegial and informal atmosphere. Therefore, the findings may not generalize beyond the elementary school level.

Interview data has limitations, including the possibility of participants censoring thoughts or otherwise limiting the amount of information they are willing to share. From a personal standpoint, the researcher served as an elementary school assistant principal for 2 years prior to becoming an elementary school principal 6 years ago. Thus, despite deliberate efforts to minimize any subjective bias, the findings may inadvertently reflect researcher bias.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature presented in this review is drawn from the following EBSCO databases: Academic Search Premier, MasterFILE Premier, Business Source Premier, ERIC, PsycINFO, and PsycARTICLES. Keywords used either individually or in conjunction include *schools*, *principals*, *assistant principals*, *vice principals*, *deputy principals*, *school administrators*, *leadership*, *leadership succession*, *socialization*, *education*, *induction*, *mentoring*, *preparation*, *professional development*, *leadership development*, *management*, *roles*, and *organization*.

For more than 50 years, scholars in North America, Europe, and the Asia-Pacific have sought to illuminate the relationship between educational leadership and student learning (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). For the majority of studies, the principal is the primary focus. Early studies adopted the “direct effects” model or the “heroic leadership” model, which endeavored to explain student outcomes entirely on the basis of principal leadership (Hallinger & Heck, 2010, p. 99). Ultimately, this unduly simplistic approach was abandoned as a growing body of research demonstrated that the impact of leadership is undeniably important, but indirect (Day & Sammons, 2013; Day et al., 2010; Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Leithwood et al., 2008; Louis et al., 2010).

Successful school leaders create conditions that promote high quality classroom instruction, professional learning, and commitment to ongoing change and improvement. In direct contradiction to the heroic leadership model, recent large-scale studies reveal that the highest performing schools espouse collaborative or distributed leadership (Day & Sammons, 2013; Day et al., 2010; Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Leithwood, 2008; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Louis et al., 2010; Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011). The most successful schools involve a wide network of constituents, including more influence for students and parents.

Sustaining a culture of excellent teaching and learning requires multiple leaders (Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011). However, while the educational leadership research gives ample attention to the expanding roles of teacher leaders and teacher leadership teams, principals and vice principals are often grouped together under the broad category of “school leaders” or “administrators” despite the difference in status and formal authority. Only in the case of a co-principalship do two school leaders share power equally (Eckman, 2007).

Indeed, Marshall and Hooley (2006) observed that while reviewing the literature on educational leadership they found a wealth of scholarly research on principals and superintendents, but a dearth of material on the assistant principal. Nearly a decade later, the same pattern emerges, perhaps even more slanted, as the increasing demands for accountability and higher achievement scores have drawn more attention to the school principal. Marshall and Hooley point out that the assistant principalship marks the beginning of a socialization process that may well culminate in a principalship or superintendency. As assistant principals carry out their work, they are being evaluated by others as well as engaging in a process of self-reflection and decision making that will determine the course of their future careers. No other staff member is as versed in the daily operations of the school as the assistant principal (Hutton, 2012; Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Paradoxically, no other staff member has been rendered quite as invisible in the scholarly literature.

The importance of the assistant principalship as a starting point is underscored by a New York City study examining the association between attributes of school principals and school performance. The researchers found minimal effect for the principals’ educational preparation and preprincipal work experience (Clark et al., 2009). The one striking exception was that

having been assistant principals at their current schools gave an advantage to inexperienced principals, whose schools outperformed those led by other novices.

Overall, schools led by more experienced principals had superior outcomes, especially with respect to mathematics test scores and attendance. This finding led Clark et al. (2009) to recommend policies that encourage school principals to remain at their posts. However, given that turnover is inevitable, even with attractive incentives (and certainly with legions of veteran principals nearing retirement), it is at least as important to ensure that novice principals arrive at their positions prepared to take on the challenging job. Increasing the visibility of the assistant principal as the potential school leader should also give greater attention to leadership succession management, which is sorely neglected (Pounder & Crow, 2005; Rhodes & Bundrett, 2005, 2012; Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011; Thompson, 2010).

Notably, an overwhelming majority of principals and superintendents believe that the best strategy for advancing effective school leadership lies in promoting promising assistant principals and teachers (Coggshall et al., 2008). In England, Rhodes and Bundrett (2012) called for a strategic approach to the creation and retention of a strong leadership talent pool at the local and national levels. That advice is equally relevant to the United States. The SREB outlined a series of “critical actions” for principal succession planning at the state, district, and building levels; this last, calling on principals to cultivate leadership talent from within the school (Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011).

New York City, the nation’s largest school system, is one of six large school districts involved in the Wallace Foundation’s Principal Pipeline Initiative (Turnbull, Riley, Arcaira, et al., 2013; Turnbull, Riley, & MacFarlane, 2013; Turnbull et al., 2015). The other five districts are: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, North Carolina; Denver Public Schools, Colorado;

Gwinnett County Public Schools, Georgia; Hillsborough Public Schools, Florida; and Prince George's County Public Schools, Maryland. The ongoing project (which produced its final report in 2018) has four key components: *leader standards*, *high quality training*, *selective hiring*, and *on-the-job evaluation and support*. A notable feature of the Principal Pipeline is the attention paid to the professional growth and development of assistant principals. According to the principal survey, 86% of new principals had been assistant principals, and the assistant principal survey revealed that a similar proportion (84%) aspired to a principalship in their district (Turnbull, Riley, & MacFarlane, 2013).

Prior studies sponsored by the Wallace Foundation, including the Learning From Leadership Project (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Louis et al., 2010) and the Stanford study of exemplary leadership development programs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007) provided insight on best practices to guide the design of the Principal Pipeline Initiative (Turnbull, Riley, Arcaira, et al., 2013). In fact, key components of the continuum of preparation were derived from the Stanford study (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). For practicing principals, exemplary programs emphasize continuous learning, including induction, mentoring, and opportunities for networking. For prospective principals, a critical feature of an exemplary preservice program is a strategically designed, supervised administrative internship that offers the aspirants opportunities to exercise leadership under the guidance of expert school leaders.

The Principal Pipeline Initiative is organized along a strategic career progression continuum (Turnbull, Riley, Arcaira, et al., 2013; Turnbull, Riley, & MacFarlane, 2013; Turnbull et al., 2015). At the onset of the project, all six districts reported that a major problem confronting the schools was a haphazard approach to career progression that allowed ambitious but questionably talented leadership candidates to gain administrator certification, build network

support, and win appointments while others with greater potential were ignored or discouraged from pursuing career advancement (Turnbull et al., 2015). At least some of those in this potentially talented but untapped or passed over group would fit the prototype of the “shafted” assistant principal (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Not only is their leadership talent squandered, but dissatisfied assistant principals are vulnerable to burnout and poor performance (Celik, 2013). In an environment of escalating pressure for school improvement, failure to cultivate promising leadership talent is counterproductive. School leadership is second only to classroom teaching in its impact on student learning (Day et al., 2010; Leithwood et al., 2008).

Traditionally, principals were placed in a leadership position and left to learn for themselves how to perform their job (Gray et al., 2007; Hall, 2008). For assistant principals, this often remains the case (Houchens, 2012; Oleszewski et al., 2012). Attention to professional development is scant, and many assistant principals feel poorly prepared for their roles. For former teachers, who comprise a substantial proportion of new assistant principals, the transition can be confusing and lonely. Describing her own experience, Workman (2013) had to deal with the realization that she no longer had teachers as colleagues, but at the same time her authority as an administrator was continually questioned. In an article published in *Teacher's College Record*, Denise Armstrong framed the transition to the assistant principalship as a “rite of passage” in which new vice principals faced hostility from teachers, excessive workloads, intimidating if not hazardous tasks (such as dealing with student violence), with minimal oversight and support (as cited in Houchens, 2012). As with most rites of passage, the newcomers are expected to endure any challenge they face, however, daunting, without showing “weakness.”

Over time, most new assistant principals gain confidence and expertise as they develop their personal leadership styles (Workman, 2013). Armstrong also found that by the third year most new vice principals were more confident, competent, and more satisfied with their work (Houchens, 2012). However, according to Houchens (2012), “this came with a price”; many had substantially lowered their expectations, especially those who were most idealistic about helping students by becoming school leaders (p. 15).

Houchens (2012) called such disillusionment “a sad commentary on school leadership from multiple perspectives” (p. 15). Building on Armstrong’s claim that education administration programs fail to prepare leadership candidates for the assistant principal’s role, Houchens decried principals and superintendents who also fail their assistant principals by allowing them to experience such a poor transition to leadership. Some principals even try to prevent their assistant principals from participating in professional development activities (Retelle, 2010). Others, the principal-makers, actively train, guide, mentor, and sponsor their assistant principals to assure them a path to the principalship.

According to Eadens, Bruner, and Black (2011), school districts are not so much lacking credentialed individuals willing to assume administrative positions, but rather, experience shortages of candidates who are both willing and qualified. As the district administrators acknowledged, the lack of a systematic approach to leadership succession allowed less suited individuals to bypass more talented candidates (Turnbull et al., 2015). This phenomenological study explored the succession of elementary school principals through the experiences and perspectives of novice principals who had previously served as assistant principals. The following section will provide important background information on the evolution of the assistant principalship.

Evolution of the Assistant Principalship

Historical perspective. Assistant principals began to appear on the landscape of American education in the early 20th century in response to the emergence of the large comprehensive high school (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Historically, principals or *head teachers* (the term still used in the United Kingdom) were placed at the helm of schools but had minimal authority (Glanz, 1994). School operations were supervised by the superintendent. However, with increasing urbanization, the management of the burgeoning school system became more complex and superintendents grew more distant from the schools' daily routine. The authority of running the school shifted to the building principal. After 1920, the principal no longer had teaching duties, but instead was tasked with the responsibility of advising less experienced teachers in instruction, curriculum, and classroom management.

The expansion of school system, and with it the educational bureaucracy, coincided with the development of rational management. The principal became more consumed with administrative activities and the principalship took on more of a managerial function (Glanz, 1994). The more formal hierarchical organization brought a new group of school officials who assumed responsibility for routine classroom supervision. In addition to their supervisory tasks, these officials also assisted the principal with practical administrative matters. Originally called *general supervisors*, they eventually became known as *assistant principals*. Their job tasks included preparing attendance reports, gathering data for evaluation purposes, and coordinating school programs. What was absent from this job description was the exercise of formal authority: assistant principals served as advisors who were subordinate to the principal.

In the early to mid-20th century, the assistant principal's routine was consumed primarily with administrative tasks and disciplinary procedures (Glanz, 1994). Some assistant principals

were actively involved with activities related to instruction and curriculum development, staff training, and professional development, but that was unusual for the time. Even today, the task most closely associated with the assistant principal's role is probably maintaining school discipline (Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Oleszewski et al., 2012; Workman, 2013).

To get a picture of the myriad activities that have comprised the assistant principal's role, Scoggins and Bishop (1993) conducted a research review extending from 1970 through 1990. They discovered 20 tasks that were common features of the assistant principal's role. These tasks covered such areas as student discipline, attendance, student activities, athletics, master schedules, building operations, budgets, reports, school calendar, transportation, curriculum, cafeteria supervision, lockers, communications, interacting with community agencies, curriculum, and acting as a substitute for the principal.

Beyond the varied nature of these activities, the most striking finding was that the nature and scope of the assistant principal's role was primarily controlled by the principal (Scoggins & Bishop, 1993). This is still true in most schools (Beltramo, 2014; Workman, 2013). In other words, the principal could (and still can) play a decisive role in whether or not the assistant principal is adequately prepared for promotion to the principalship (Brown-Ferrigno, 2007; Chan et al., 2003; Oleszewski et al., 2012; Retelle, 2010).

The education reforms of the 1980s and 1990s triggered an upsurge of interest in the assistant principal's role (Glanz, 1994; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Mertz, 2000; Michel et al., 1993). As instructional leadership became a dominant leadership model, assistant principals began taking on roles as instructional leaders (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Instructional leadership is often the most satisfying aspect of the assistant principal's role ("Role of the Assistant Principal," 2008).

The ability to manage interpersonal relationships within the school and with the local community gained more importance with increasing attention to the accountability of school leaders to various stakeholder groups (Michel et al., 1993). In fact, strong interpersonal skills are deemed an essential competency for principals and assistant principals (Leithwood & Azah, 2014). Recognition of the effectiveness of distributed leadership for the purpose of sustained school improvement further increased the need for strong interpersonal and communication skills and drove significant changes to the assistant principal's role (Muijs & Harris, 2003).

Two interrelated phenomena in the 1980s figured prominently in reconfiguring the assistant principal's role: the drive for effective schools and the emergence of instructional leadership (Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Michel et al., 1993). Activities related to instruction were completely absent from a survey of the tasks performed by assistant principals in 1965, but ranked high on the list in importance in 1987 (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Providing incentives and motivation to teachers was another new addition during the 1980s. Furthermore, tasks related to school policy and public relations also gained importance during the time frame. In descending order, the five responsibilities deemed most important by vice principals surveyed by Chan et al. (2003) were instructional support, curriculum development, maintaining a safe school climate, performing teacher observations and evaluations, and meeting with parents.

Present and future. Broadly, the activities of the 21st century assistant principal can be divided into two categories: instructional and organizational ("Role of the Assistant Principal," 2008). According to Glanz (1994), this is basically an extension of the origins of the position as an administrative and instructional function. Glanz emphasized that it is historically inaccurate to claim that assistant principals were never involved in instructional and curricular activities. Even if this involvement was limited in the past, he argued, there is historical precedence for

expanding the roles and responsibilities of the assistant principal to encompass the more rewarding educational leadership tasks.

According to Marshall and Hooley (2006), the assistant principal holds an essential position in education for several reasons. First, the assistant principalship is often an entry level position for administrative careers. Most assistant principals aspire to upward advancement (Chan et al., 2003; Edwards, 2010; Retelle, 2010; Turnbull, Riley, & MacFarlane, 2013). In view of this predilection, Marshall and Hooley (2006) note that assistant principal positions typically offer opportunities for observing and interaction with supervisors and learning the types of behaviors essential to upward promotion.

Second, assistant principals are entrusted with maintaining the norms and rules of the school culture (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). In performing this role, assistant principals are generally the ones who have to deal with the most challenging disciplinary problems. Indeed, this aspect of the assistant principalship is primarily what made the position such a frightening “rite of passage” to the assistant principals surveyed by Armstrong (as cited in Houchens, 2012). During their first year on the job, they were confronted with such serious and unpredictable events as violent conflicts, bomb threats, suicidal students, as well as the presence of drugs. Being forced to make high-risk calculations without adequate preparation or supervision intensified feelings of vulnerability that are common to novices. Inhibitions about disclosing their fears and uncertainty further exacerbated feelings of stress.

According to Marshall and Hooley (2006), “Social issues such as poverty, racism, and family disruption help define the world in which assistant principals find themselves” (p. 2). At the same time, new assistant principals (and principals) are often left on their own to make sense of the world they inhabit and their professional roles and identity within it (Grodzki, 2011).

Being entrusted with maintaining cultural norms while exposed to injustices that adversely affect students can be a double edge for novice assistant principals who are aware of school policies that may be harmful to students but feel powerless to change them (Best, 2015). Alternately, they may be afraid to jeopardize their careers by speaking out. Traditionally, schools have rewarded conformity; the assistant principals that conformed most closely to organizational norms were most often promoted (Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Mertz, 2000).

Third, Marshall and Hooley (2006) pointed out that by monitoring hallways and paying attention to students' actions and needs, assistant principals must frequently play the role of mediator. This role entails addressing conflicts that arise among teachers, students, and the community. Once again, this highlights the crucial importance of relationship-building skills (Leithwood & Azah, 2014). Inadvertently, it also highlights the potential for role conflict, especially when assistant principals who had been teachers, or in some cases, are simultaneously teachers and administrators, find themselves on the opposite side of their former colleagues (Beltramo, 2014; Workman, 2013).

Marshall and Hooley (2006) recognized the difficulty of being a mediator. Assistant principals are beholden to multiple stakeholders. Mediation also involves compliance with federal, state, and local school policies, which are not always aligned. Assistant principals are entrusted with maintaining order, but are not prepared for this role by courses that focus on curriculum, leadership skills, best instructional practices, and school law. For principals as well as assistant principals, there is a marked disconnect between what is taught in educational leadership programs and the messy realities of the school setting. For at least 50 years, a gap has existed between the recommendations for how principals should perform as school leaders and what they actually do (Louis et al., 2010).

Finally, Marshall and Hooley (2006) noted that assistant principals encounter daily the fundamental dilemmas of school systems. They talked with students with personal and family problems, parents who were angry about social conditions affecting their children's school, and teachers who were resentful and resistant to being monitored. On some occasions, they substituted in the classroom. To Marshall and Hooley, their daily reality was "a microcosm representing the array of issues that arise when children bring society inside the school's walls" (p. 3). In view of this situation, assistant principals "have developed into a prime group of individuals who could, if asked, generate a unique picture of the existing conditions of public education" (p. 3).

Indeed, many assistant principals would probably welcome being asked for their input on how to change structures that unfairly and adversely affect students (Best, 2015). Marshall and Hooley (2006) recognized this and envisioned a new model they call "advocacy leadership." Ideally, they would like to see the assistant principalship being transformed into a vehicle for social justice leadership.

Marshall has long been an advocate for increasing the visibility of assistant principals, as well as the respect awarded them for the critical multiple roles they perform. Marshall and Hooley (2006) envisioned assistant principals as change agents who fearlessly grapple with social issues—a radical change from subordinates who are tasked with maintaining the status quo. Whatever course it takes the assistant principal's role will continue to evolve in the future and the demands of that role must be matched by educational preparation that immerses aspiring leaders in the daily realities of the job, followed by ongoing and continually updated professional learning (Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Hutton, 2012; Oleszewski et al., 2012; Oliver, 2005).

Models of Assistant Principal Leadership

Delegation versus distribution. Muijs and Harris (2003) framed the assistant principal's leadership role within the issue of management versus leadership. Charged with mundane administrative functions and expected to maintain the status quo, assistant principals were often frustrated with a role that was poorly defined and yet narrowly circumscribed in terms of opportunities to lead innovation and change. Disillusionment or cynicism is a common consequence (Houchens, 2012). Studies in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia typically found that assistant principals desire to take more of an active role in planning, policymaking, staff and curriculum development, and interacting with families, community members, and others outside the school (Muijs & Harris, 2003). Author Alma Harris is one of the United Kingdom researchers whose extensive, ongoing research confirmed that in the highest performing schools, assistant principals, as well as teachers and teacher leaders, are active decision makers in these activities (Day et al., 2010; Leithwood et al., 2008).

Transactional leadership is often equated with management. According to Pepper (2010), transactional leadership is the most effective leadership style for a stable, orderly, and predictable school environment that is most conducive to student learning. Transformational leadership, which, along with instructional leadership, has emerged as the dominant paradigm in education, serves as a driver of change and promotes staff commitment and satisfaction. In reality, no single leadership style or model predicts school success (Day et al., 2010; Leithwood et al., 2008). Successful school leadership involves tackling mundane managerial issues as well as larger problems that demand novel solutions, and effective school principals adeptly combine management and leadership skills (Day & Sammons, 2013). As new assistant principals gain

more confidence, they develop their own leadership style (Workman, 2013). The critical issue in their satisfaction is that they have opportunities to exercise leadership (Muijs & Harris, 2003).

A subtext of the management versus leadership question is the issue of delegating versus distributing (Muijs & Harris, 2003). Delegation is the strategy by which managers have traditionally allocated less important (or desirable) tasks to subordinates. In the case of educational leadership, this denotes the administrative, supervisory, and support tasks that have been part of the vice principalship since the mid-20th century.

In contrast, distributing implies that there is shared responsibility for school leadership (Day & Sammons, 2013; Day et al., 2010; Leithwood et al., 2008; Leithwood & Mascal, 2008; Louis et al., 2010; Muijs & Harris, 2003). According to Muijs and Harris (2003), the elements of a distributed leadership paradigm for shaping the assistant principal's role include: (a) curriculum development and innovation; (b) advancing the school goals; (c) developing and communicating a vision and promoting shared understanding among staff members, including capitalizing on the assistant principal's visible presence between the staff and the principal; (d) acting as a change agent; (e) coaching and evaluating teaching staff; (f) acting as a community relations agent and liaison; and (g) continuing the traditional role in student discipline.

The model of the assistant principalship outlined by Muijs and Harris (2003) essentially represents a transition from management to leadership. This model has been associated with higher job satisfaction among assistant principals. Although in less detail, Pounder and Crow (2005) expressed a similar vision for redesigning the assistant principal's role to be more rewarding. Implicit in this model are features of transformational, transactional, and instructional leadership (Pepper, 2010).

Co-leadership. In view of the escalating complexity of the principal's role there is increasing support for co-leadership (Eckman, 2007). A search of the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) database and other online sources in 2006 revealed 170 individuals serving as co-principals in public and private elementary, middle, and high schools in the United States (Eckman, 2007). Further researching the model, Eckman discovered an article on co-principalship dating back to 1978. The author was Edwin West who was superintendent of the High Point Public Schools in North Carolina (currently part of Guilford County Schools). West reasoned that redesigning the principal's job would produce a more manageable workload and allow for more concentration on instructional leadership.

The original co-principalship consisted of two administrators of equal stature who divided their responsibilities so that one served as "principal of instruction" and the other as "principal of administration" (Eckman, 2007, p. 48). In surveying individuals drawn from the database searches, Eckman found that the current generation of coprincipals did not adhere to those arbitrary distinctions. Rather, they divided their activities based on their personal competencies and experience. Underscoring the meaning that school leaders give to instructional leadership, all the coprincipals "insisted on serving as instructional leaders" (Eckman, 2007, p. 48).

Under the direction of a principal who shapes their professional role, assistant principals do not have the opportunity to "insist" that they act as instructional leaders (Chan et al., 2003; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Muijs & Harris, 2003). However, that role is often the greatest source of their satisfaction (Pounder & Crow, 2005; "Role of the Assistant Principal," 2008). Indeed, Eckman (2007) noted that the coprincipal's emphasis on being "teachers of teachers" is illustrative of the value they ascribe to the instructional leadership function.

According to Eckman (2007), there are numerous reasons why schools adopt a co-principalship. In the case of a huge comprehensive high school, the traditional model of a principal and an assistant was ineffective for satisfying all the adults who wanted to “hear from the principal” (p. 48). An elementary school co-principalship arose from a merger of several schools that created a student body exceeding 1,200 students. In a particularly relevant case, one co-principalship emerged in response to a vacancy left by a popular principal. Two assistant principals applied for the position “as a team” to provide a sense of stability and ease parents’ concerns (p. 48). Quite a few co-principalships emerged in response to rapid turnover, ineffective leadership, or the need for a principal on short notice, in most cases opening up opportunities for assistant principals or teachers to move into principal leadership roles. In addition to making a case for establishing a co-principalship, these situations also make a compelling argument for more careful attention to leadership succession planning (Pounder & Crow, 2005; Rhodes & Bundrett, 2005, 2012; Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011; Thompson, 2010).

A successful co-principalship demands certain qualities such as shared vision and values, ongoing communication, good conflict resolution skills, close personal and professional relationships, clear boundaries, complementary strengths, and acceptance and accommodation of individual differences (Eckman, 2007). More generally, these are characteristics that define a successful school leader (Day & Sammons, 2013; Day et al., 2010; Leithwood et al., 2008). As to complementary strengths, distributing leadership implies the allocation of tasks to maximize school capacity. Clearer boundaries would work to reduce the role conflict and role ambiguity that are endemic to the assistant principalship (Celik, 2013; Marshall & Hooley, 2006). The

most effective school leaders actively strive to develop the self as well as others around them (Day & Sammons, 2013).

Socialization Into School Leadership

Aspiring school leaders. Brody et al. (2010) drew on Van Maanan and Schein's (1979) classic theory of socialization as a framework for their exploration of how an educational leadership program utilized focused observation to promote the role conceptualization and identity development of school leadership candidates. Role identity development was also the focus of Grodzki's (2011) study of the organizational socialization of new principals and vice principals.

Van Maanan and Schein (1979) outlined four types of socialization: *anticipatory*, *professional*, *organizational*, and *personal*. These four types roughly correspond to stages of identity development. Anticipatory socialization involves projecting oneself into a future role. Aspiring school leaders typically begin their educational preparation with a vision of what a good school leader should or should not be (Brody et al., 2010). This is especially true given that teachers form a substantial proportion of students in educational leadership programs. Teachers who have participated in internships report exposure to negative role models as well as those who are role models for excellent leadership (Earley & Glenn, 2009).

Professional socialization denotes the process by which individuals develop a role-based identity that includes values, norms, knowledge, skills, competencies, and attitudes that are essential for fulfilling a particular occupational role (Brody et al., 2010). These attributes are applicable across different organizations where the profession is practiced. In organizational socialization, the person is introduced to and immersed in the organizational culture (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Workman (2013) used Van Maanen and Schein's (1979) model of

organizational socialization, along with Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory to describe the experiences of new assistant principals as they make the transition from teaching. Brody et al. (2010) focused on professional socialization.

The participants in the qualitative study were current and former students of the ELPAP at the University of Pennsylvania, along with school and district personnel (Brody et al., 2010). The program is based on the theory that school leaders who promote school improvement purposefully demonstrate four leadership behaviors derived from best practices of effective school leaders. The effective school leader is expected to be an instructional leader with high expectations for student performance that are manifest in daily practice; an organizational leader, who practices collaborative leadership while building relationships and structures that a learning community dedicated to transformation and reform via problem solving; a public leader who forges partnerships with other schools, families, and the community; and an evidence-based leader who engages in ongoing inquiry into the performance of the organization through a data-driven approach.

Notice that there is no mention of terms such as *transformational*, *transactional*, or *democratic* in the description of the four leadership behaviors. A consistent finding in leadership research is that there is no single superior leadership style; rather, the most successful school leaders display a similar repertoire of behaviors, with eight key dimensions that center on student learning, well-being, and achievement (Day et al., 2010). These eight dimensions are implicit on the four leadership behaviors outlined by Brody et al. (2010). Successful school leaders define their vision and values to boost expectations, set direction, and build trust; reshape the conditions for teaching and learning; restructure aspects of the organization and redesign leadership roles and responsibilities; enhance teacher quality; improve the quality of teaching and learning; foster

internal collaboration; and build strong relationships outside the school community (Day et al., 2010). The way these dimensions are carried out and combined varies in accordance with the characteristics of the school and community.

To enhance the leadership capabilities of the aspiring principals, the ELPAP program is also designed to develop five interrelated competencies: intrapersonal and interpersonal growth, habits of mind, reflective practice, communication skills, and professionalism (Brody et al., 2010). Focus observations, on which the study is based, provides leadership candidates with direct exposure to the practice of instructional leadership in the school setting. The leadership students spend a day at the school, preceded by an in-class presentation by the school principal and leadership team members who share information, including the school's mission, the reform practices that were adopted, and demographic and student achievement data. Various types of additional information may be included, and the students are encouraged to seek out any additional information on their own.

The leadership candidates' qualitative responses revealed that by exploring the school culture first hand, they envisioned themselves as partners in learning with the school (Brody et al., 2010). The learning opportunity enabled them to apply the theories they learned in their coursework to real-world school problems. According to Brody et al. (2007), one of the predominant themes was the extent that the students began to clarify role conceptions and develop and embody identities aligned with those conceptions. In short, participation in focused observations facilitated professional socialization.

Brody et al. (2010) discerned four aspects of role-making conceptions that the prospective leaders crystallized through focused observations. The first is engaging the self and others in implementing a vision that guides instruction. Second is shaping effective

communication that promotes individual and collective growth. Third, the students came to embody a disposition to critical inquiry. Fourth and finally, the students came to understand the complexity of organizational change. Aspiring leaders who internalize these elements of professional socialization would likely become school principals who cultivate leadership talent in others. New program graduates may be more likely to be offered assistant principalships. As Marshall and Hooley (2006) observed, this experience might not prepare candidates for the messy realities of a traditional assistant principalship. However, the principles of the leadership preparation program, and the nature of the focused observation experience, are consistent with Marshall and Hooley's vision of the assistant principal of the future.

New principals and assistant principals. Grodzki (2011) presented the case study of a Canadian school district with the aim of discerning and describing the interaction, connection, or misalignment between the organizational socialization of new principals and vice principals, how they make sense of their work, their self-efficacy perceptions, and their eventual role identity development. The study was designed with the goal of improving the quality of professional development and leadership preparation and succession planning programs. The midsized district encompasses 42 schools, drawing students primarily from urban and semirural areas.

The findings presented by Grodzki et al. (2011) came primarily from 18 in-depth interviews, although the case study included document analysis and observations. The problems experienced by the district in filling vacancies exemplified the observation by Eadens et al. (2011) that it can be difficult to find candidates who are both willing and qualified. Leadership succession had been largely ad hoc, as it is in many school districts (Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011; Turnbull, Riley, Arcaira, et al., 2013). Grodzki (2011) noted that participants at all levels found it difficult to clearly define the school administrator's role, which he proposed might be

due to the complexity of the role. District administration gave precedence to instructional leadership, which is welcomed by most administrators but for which they were not fully prepared. As a group, the administrators felt overwhelmed by competing demands and unrealistic expectations, which undermine their sense of self-efficacy. Several administrators felt their work was undervalued and underappreciated, which is a common occurrence among vice principals (Marshall & Hooley, 2006).

Several participants admitted struggling with the transition from teacher to administrator (Grodzki, 2011), which Workman (2013) also observed in new vice principals, as well as experiencing it personally. Beyond the loss of collegiality from no longer being one of the teachers, the new administrators found it difficult to relinquish the confidence they felt in the classroom and accept that they were now performing significantly different roles that demanded new knowledge and skills (Grodzki, 2011).

Moreover, the lack of a clear definition of their new professional roles led to feelings of ambiguity for several new administrators (Grodzki, 2011). In particular, elementary school vice principals found that the principal expected them to give priority to teaching over administrative tasks. Vice principals in this dual role are best described as *boundary spanners* (Beltramo, 2014). Navigating the two roles can be a challenging endeavor. The new administrators had sources of formal and informal support, but expressed a need for more formal supports such as mentoring (Grodzki, 2011). Although mentoring is widely desired and recommended, the creation of a successful mentoring program that maximizing the potential benefits of mentoring for educational leaders requires substantial investment (Gray et al., 2007).

All the new administrators reported feelings of frustration as well as excitement over their new appointments (Grodzki, 2011). They strongly desired to make a difference and do

good things for students, but at the same time they often felt overwhelmed and lacking the knowledge, skills, and supports need to realize their goals. Analogous to Armstrong's observations of novice assistant principals (as cited in Houchens, 2012), the new administrators had to revise their expectations, often to a surprising degree (Grodzki, 2011). However, rather than becoming cynical, Grodzki (2011) noted that most participants remained optimistic, and to varying degrees, managed to keep their enthusiasm for the job.

According to Grodzki (2011), the district employed a variety of socialization tactics to facilitate the transition of the former teachers into their new professional roles. Their socialization experiences, and more importantly, how they perceived them and made sense of them, provided the foundation on which the new administrators constructed their professional identity. Based on the relevant literature and the findings and conclusions of the case study, Grodzki developed a framework for succession planning and socialization of new school administrators. The conceptual framework initially proposed for the study presumed interactions between organizational socialization, sensemaking and developing a sense of self-efficacy, and the development and enactment of new role identities. Grodzki discovered that missing from the framework was a description and analysis of the conditions affecting this interaction. Thus, a number of relevant variables were added to the conceptual model. According to Hallinger (2011), the critical factor in successful school leadership is the context. The same may be said of programs designed to promote the development of successful school leaders.

Role Perceptions and Role Demands

Novice versus experienced assistant principals. Barnett et al. (2012) explored how novice and experienced assistant principals perceived the realities of their professional roles and responsibilities. The researchers framed the qualitative study within the context of changes in

public policy that place school administrators under heightened scrutiny with increasing demands for accountability. The purposive sample included 37 novice assistant principals (three years or less experience) and 66 more experienced assistant principals (greater than three years experience). All were drawn from elementary, middle, and high schools in South Texas.

The first research question centered on the challenges faced by assistant principals. In descending order, the main challenges cited by both novice and more experienced vice principals were workload and task management, student issues, parent issues, teacher and staff issues, curriculum and instruction issues, personal expectations, and external expectations. For the most part, the two groups reported similar challenges. However, two distinctions emerged. The experienced assistant principals reported more challenges related to instructional leadership, presumably because they had more responsibility for performing that role and were under more pressure to improve student learning. A second distinction was that the experienced group reported more psychological and emotional strain, as well as a greater sense of personal responsibility. The two are not unrelated. Burnout is a common phenomenon, exacerbated by the role stress of the assistant principalship (Celik, 2013; Marshall & Hooley, 2006).

Strong relationship-building skills are essential for successful school leadership (Leithwood & Azah, 2014). The most effective school leaders create a culture of trust (Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011). Given this importance, it is significant that novice as well as experienced assistant principals tended to feel they had good “people skills” and felt comfortable working with others and building relationships (Barnett et al., 2012). Supervising, critiquing, and evaluating teachers can be especially daunting for assistant principals who were or are still teachers (Beltramo, 2014; Workman, 2013). However, with learning and work experiences that prepared them for working with other adults, many respondents felt no problem with activities

such as conducting classroom observations, completing teacher evaluations, and delivering staff development (Barnett et al., 2012). Hutton (2012) argued that assistant principals should be well versed in the principles and practices of adult learning. Previous experience played a critical role in the assistant principals' interactions with both adults and students (Barnett et al., 2012).

The participants' comfort with working with people did not extend to dealing with conflict, which many felt inadequately prepared to do (Barnett et al., 2012). Many participants, including experienced vice principals, felt they lacked understanding of certain job expectations, particularly related to curriculum and instruction, and also felt they lacked organizational and managerial skills. These responses are consistent with the assertion that leadership preparation programs do not address the daily realities of assistant principals (Marshall & Hooley, 2006).

In fact, based on their findings, Barnett et al. (2012) recommended that leadership preparation programs should invest in helping prospective school leaders improve their organizational skills, notably time management and prioritizing, and place more emphasis on conflict resolution and instructional leadership. Several of their recommendations are integral to the ELPAP (Brody et al., 2010).

Additionally, as part of a continuum of professional growth and development, Barnett et al. (2012) recommended mentoring and job-embedded professional development. These strategies are endorsed repeatedly for developing high-quality school leaders, including assistant principals who are well prepared for upward promotion (Gray et al., 2007; Hall, 2008; Hutton, 2012; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Mendels & Mitgang, 2013; Oleszewski et al., 2012; Robinson, Horan, & Nanavati, 2009; Searby, 2008; Turnbull, Riley, Arcaira, et al., 2013; Turnbull, Riley, & MacFarlane, 2013; Turnbull et al., 2015). Hutton (2012) views job-embedded professional development as essential to preparing assistant principals for the principalship. Several school

leaders, education faculty members, and talent developers cite the Principal Pipeline Initiative as a model program for states and districts (Mitchell, 2015). They argued that in view of the current demands on school leaders, districts need to “build a bench” that ensures that schools have a pool of effective leaders ready to fill any vacancies that occur (p. S8).

Role strain and burnout. Role ambiguity, role conflict, and role overload are perennial hazards for assistant principals (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). While there is a large body of organizational research examining the effects of role conflict and role ambiguity on work performance and burnout, Celik (2013) observed that despite the myriad tasks performed by assistant principals, they are rarely the focus of this channel of research. Conducted with head vice principals and vice principals of elementary and secondary schools in the Turkish cities of Denizli and Manisa, Celik explored the effects of role ambiguity and role conflict, and burnout, as well as direct and indirect effects on job performance.

The participants, 200 vice principals, completed the Maslach Burnout Inventory, the most popular instrument for assessing burnout, the Role Conflict and Role Ambiguity questionnaire developed by Rizzo and colleagues, and the Job Performance Scale (as cited in Celik, 2013). Role ambiguity is usually more detrimental than role conflict. The findings confirmed that role ambiguity both directly and indirectly adversely affected job performance. With burnout included in the analysis, emotional exhaustion fully mediated the association between role ambiguity and performance, while personal accomplishment proved partially mediating.

For role conflict, the direct and indirect effects were contradictory (Celik, 2013). In terms of direct effects, role conflict increased job performance, which may not be unusual as it signifies carrying out multiple roles. Indirectly, however, role conflict undermined job performance via the negative effects of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization. Assistant

principals who are former teachers, or who teach simultaneously, at their current school are especially vulnerable to role conflict (Beltramo, 2014; Workman, 2013). In view of the findings, Celik (2013) called for more precise delineation of “the roles, mission, authority, and responsibilities of vice principals” (p. 208).

Managing workload. Leithwood and Azah (2014) engaged in exploration of the sources of workload for elementary and secondary school principals and vice principals, along with how they make sense of that workload. Two mixed methods studies were undertaken sequentially; first with elementary school administrators, followed by the secondary school study. In-depth interviews were conducted with 102 elementary school administrators and 61 secondary school administrators drawn from Toronto’s three principals’ associations. The qualitative component also included focus group interviews with a select sample of 10 trustees nominated by the Ontario School Boards Association and with 65 directors of education. All members of the principals’ associations were invited to participate in an online survey, which drew 2,600 principals and vice principals from elementary schools and 970 from secondary schools.

The survey results produced 18 workload sources, half cited by both elementary and secondary school administrators (Leithwood & Azah, 2014). The interviews also elicited 18 workload sources, with five common to both school levels, 10 unique to elementary school administrators, and three unique to the secondary school level. Although some issues were specific to the Ontario or Canadian school contexts, the two dominant workload sources are equally applicable to school administrators in the United States: allocating the time needed for school improvement efforts and developing the staff capacities for achieving school improvement goals.

For principals and vice principals at both school levels, the key contributors to managing workload were motivated and high performing teachers, leadership team members, and office personnel who were willing to extend themselves, support each other, embrace continuous learning, and work collaboratively toward school improvement (Leithwood & Azah, 2014). For secondary school administrators, strong leadership on the part of department heads and faculty who displayed genuine interest and commitment to continuously professional learning (presumably in their respective disciplines) were also cited as important support sources.

Although for the most part, the study did not distinguish between principals and vice principals, gaining experience in one's respective role as a principal or vice principal was an important factor in coping with job demands (Leithwood & Azah, 2014). Consistent with the tenets of self-efficacy, experience builds confidence in performing a particular role (Bandura, 1997). According to Leithwood and Azah (2014), the expertise gained from professional practice allows school administrators to respond more efficiently to various situations and also leads to more confidence in decision making. Some administrators also reported that experience helped them balance work and family more successfully because they viewed their work from a broader perspective. Although the study did not explore this last issue more deeply, it is possible that more experienced principals and vice principals view their job from a different perspective because they feel more secure and freer of scrutiny than novice administrators.

On issues related to leadership, all groups of respondents, principals, vice principals, trustees, and directors, cited the crucial importance of interpersonal skills due to the "people-intensive" nature of school administration (Leithwood & Azah, 2014, p. 9). High expectations for students' performance and willingness to delegate or share leadership also emerged as important factors for managing leadership roles. These responses are consistent with the features

of successful school leadership (Day & Sammons, 2013; Day et al., 2010; Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Louis et al., 2010; Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011).

Leithwood and Azah (2014) noted that while their research did not directly query the respondents on what types of training would be more beneficial, the findings carry at least four implications for the professional training and development of principals and vice principals. The main implication, according to Leithwood and Azah, is that leadership training should be tailored to fit the specific characteristics of each school and community as well as the unique learning needs of the individual school leader. This type of customization is evident in the exemplary school leadership preparations cited by Darling-Hammond et al. (2007), and in the Principal Pipeline Initiative, which built on their research (Turnbull, Riley, Arcaira, et al., 2013; Turnbull, Riley, & MacFarlane, 2013; Turnbull et al., 2015). The emphasis on differentiated learning experiences should implicitly mean that assistant principals have learning experiences that help them to optimize their professional roles as well as prepare those who desire future principal leadership.

A second recommendation by Leithwood and Azah (2014) is providing school administrators with systematic training on how to deal with multiple initiatives in response to external demands. Developing capabilities in collaborative problem solving and decision making would be a potential strategy. Ideally, the principals and vice principals desired to see a reduction in the number of new initiatives in their districts. Moreover, they wanted greater autonomy at the school level so they could set their own priorities for school improvement.

Leithwood and Azah (2014) proposed that district officials use principal and vice principal satisfaction as an important measure for making decisions that affect schools. When

the sources of workload diminished job satisfaction, the workload was viewed as less manageable and the administrators expressed less positive attitudes toward their work. This pattern was reversed when the sources of workload increased job satisfaction; the workload was seen as more manageable and attitudes were more favorable.

Leithwood and Azah (2014) concluded that job satisfaction is critical to how principals and vice principals perceive the nature and extent of their workload. For vice principals, in particular, it is important to keep in mind that role ambiguity and role conflict are consistently found to undermine job satisfaction (Celik, 2013). Being relegated to tasks such as discipline and denied opportunities for instructional leadership and professional growth are major sources of dissatisfaction for vice principals (Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Workman, 2013).

Career Aspirations of Assistant Principals

Recommendations for creating a pipeline to the principalship include redesigning the roles of principals and assistant principals to make school administration more attractive to potential candidates. Pressures imposed by accountability measures and school reform agendas play a powerful role in the decisions of some qualified candidates not to pursue an administrative position (Brotschul, 2104; Coggshall et al., 2008; Eadens et al., 2011). Most studies find that the majority of assistant principals aspire to the principalship. However, this goal is not universal. Moreover, the aspirations of those who desired upward promotion are not always fulfilled, even for individuals who competently performed their roles as assistant principals (Retelle, 2010).

Career trajectories. Based on detailed case studies, Marshall and Hooley (2006) delineated several potential career trajectories for assistant principals that can be divided into three groups: *upwardly mobile*, *career*, and *plateaued*. With ambitions for career advancement, upwardly mobile assistant principals develop active and powerful networks via professional

organizations. An important feature of this network is an influential sponsor to help advance career goals. The career assistant principal has no interest in becoming a principal. Rather, he or she has created a fulfilling work life with rewarding assignments, a good working relationship with the principal, and enough authority to enjoy high professional status. Mike Weiss, the NASSP Assistant Principal of the Year award winner, exemplifies this type of assistant principal (“Role of the Assistant Principal,” 2008).

In contrast to the career assistant principal, the plateaued assistant principal desires a promotion to the principalship and has even applied for several positions but unsuccessfully (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). The plateaued vice principal usually lacks the support of a mentor may not be equipped for the principal’s role. A variation of the plateaued assistant principal is the “shafted” assistant principal who is qualified for the principalship but who has lost out on opportunities for promotion due to factors such as the loss of a sponsor, unfortunate placement, or district changes. One assistant principal in Retelle’s (2010) study fit this description. Despite his proficiency as an educational leader, he appeared to lack networking skills and was unable or unwilling to navigate the intricacies of district politics.

In addition to those three groups is the *downwardly mobile* administrator who goes from principal to assistant principal or from administration to teaching (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Going from teacher to teacher leader to assistant principal is not always a smooth transition (Beltramo, 2014; Grodzki, 2011; Workman, 2013). The loss of collegial support, combined with the poorly defined parameters of the assistant principal’s role, may cause some new assistant principals to question whether they made the right career decision. Others may find the assistant principalship unduly stressful or decide that they prefer classroom teaching to administrative tasks (Marshall & Hooley, 2006).

On the other hand, downward mobility can be involuntary resulting from budget cuts that reduce administrative staff or demotion due to political or performance issues (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Oleszewski et al. (2012) deem it important to distinguish between voluntary and involuntary downward mobility. They point out that “there is a difference in attitude and work ethic between an administrator who chooses to return to the classroom and one who is demoted due to performance issues” (p. 281). Without questioning that distinction, it excludes voluntary and involuntary downward mobility for other reasons. Newly hired administrators are likely to be the first casualties of budget cuts and their downward mobility may be transient before they obtain another position, perhaps in another school or district.

Moreover, given the expansion of opportunities for teacher leadership, rather than return to the classroom, a dissatisfied assistant principal might choose a position such as a literacy coordinator, technology coordinator, or program developer. Moving from the assistant principalship to a teacher leader position would be more of a lateral than a downward move. Additionally, Mike Weiss pointed out that an assistant principal might choose to pursue a leadership role outside the school but within the district, thus representing a lateral move and alternative path for the career assistant principal (“Role of the Assistant Principal,” 2008).

Marshall and Hooley (2006) also observed an additional type, the assistant principal who considers leaving the educational field for another career. Individuals in this group have often had prior managerial experience and have skills and competencies they can transfer to the private sector. High stakes testing and escalating demands for accountability have made the assistant principalship less attractive (Brotschul, 2014; Oleszewski et al., 2012). This may be especially so for those who consider themselves overqualified for the assistant principalship and poorly

rewarded for their effort, common characteristics of assistant principals who contemplate leaving the field (Oleszewski et al., 2012).

Career aspirations. Edwards (2010) investigated the career aspirations of 177 assistant principals practicing in elementary, middle, and high schools in a large urban North Carolina school district. Using a modified version of the Assistant Principal Career Stability Survey, the study concentrated on their plans for the next 5 or 10 years. Intended career paths included: becoming a principal, assuming another administrative position, returning to classroom teaching, leaving the field of education entirely, or other (self-reported) career alternatives.

The vast majority (84.57%) of respondents desired upward advancement, with more than three quarters (77.4%) of the assistant principals interested in becoming full principals (Edwards, 2010). This mirrors the pattern found in the earlier study of Chan et al. (2003). A small proportion of the respondents were interested in another administrative post (6.5%) but only a scant 2.4% preferred to remain assistant principals (Edwards, 2010). None of the respondents desired to return to classroom teaching. Most respondents thinking of leaving education (13.7%), were contemplating retirement. In fact, the assistant principals with the shortest tenure in their district were the most eager to be promoted.

Apart from age or experience, certain factors related to work conditions and role conflict affected the assistant principals' proposed career aspirations (Edwards, 2010). Role conflict and role overload are common problems, leading to anger, frustration, burnout, and even depression (Celik, 2013; Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Being given assignments but without sufficient human resources to fulfill them triggered interest in upward promotion (Edwards, 2010). Interestingly, greater disagreement with the statement that carrying out an assignment meant having to defy a rule or policy was also related to aspirations for upward promotion. One might think that having

to defy existing rules to perform tasks might be motivation to move up to a leadership role with more of a voice in creating rules or policy. Alternatively, assistant principals who do not see rules or policies as obstacles to performing their jobs might be more comfortable with the educational system while those feel they need to go against the existing rules might be more inclined to leave the educational field.

As previously stated, historically, conformity was rewarded (Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Mertz, 2000). Reductions in assistant principal positions during the 1980s disproportionately affected women and minorities who were the newcomers to the job and were “different” than the traditional incumbents. The assistant principalship is often described as a profession that discourages risk taking and innovation. Enforcing social and organizational norms has been a defining feature of the assistant principal’s role since its inception (Glanz, 1994). Educators today receive mixed messages. They are told to be innovators and change leaders while at the same time they are subjected to external accountability mandates that impinge on the professional autonomy of teachers and school leaders alike. This often leads to frustration, dissatisfaction, and cynicism (Houchens, 2012).

Dunleavy (2011) examined the career aspirations of assistant principals in New York City, focusing on whether they desired to become principals. Certain demographic features defined the aspiring principals. The prospective school leaders were most likely to be female assistant principals in elementary schools, and under age 50, while those who expressed intentions to remain in the assistant principalship had the opposite profile: male, secondary school assistant principals, and over age 50. The interaction of age and gender may be a reflection of the fairly recent influx of women to the assistant principalship (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Interestingly, Chan et al. (2003) found that male assistant principals were more likely to

desire upward promotion. Changing gender roles may be a factor in the patterns emerging roughly a decade apart.

At the same time, McGee (2012) found that female administrators are often inhibited from seeking higher positions by self-imposed barriers. Family responsibilities often keep women from pursuing leadership positions that involve longer hours and responsibilities and, especially, relocation. However, this attitude is no longer limited to women. Many young adults of both genders insist on a favorable work-life balance and may think of spouses and family first before pursuing a principalship (Brotschul, 2014).

Several participants in McGee's (2012) study implicated lack of mentorship and encouragement from others as barriers to women's upward advancement in educational leadership. More than mentorship per se, sponsorship may be a decisive factor in promotion to principal (Retelle, 2010). Strategies that promote self-awareness and self-reflection are often advocated as essential components of effective leadership preparation (Barnett et al., 2012; Brody et al., 2010; Hutton, 2012). According to McGee, once the women recognized that the barriers keeping them from upward advancement could be self-imposed, they quickly abandoned them and applied for vacant positions. Rather than allowing family responsibilities to impede their career path, they devised strategies for balancing work and family. The decisive factor was that the women became aware of the fact that they had a choice in determining the course of their career trajectories. Notably, Marshall and Hooley (2006) advocate integrating feminist perspectives as well as social justice perspectives into educational leadership training. The concept of *equity* in education extends to ensuring the pipeline to the principalship and superintendency provides equitable opportunities for upward advancement as well as closing academic achievement gaps.

An additional factor in the drive to become a principal, observed by Dunleavy (2011), was the extent the assistant principals felt their work was respected and valued, which served as a strong motivational force for seeking upward promotion. The principal may play a pivotal role. All the assistant principals in Retelle's (2010) qualitative study reported that the principal was expected to train and mentor assistant principals. However, the principals varied substantially in the extent that they carried out this developmental role. Some actively dissuaded assistant principals from taking part in professional development activities. This would seem to imply that they viewed their assistant principals as subordinates and that they lacked respect for their personal and professional growth and potential.

A second group of principals supported the assistant principals' career aspirations by entrusting them with various leadership responsibilities and involving them in activities and events that helped them build leadership knowledge, skills, and expertise (Retelle, 2010). The third group, the principal-makers, went out of their way to provide mentoring, training, guidance, and sponsorship. Not surprisingly, assistant principals who worked with principal-makers were most likely to be promoted. However, according to Retelle (2010), this relationship was complex. The principal-makers' influence with district leadership seemed to be an important factor. Retelle also raised the possibility that assistant principals viewed as more talented leadership candidates might have been more likely to be assigned to a principal-maker. The most striking discovery in Retelle's study was the powerful role of district politics in the upward promotion of assistant principals. While the importance of developing interpersonal skills is routinely acknowledged, it is accurate to say that aspiring leaders need to develop networking skills along with the skills to deal with the political aspects of educational leadership.

Taking part in a formal leadership development that encourages self-reflection and self-efficacy may trigger the realization that an assistant principal is being stunted and poorly prepared for the principalship. Brown-Ferrigno (2007) explored the professional growth of participants in a partnership program between the University of Kentucky and the Pike County Public Schools. Cohort support is an important feature of the program, and several participants found that the trust they built and the knowledge and confidence they gained through the program enabled them to express feelings about their work. One novice assistant principal complained that his only responsibility was student discipline. After participating in the program he realized he was not gaining the type of experience requisite for becoming a principal.

Other members of the cohort suggested that he discuss his feelings and talk with the principal about taking on the responsibilities that would offer him opportunities for professional growth (Brown-Ferrigno, 2007). Most novice assistant principals seem to be inhibited from approaching the principal for this type of discussion (Houchens, 2012). There is no way of knowing whether or not the cohort's advice was taken. However, without support for taking the initiative in a frustrating situation it seems probable that many otherwise promising school leaders might end up as plateaued or shafted assistant principals.

Singletary-Dixon (2012) explored the career aspirations and attitudes to their work of New York City assistant principals, utilizing the Assistant Principal's Professional Leadership in Education survey designed for the study. Dunleavy (2011) also used an original survey, perhaps due to the scarcity of research focused specifically on assistant principals. A total of 246 assistant principals from schools located throughout the five boroughs responded to the survey (Singletary-Dixon, 2012). Most respondents were between the ages of 41 and 50 years old. Those with 1 to 10 years of experience in the assistant principalship expressed the strongest

interest in becoming principals, while the older respondents were satisfied with their current positions. On the whole, the assistant principals were highly satisfied and confident in their work. They described good relationships with their principals and school faculty and felt their work was appreciated and valued.

Singletary-Dixon (2012) recommends mentorships for assistant principals, in particular mentoring programs that are designed *by* assistant principals or in which they have input. There is virtually universal consensus on the benefits of mentorship, but with the caveat that the programs must be well designed (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Gray et al., 2007; Searby, 2008). Singletary-Dixon (2012) also called for closer alignment between university educational administration programs and local school districts, which would address the gaps between what administrators learn in their educational preparation programs and what is needed by districts, as well as concerns over the quality of principal preparation (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Turnbull, Riley, Arcaira, et al., 2013; Turnbull, Riley, & MacFarlane, 2013; Turnbull et al., 2015). University-district partnership would also facilitate better socialization of principals and assistant principals into their roles (Barnett et al., 2012; Grodzki, 2011).

Eadens et al. (2011) investigated the intentions of Florida graduate students in educational leadership to pursue an assistant principalship. The researchers noted that only slightly more than half of all graduates of educational administration programs actually go on to become school administrators. The result is a paradoxical situation in which enrollments in educational leadership programs are expanding, but there is still a shortage in many districts of willing and qualified candidates for available positions. Eadens et al. surveyed the 217 participants with the Leadership Practices Inventory (Kouzes & Posner, 2007) with the aim of

discerning a relationship between the participants' self-assessed leadership and career aspirations.

Three quarters of the participants were classroom teachers, with an additional 13% describing themselves as resource or lead teachers (Eadens et al., 2011). A higher proportion came from secondary schools than elementary schools (46.5% versus 38.2%). Roughly 84% intended to seek an administrative position upon earning their master's degree. Inspiring a Shared Vision and Challenging the Process were most strongly linked with intentions to pursue an assistant principalship, but there was no significant association. In fact, rather than intrinsic motivation for leadership, salary played more of a role in the decision to obtain a graduate degree and pursue an upward career path. Salary figured prominently in close to two thirds of the participants' future intentions.

Brotschul (2014) used self-determination theory as a framework for examining the factors that influence assistant principals to pursue a principal position. Self-determination theory covers three types of motivation: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation (Deci & Ryan, 2008). The assistant principals displayed intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy and were willing to deal with challenges (Brotschul, 2014). Although this pattern should predispose them toward upward advancement, the participants did not feel prepared to assume a principalship. Furthermore, most enjoyed their roles as assistant principals and in contrast to most studies, the majority of respondents did not desire to become principals. This seemed to be a reflection of the combination of satisfaction in one's present role and sense of being unprepared for the principalship. In addition, the assistant principals seemed to have negative conceptions of the principalship, which they viewed as enmeshed in politics and detached from interactions with students.

Brotschul (2014), who is himself a principal after having been an assistant principal, implicated the principals for the complacent attitudes he observed in the assistant principals. Similar to Marshall and Hooley (2006), and Hutton (2012), Brotschul (2014) envisioned a new conception of the assistant principal's role that reflects the knowledge, skills, competencies, and responsibilities expected of a school principal. This includes the provision of opportunities for professional learning and growth and for demonstrating competency in instructional leadership for the purpose of improving teaching and learning. All three authors viewed the assistant principalship as a starting point for cultivating talented school leaders.

Job Satisfaction

Yu-kwong and Walker (2010) and Kwan and Walker (2012) investigated job satisfaction among vice principals in Hong Kong. The first study, undertaken in response to the scarcity of research on assistant principals, included 331 secondary school principals (Yu-kwong & Walker, 2010). The study examined job satisfaction in terms of four interrelated facets: *professional commitment, sense of synchrony, sense of efficacy, and level of personal challenge*. One aim of the study was to discover whether this model could capture the vice principals' job satisfaction.

The findings confirmed that the four-factor model, encompassing intrinsic and extrinsic influences ("self" and "coworkers") could effectively predict job satisfaction (Yu-kwong & Walker, 2010). Professional commitment denotes the vice principals' enthusiasm for and perceived value of their profession. Consistent with Bandura's (1997) theory, sense of efficacy denotes confidence in one's ability to perform job responsibilities and improve schools (Yu-kwong & Walker, 2010). Sense of synchrony relates to the school environment and assesses the extent of congruence among colleagues in relation to the school's mission along with the degree of support vice principals receive from their colleagues. Level of challenge denotes the amount

of stress experienced by vice principals and their ability to balance their work and personal lives. Professional commitment, sense of synchrony, and self-efficacy enhanced job satisfaction while job stress detracted from it. This pattern of relationships of commitment, self-efficacy, and job stress to satisfaction are found in numerous studies. Commitment and level of challenge exerted the strongest effects on satisfaction.

Notably, differences emerged between vice principals who aspired to the principalship and career vice principals on all four aspects of job satisfaction (Yu-kwong & Walker, 2010). Specifically, the aspiring vice principals expressed greater commitment, higher sense of efficacy, and experienced less stress. The participants in this group felt they could make a difference and their commitment and confidence seemed to buffer against stress. An important finding was that the vice principals who were more committed and more confident performed a wider variety of job activities. Although Yu-kwong and Walker (2010) used the term *delegation* in their proposal for making the vice principalship more engaging and satisfying, their recommendations are more aligned with the more empowering model of *distribution* (Muijs & Harris, 2003).

In subsequent research, Kwan and Walker (2012) explored discrepancies between the ideal and actual job responsibilities of the Hong Kong secondary school vice principals in relation to job satisfaction. The framework was composed of seven responsibilities: external communication and connection; quality assurance and accountability; teaching, learning and curriculum; staff management; resource management; leader and teacher growth and development; and strategic direction and policy environment. According to Kwan and Walker (2012), the findings affirmed Glanz's (1994) claim that the responsibilities given assistant principals are misaligned with their preferences, resulting in frustration with not being able to fulfill their vision of the assistant principal's role.

In particular, the vice principals felt that staff management consumed an inordinate amount of their time (Kwan & Walker, 2012). On the other hand, they desired to be more involved in school resource and financial management. Kwan and Walker (2012) proposed that the vice principals may be aware that assuming a principalship would require competence in this area. Not surprisingly, the vice principals wanted to devote more time to leader and teacher growth and development and to teaching, learning, and curriculum. In other words, the vice principals desired more responsibilities as instructional leader, typically the most desirable leadership role (Eckman, 2007).

The only significant difference between aspiring and career vice principals on the seven measures was that the vice principals who felt most prepared for the principalship had more experience with resource management (Kwan & Walker, 2012). Overall, the vice principals characterized as “strong and prepared” were more satisfied than career vice principals (p. 15). However, this was not true of older “strong and prepared” vice principals who were probably disillusioned by shrinking career opportunities and would likely fall into the categories of plateaued or shafted vice principals (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Although some of the findings may be less relevant to assistant principals in the United States, the overall picture is similar to that painted by Marshall and Hooley (2006).

Preparation for Leadership

According to the Stanford researchers, exemplary programs for practicing principals feature continuous learning, including induction, mentoring, and opportunities for networking, while programs for future principals feature a strategically designed, supervised administrative internship that provides the participants with ample opportunities to practice leadership under expert guidance (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). These strategies were integrated into the

Principal Pipeline Initiative (Turnbull, Riley, Arcaira, et al., 2013; Turnbull, Riley, & MacFarlane, 2013; Turnbull et al., 2015).

An alternative term for internship is *apprenticeship*, evoking the historical relationship between a student and a master craftsman. The term *leadership apprenticeship*, used in England, is synonymous with *administrative internship*, the preferred term in the United States (Earley & Glenn, 2009). Early and Glenn (2009) are staunch advocates of this strategy for developing school leaders. In their experience, principals often cite working alongside veteran school leaders as the single most influential learning experience over the course of their development.

Hall (2008) directly invoked the historical roots of apprenticeship, proclaiming that amidst escalating pressure for accountability there is an urgent need “to develop *principals as master artisans* [original emphasis]” (p. 449). According to Hall, this venture involves providing principal candidates with internships that offer extensive opportunities for experiential learning and providing new principals with opportunities for formal mentoring as part of a well-crafted structured program that matches protégés with experienced principals who are both master artisans and master mentors.

Even principals who are excellent leaders do not necessarily make good mentors. Features of an effective mentoring program include a formal structure, mutually defined roles and responsibilities, careful attention to the selection and training of mentors, and a good match between the mentor and protégé (Gray et al., 2007; Hall, 2008). While the literature reveals case studies of outstanding mentoring programs, there has been no systematic endeavor to describe and evaluate principal mentoring programs and almost no attention to mentoring assistant principals apart from studies including lead principals and assistant principals. Oliver (2005)

found that an overwhelming majority of assistant principals desired to participate in mentoring. Over a decade later, the topic still receives scant attention.

Mentoring

A successful mentoring program carries benefits for the protégé, the mentor, and the organization (Yirci & Kocabas, 2010). Benefits for protégés include professional competence, goal setting, self-confidence, motivation and satisfaction, psychological support, communication skills, personal growth, creativity, time-management skills, and employability. Benefits for mentors include respect and satisfaction, learning experience, status, and self-reflection. The organization, in turn, gains benefits in numerous areas. These include: organizational effectiveness, motivation, satisfaction, productivity, organizational change, recruitment and retention, high performing employees, organizational learning and culture, cost efficiency, time efficiency, organizational development, and strategic planning.

Alsbury and Hackmann (2006) explored the perspectives of mentors and protégés involved in the Iowa Administrator Mentoring and Induction program, a 2-year pilot program for developing principals and superintendents. The participants included mentors and protégés from both groups. The finding confirmed that a key feature of a successful mentoring program is the development of a supportive relationship between the mentor and protégé that emphasizes “role socialization into the profession, reflective conversation, and role clarification” (p. 183). This should be especially valuable for assistant principals, whose roles are typically poorly defined (Barnett et al., 2012; Celik, 2013; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Oleszewski et al., 2012). To the protégés, the defining characteristic of an effective mentor was being a good listener (Alsbury & Hackmann, 2006). On the other hand, they gave low ratings to mentorships that narrowly

concentrated on skills development, which the protégés felt they could acquire from other sources.

Alsbury and Hackmann (2006) recommended preparation for both mentors and protégés, which is often lacking (Gray et al., 2007; Searby, 2008). They also advised that mentors and protégés should be carefully matched for a relationship that is mutually rewarding to both partners (Alsbury & Hackmann, 2006). For accomplishing this, Alsbury and Hackmann suggested surveying prospective mentors and protégés on what they desire in a mentoring relationship.

Mentorship is a feature of the Kansas Educational Leadership Institute (KELI), a collaborative partnership between the state department of education, state associations for school boards, school administrators, and superintendents, and a state university (Augustine-Shaw, 2015). KELI is dedicated to employing best practices for preparing principals with the overarching goal of building and strengthening 21st-century principal leadership in Kansas schools. A key component of the program is assisting principals in their first year.

A survey of stakeholders disclosed that slightly more than half (52%) of the principals had no mentoring experience and the same proportion of school districts did not provide mentors (Augustine-Shaw, 2015). This is one reason that experts in leadership development laud the Principal Pipeline Initiative (Mitchell, 2015). The survey was designed to provide feedback for improving the KELI program and disclosed that a number of essential leadership competencies were rated by principals and/or superintendents as the last to be included or least effective components of leadership development programs (Augustine-Shaw, 2015). “Community outreach” and “developing leadership capacity in others” were almost universally cited as being excluded or ineffective. However, it is disturbing to note that in addition to these components,

the principals cited “professional development rich in leadership opportunities” and “setting goals” as least effective in their current mentoring programs. Superintendents found “shaping a vision of academic success for all students” as least effective. All the dimensions of leadership on which the mentoring programs were weak are aspects of leadership practice by virtually all successful school leaders (Day et al., 2010).

The survey presented by Augustine-Shaw (2015) came from the work of the Kansas Building Leader Mentoring and Induction Task Force. The mentoring and induction program is a work in progress. Ongoing feedback, evaluation, and improvement are built into the program design. School district-university partnerships are strongly recommended for developing principals and assistant principals (Barnett et al., 2012; Grodzki, 2011; Singletary-Dixon, 2012).

Mentoring plus coaching. Mentoring plus intensive coaching is a feature of the Principal Pipeline Initiative (Turnbull, Riley, Arcaira, et al., 2013; Turnbull, Riley, & MacFarlane, 2013; Turnbull et al., 2015). Built on the principles and practices of adult learning, the MentoringCoaching program for the leadership development of public school principals and vice principal evolved from collaboration between the Canadian Ministry of Education, the Ontario Principal’s Council (OPC), and local school districts throughout the province (Robinson et al., 2009). Discussions between the OPC and the Ministry of Education revealed conditions that are virtually identical to those in the United States; specifically, a shortage of candidates both willing and qualified to assume an administrative position exacerbated by the looming retirements of veteran principals (Eadens et al., 2011).

Participants in the MentoringCoaching program are members of a collaborative community of practice (Robinson et al., 2009). The program is structured to build on learning gained from prior mentoring experiences as it works to advance the protégé’ knowledge and

skills. As the name implies, the program's defining feature is the synthesis of mentoring and coaching, which is central to design. The mentors and protégés (newly appointed principals and vice principals) agree to work together to achieve mutually decided goals in a series of regular meetings. Coaching serves as a mechanism for "building individual and team learning capacity," as well as fostering self-awareness and skills development (Robinson et al., 2009, p. 36). The program exemplifies job-embedded coaching (Hutton, 2012). According to Robinson et al. (2009), the combination of mentoring and coaching maximizes the best practices of both modes of career development by organizing them into a comprehensive professional leadership development program.

Pivotal to the program's success is the development of a mentoring and coaching culture, denoting an architecture that supports continuous learning and development at all levels (Robinson et al., 2009). This structure promotes the growth of the mentor and the protégé and "elevates mentoring practice" (Robinson et al., 2009, p. 36). The OPC trains veteran school principals to deliver the program in schools and districts throughout Ontario, with ongoing support for all participants. Workshops such as *Sustaining a MentoringCoaching Culture* (focused on the program's core elements of readiness, opportunity, and support) and *Establishing a Formal MentoringCoaching Program* (designed to align with a district's existing leadership development initiatives) are among an array of resources for participants, which also includes webcasts (featuring experts in consulting, training, mentoring, and coaching) and *The Supporting Effective School Leadership* handbook available on the OPC website.

Additional resources included *Mentoring Strategies for Success* for the MentorCoaches and *Mentees: Preparing to Make the Most of your Mentoring Relationship* (Robinson et al., 2009). The workshop for protégés is created especially for helping the new principals and vice

principals maximize developmental opportunities, an often neglected but valuable aspect of mentorship (Searby, 2008). MentorCoach Training for Educators offers three sessions focused on cultivating a coaching mindset for supporting school leaders' professional development (Robinson et al., 2009). A fourth session, scaffolding on the initial package and concentrated on expanding essential skills and practices and providing the new school leaders with additional practice, observation, and feedback, was added in response to requests by participants.

Exemplary mentoring programs enrich both mentor and protégé (Yirci & Kocabas, 2010). Feedback drawn from focus groups, interviews, and evaluation data from the first year pilot project confirmed that the MentoringCoaching program was equally valuable for both groups. Robinson et al. (2009) observed that mentoring principals close to the end of their careers were pleased by the value of their experience to others and enjoyed the opportunity to nurture new talent. This positive impact on veteran principals could be useful for encouraging retiring school leaders to continue as mentors as well as recruiting retired principals to become mentors. Retired principals serve as mentors and coaches in districts involved in the Principal Pipeline (Turnbull, Riley Arcaira, et al., 2013).

The positive impact of the MentoringCoaching program on the mentors and protégés resounded through all levels of the educational system. According to Robinson et al. (2009), from a systems perspective, a key advantage of the MentoringCoaching program is the powerful infrastructure created by the collaborative relationships between the OPC, school districts and boards, and the Ministry of Education. This structure ensures that the program is aligned with current educational priorities, practices, and goals. Ongoing improvement and expansion are integral to the design of the program. Preliminary results demonstrated superior performance by new school leaders as well as enhanced capacity building, support for school system priorities,

and access to outside experts. Robinson et al. predicted that as more aspiring school leaders participate in the MentoringCoaching program, the quality of instructional leadership will continue to improve. Exemplary educational leadership development programs typically involve networks of collaborative partners (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). The structure of the MentoringCoaching program should be conducive to adaptation as a state or regional program in the United States, providing the partners are willing to engage in the ongoing collaboration that is the hallmark of the Ontario program.

Leadership Succession Planning

The lack of attention to developing leadership capacity in others in the KELI program (Augustine-Shaw, 2015) contrasts sharply with the SREB recommendations for leadership succession management (Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011). The SREB report outlined a series of actions for principals. They call on principals to (a) take responsibility for developing at least one individual in the school who is ready to assume the principalship; (b) use annual performance reviews to identify teachers with leadership potential, encourage them to pursue a career as a principal, and create opportunities for them to exercise leadership; (c) identify natural leaders and provide them with growth opportunities; (d) insist that assistant principals engage in and master all facets of school leadership, with particular emphasis on curriculum and instruction; (e) work with classroom teachers who are in school leadership training programs so they can have release time to complete a variety of experiences via internships; and (f) after developing their own skills and competencies as principals, take on the role of formally mentoring novice and future school leaders.

The principal actions outlined by the SREB are meant to be integrated into a comprehensive leadership succession planning program (Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011). It is

notable that they “insist” (the word used in the original report) that principals develop leadership skill in their assistant principals, with special attention to curriculum and instruction. Hutton (2012) declared that “The principal who does not regard the assistant principal as a valuable partner in the leadership model is not working at full capacity and does not have a school of optimum productivity” (p. 51). As an advocate of shared and distributed leadership, Hutton asserted that “Lead principals must be willing to share leadership and job autonomy with their assistant principals,” noting that assistant principals are colleagues and credentialed leaders (p. 50). Hutton envisioned job-embedded professional development as the ideal professional development model for facilitating the leadership development of assistant principals.

It is disappointing to note that the assistant principals involved in the Principal Pipeline Initiative assessed the support they received less favorably than the novice principals (Turnbull, Riley, & MacFarlane, 2013). According to the district leaders, the most formidable challenge they faced was reframing the assistant principalship (Turnbull et al., 2015). In contrast to the traditional practice of allowing principals to shape the responsibilities of their assistant principals, the district leaders wanted to deploy assistant principals strategically, as “both apprenticeship and proving ground for future principals” (p. 15). Most assistant principals shared that perspective.

However, in all the districts, with the exception of Gwinnett County, the district leaders expressed concerns about assistant principals who had not demonstrated high potential to meet expectations for district principals (Turnbull et al., 2015). In response the district leaders proposed lateral moves, such as central office positions, for some assistant principals. At the same time, the districts varied substantially in their strategies for the leadership preparation of assistant principals. When these findings are combined with the assistant principals’ perceptions

of receiving less than ideal support, the question arises of whether many assistant principals really lacked leadership talent or whether the district programs were poorly designed for helping them reach their potential, even if they were ostensibly modeled after best practices. Like the KELI program (Augustine-Shaw, 2015), the Principal Pipeline Initiative is still a work in progress. The latest report released suggests that developing the leadership capabilities of assistant principals may be the weakest program component (Turnbull et al., 2015).

Conclusion

Amidst a voluminous body of educational leadership literature, the assistant principal is almost invisible. In many respects, the role has evolved from its roots in supervision, school discipline, and attendance. However, in one critically important respect it has not changed: in most schools the principal determines the assistant principal's role, which plays a decisive role in whether the assistant principal is prepared to assume the principalship (Beltramo, 2014; Brown-Ferrigno, 2007; Chan et al., 2003; Oleszewski et al., 2012; Retelle, 2010; Workman, 2013). Initiatives designed to facilitate school leadership succession are striving to change that (Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011; Turnbull, Riley, Arcaira, et al., 2013; Turnbull, Riley, & MacFarlane, 2013; Turnbull et al., 2015). However, this endeavor entails a radical reformulation of the assistant principalship and the traditional conception seems to be deeply entrenched.

Studies consistently found that the overwhelming majority of assistant principals aspire to the principalship. Yet they frequently lack the knowledge, skills, and confidence to assume the leadership role because they were not sufficiently prepared by their experience as vice principals. Mentoring, coaching, internships (or apprenticeships), job-embedded professional development, and ongoing opportunities for professional learning are essential components of

exemplary leadership development programs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). However, the preliminary results of the Principal Pipeline Initiative showed that even projects that integrate these strategies can fail to produce the desired results, presumably due to how they are implemented (Turnbull et al., 2015). Soliciting input from assistant principals regarding how they perceive their roles and their needs and preferences for leadership development should work to improve the quality of assistant principal leadership development. Assistant principals play a critical role in schools and school improvement and certainly warrant much more research attention.

Chapter 3: Research Design

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of novice principals regarding how their past experiences in the assistant principal position informs and influences their leadership practices. A qualitative study was used to elucidate these perceptions in great depth. Elementary school principals in Central Arkansas were the focus of this study. Arkansas, like many states, is facing a potential shortage of qualified administrators. Understandably, the lack of suitable candidates for the position of building principal is a concern for many school districts. This reflective study of principal succession identifies relationships between expectations and realities of the principalship, as well as formal and informal socialization experiences for the position.

Research Questions

This study was driven by the following research questions:

- How are school districts mentoring and training assistant principals to prepare them for future principalships?
- How do novice principals perceive their roles regarding the career development of assistant principals?
- How do novice principals perceive their leadership practices have been influenced by their past experiences as assistant principals?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework selected to guide this study was transformational leadership theory. Transformational leaders exhibit behaviors that inspire and empower followers. The most popular framework for transformational leadership is Bass's model, which consists of four dimensions: idealized influence (or charisma), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation,

and individualized consideration (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Idealized influence captures behaviors that elicit admiration, respect, and trust. Inspirational motivation denotes the ability to present a compelling vision that engages others in working toward individual and collective goals. Intellectual stimulation involves soliciting ideas, opinions, and input from followers to drive change, innovation, and creativity. Demonstrating individualized consideration entails being sensitive to each person's needs for growth, development, and recognition, creating new learning opportunities, and encouraging followers to realize their full potential. Intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration are the most relevant for understanding how principals provide their vice principals with opportunities for learning and development (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2009).

Transformational school leadership requires a repertoire of skills that can only be developed through on-the-job experiences, high-quality training, and day-to-day mentorships (Bierly & Shy, 2013). Mentoring and job-embedded professional development are consistently recommended for developing high-performing school leaders (Gray et al., 2007; Hall, 2008; Hutton, 2012; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Oleszewski et al., 2012; Turnbull, Riley, Arcaira, et al., 2013; Turnbull, Riley, & MacFarlane, 2013; Turnbull et al., 2015). According to Bierly and Shy (2013), if school districts are to place the most talented and capable candidates in critical leadership positions, they must give much higher priority to investing in developing them.

For decades, educational researchers have sought to determine the attributes of an excellent school leader (Hallinger, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 2010). The concept of *leadership for learning* embodies features of instructional, transformational, and distributed leadership that are characteristic of the most successful schools (Hallinger, 2011). According to Leithwood and Jantzi (2009), while certain features are common to all organizations, schools have certain

distinguishing characteristics. These include a highly dedicated workforce, permeable boundaries, a flatter structure than the traditional hierarchy, a hectic pace, and the unique objective of educating and developing children and youth, which implies a stakeholder role for parents. Additionally, teachers have traditionally worked in isolation from their own colleagues, which makes collaborative processes even more complex.

Based on the specific features of schools, Leithwood and Jantzi (2009) developed a model of transformational school leadership. The first dimension is *setting direction*. Vision and goals are key elements of this facet of leadership, which broadly parallels inspirational motivation (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The second component is *developing people* (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). Elements of individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation are implicit in this dimension of school leadership, which also encompasses instructional leadership. Notably, Leithwood and Jantzi view instructional leadership as an aspect of a leader's emotional intelligence. From this perspective, instructional leadership involves being aware of and sensitive to the needs and concerns of others, striving to boost optimism, enthusiasm, and commitment while reducing stress and frustration, and instilling a strong sense of mission in school stakeholders. By implication, principals who actively work to develop the leadership talent of their vice principals embody some of the best features of instructional leadership.

The third dimension of Leithwood and Jantzi's (2009) model is *redesigning the organization*. This entails building a culture conducive to collaboration and learning and establishing and maintaining structures to support that culture. As Louis and Wahlstrom (2011) noted, sustaining a culture of excellence for all stakeholders requires multiple leaders. According to Leithwood and Jantzi (2009), redesigning the organization involves reaching out to stakeholders beyond the school building. This underscores the vital importance of strong

interpersonal and relationship-building skills for successful school leadership (Barnett et al., 2012; Leithwood & Azah, 2014).

Transformational leadership can be learned and developed (Bass & Riggio, 2006). In the past, school districts relied on external searches to fill vacant leadership posts. The future of high-quality school leadership lies in identifying candidates with good leadership potential and developing leadership talent within the school and district (Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011; Turnbull, Riley, Arcaira, et al., 2013; Turnbull, Riley, & MacFarlane, 2013; Turnbull et al., 2015). To accomplish this, school principals must take an active role in providing their assistant principals with a variety of opportunities to learn and practice leadership skills.

Research Paradigm

Constructionism. This study sought to illuminate the phenomenon of principal succession through the perspectives and experiences of novice principals. A constructionist-interpretive research paradigm was selected for this endeavor. A constructionist approach recognizes how the people collectively draw meanings from their experience based on shared cultural and social influences (Crotty, 2003). To gain insight into each participant's unique experiences and perceptions, this study relied on open-ended questions that were broad enough to allow the participants to construct their own meanings (Creswell, 2013). This study deliberately included school leaders who had certain shared experiences, specific experiences that were unique to the group and perceptions that were highly individual but likely to be shared with other participants. Major themes were drawn from the various commonalities and differences that emerged during the data analysis process.

Interpretivism. As a qualitative research paradigm, interpretivism recognizes the subjectivity of the human experience (Nudzor, 2009). Each of us perceives and experiences the

world in our own way, influenced by our personal preconceptions and beliefs. This research approach emphasizes exploring the nature of a phenomenon in depth rather than forming and testing hypotheses. As a veteran in the field of educational leadership, the researcher sought deeper understanding of this realm. In particular, a qualitative exploration of former assistant principals gives expression to a group whose professional role is essential to effective and efficient school operations, but who have been rendered almost invisible in educational leadership research. The detail and effort involved in interpretive inquiry allowed the researcher to gain insight into specific events as well as uncover a variety of perspectives that might have been otherwise hidden (Vine, 2009).

Phenomenology. A phenomenological approach was selected as the best method for exploring the perceptions and experiences of novice principals and portraying them as seen through their eyes. According to Patton (2002), “A phenomenological study is one that focuses on the descriptions of what people experience and how it is that they experience what they experience” (p. 107). This phenomenological study invited novice principals to elaborate on the meanings they ascribed to the role of assistant principal (Creswell, 2013). The purpose of this study was to illuminate this phenomenon through descriptions of the lived experiences of the participants using a semistructured interview guide. Data were analyzed for key statements, units of meaning, textual and structural description, and description that portrayed the “essence” of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The phenomenological approach allows both the researcher and the reader to gain insight into the experiences of others.

Research Design

As a qualitative, phenomenological study, this research involved a small purposive sample of novice principals who engaged in individual interviews. This study had a twofold

purpose. First, it aimed to gain understanding of how the leadership practices of novice principals are influenced and informed by their prior experiences as assistant principals. Second, the study sought to identify and define the assistant principal's roles and responsibilities.

Deep insight into the phenomenon under study was gathered through individual interviews and field notes. Participants were asked to complete an Informed Consent Form (Appendix A) prior to the interviews being conducted. Each principal was interviewed individually using a semistructured protocol of open-ended questions (Appendix B). One-on-one interviews provided each participant an opportunity to share his or her experiences (see Plano Clark & Creswell, 2010). Open-ended questions provided opportunities for principals to describe the job-related roles and responsibilities they experienced while serving as assistant principals that have been most directly transferable to their principalships. Interviews lasted from 45 to 60 minutes each, were digitally recorded, and transcribed verbatim. The interviews occurred during and after school hours, depending on each participant's availability. The researcher took notes during the interview to preserve certain points of emphasis.

The open-ended nature of the questions (Appendix B) allowed the researcher freedom to probe the interviewee to elaborate on answers or to follow a new line of inquiry introduced by the interviewee. The use of open-ended questions also allowed each interviewee a chance to "create his/her own options for responding" (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2010, p. 257). Interviews were fairly informal, with the researcher trying to make the participants feel like they were taking part in a conversation or discussion rather than in a formal question-and-answer situation. Accuracy was ensured by listening to the interviews multiple times through digital recordings (see Plano Clark & Creswell, 2010).

The researcher made written descriptions of the people, situations, and environment that were observed during interviews. The focus of the field notes included characteristics of participants, including values, attitudes, skill and knowledge levels; interactions in social situations, including power relationships and level of participation; and nonverbal behavior, including facial expressions and gestures.

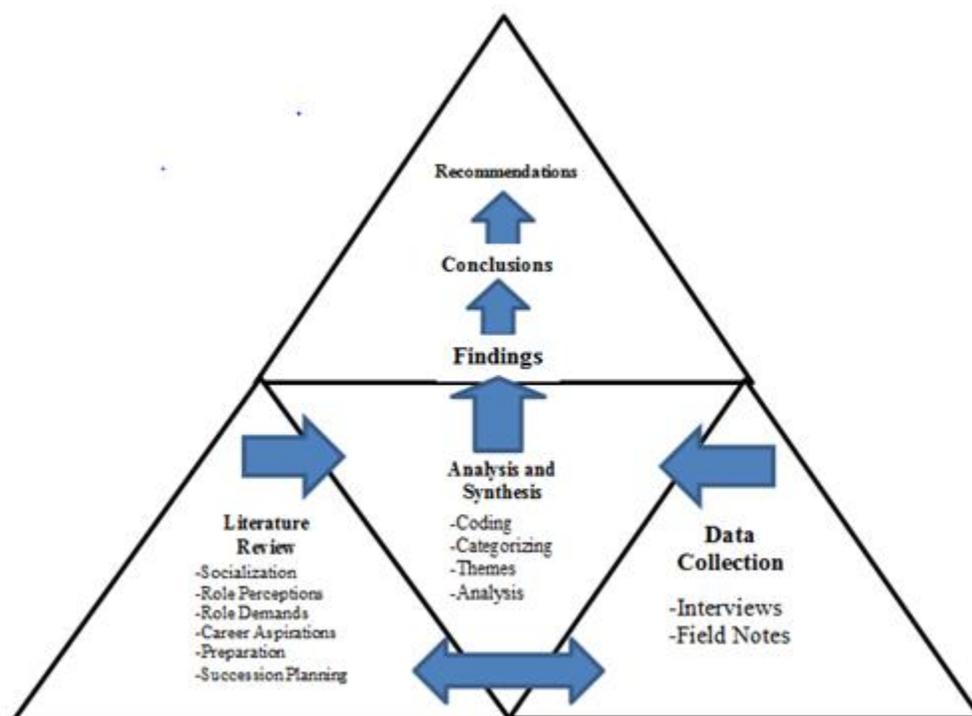


Figure 1. Research design overview of this study.

Sampling strategies and techniques. The richness and depth of qualitative research findings depend on the quality of the source material (Polkinghorne, 2005). This entails the selection of participants who describe and clarify their experiences in relation to the overarching question of how well their role as assistant principal prepared them for the principalship. Purposeful sampling procedures were used to select specific districts and elementary schools. Purposeful sampling allows for the selection of “information-rich cases with the objective of

yielding insight and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 104).

Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) recommended using criterion sampling for phenomenological research, which involves choosing participants that meet a specific criterion (or criteria) of importance. In this study, it involved the selection of participants who had experienced organizational socialization as assistant principals and had been promoted from assistant principal to building principal. Eight purposefully selected early-career principals serving at different elementary schools in four Central Arkansas school districts and one Western Arkansas school district were contacted via e-mail (Appendix C) or phone (Appendix D) and asked to participate in semistructured interviews. The school districts varied in size from approximately 3,400 to 25,000 students. They also varied in student demographics, with five districts that are predominately White and one that is predominately African American. Percentage of students receiving free or reduced-price meals also varied from 37% to 71% in the five school districts.

Overview of information needed. Information relating to the participants’ perceptions of leadership development was obtained through in-depth interviews with eight elementary school administrators. The researcher explored the organizational socialization of assistant principals through the perspectives of novice elementary school principals. Through in-depth interviews, novice principals discussed their perceptions of the job responsibilities and socialization experiences they previously had while serving as assistant principals. Consistent with Hallinger’s (2011) emphasis on context, this research also explored the interaction between the administrators and their work environments. Given the nature of the perceptual information, the data collected provided knowledge of the organizational socialization strategies used in each of

the five school districts. The perceptual information was documented in a descriptive and evaluative manner.

Theoretical information was obtained through reviewing literature using the following key terms, either individually or in conjunction: *schools, principals, assistant principals, vice principals, deputy principals, school administrators, leadership, leadership succession, socialization, education, induction, mentoring, preparation, professional development, leadership development, management, roles, and organization.*

Data collection methods. The data for this study were collected through individual, face-to-face, semistructured interviews with eight early career elementary school principals. Upon receiving permission from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct this research study, contacts within the Arkansas Association of Elementary School Principals' Board were informed of the study and asked to nominate candidates whom they thought would best be able to articulate their experiences and perceptions and who might have particular interest in participating in this research study.

Participants were interviewed for 45 to 60 minutes after they signed the Informed Consent form. The interview protocol (Appendix B) included questions that provided insight related to the research questions. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. The open-ended nature of the questions during the semistructured interview allowed the participants to elaborate on their responses in order to provide rich, thick descriptions of their assistant principal and principal experiences. Field notes were written during the interviews to help the researcher recall details that might not have been present in the interview transcripts. Disadvantages of semistructured interviews include the time-consuming nature of interviews and the potential for the interviewer to guide the interviewees in a specific direction.

Data analysis and synthesis. A transcriptionist listened to the audio recordings following each interview and typed them as a written transcript. This allowed the researcher to interpret the contents of each transcript individually. The researcher analyzed the qualitative data from transcribed interviews and field notes to begin the process of making sense of the data. Coded information and categorized themes were drawn from the qualitative data.

An immersion approach seemed suitable for phenomenological research. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2012), in phenomenological research the focus is capturing the “essence” of the phenomenon being explored. The immersion approach is flexible and relatively unstructured. During data analysis, caution was taken so as not allow assumptions or bias to affect the descriptive portrayal of the phenomenon (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The coding process began by developing a set of initial descriptive codes based on the research questions and familiarity with the content of the interviews. Preliminary descriptive codes, in order of frequency of code, are as follows: leadership, building relationships, communication, duties, mentors, student achievement, discipline, curriculum, instruction, data interpretation, hiring, vision, school culture, teacher buy-in, concerns, professional development, management, teacher evaluation, and administrative tasks. Additional codes were created as emerging ideas were discovered during multiple passes through the interview transcripts.

Versus coding was used for the next coding pass through the interview transcripts. Participants described assistant principal duties and responsibilities versus principal duties and responsibilities. They also described their relationships with students, parents, teachers, and district personnel when they were assistant principals versus those relationships once they became principals. Another area of focus during the interviews was assistant principal professional development opportunities versus principal professional development opportunities.

These three versus codes captured the participants' experiences as assistant principals versus their experiences as principals (see Saldana, 2013).

The researcher chose to use in vivo coding as the next coding method because this study represented practitioner research. This method was used to organize the interviews in the words of the participants because "sometimes the participant says it best" (Saldana, 2013, p. 94). In vivo coding "draws from the participant's own language for codes" (Saldana, 2013, p. 84). The researcher scrutinized interview transcripts for significant stories the participants told of the experiences they had when they served in the assistant principal role related to the experiences they had in the principal role. Reflection upon the significant stories from the in vivo coding process led to the participants' narratives presented in Chapter 4.

Themes are the major categories or findings of a qualitative study (Creswell, 2009). Creswell (2009) maintained that themes should "display multiple perspectives from individuals and be supported by diverse quotations and specific evidence" (p. 189). A theme is defined by Saldana (2013) as "an extended phrase or sentence that identifies what a unit of data is about and/or what it means" (p.175). Themes that emerged from the data analysis process were relationships, leadership development, and job responsibilities.

Ethical considerations. Participants for this research study were chosen because they could describe and clarify the roles and responsibilities associated with the position of assistant principal as experienced by previous assistant principals. Novice principals were asked to describe in as vivid detail as possible the district's organizational socialization experience for assistant principals. All participation was strictly voluntary. Prospective participants were informed that they may refuse to participate, or stop participating at any time, without any explanation. They were also told they could ask to have all of the information about them

returned to them, removed from the research records, or destroyed. Even though there were no expected risks to the participants as a result of this study, safeguards were established to protect them.

An interactive research design (Appendix E) was created to organize this phenomenological study. It explicitly identified key components addressed in the research and made logical connections among the design components (Maxwell, 2013). This design also took into account the reflexive nature of phenomenological research which allowed for the components of the study to be adapted if an ethical issue arose.

Informed consent stipulated that information collected would be stored in a locked file cabinet to which only the researcher had access. No individually identifiable information about any participant would be revealed. Participants and their districts were provided pseudonyms, and all persons or places to which they referred were given pseudonyms (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Records of participant names were kept in a separate file from any other documents. Audio files were stored on a secured computer in the researcher's office and destroyed following the completion of the transcription. Transcripts identified interviewees by a code rather than a name.

The researcher was aware that participants might have been reluctant to discuss their perceptions for a couple of reasons: fear of sounding disloyal to the principals they worked with in the past, and fear that their districts would discover that they felt inadequately prepared for the principalship. Therefore every effort was made to conduct each interview in a nonthreatening manner with consideration of the unique experiences presented. It was acknowledged that the nature of the study was complex and sensitive and that all data gathered were used solely for the analytical purposes of the researcher. With the confidentiality safeguards in place through the

informed consent and the University of Arkansas' IRB approval (Appendix F), the rights of the participants were ensured.

Issues of trustworthiness. According to Creswell and Miller (2000), qualitative researchers must show that inferences drawn from their studies are grounded in data. Sufficient detail was provided to allow readers to assess the validity or credibility of the work. The researcher highlighted quotes and examples to accurately represent the participants' thoughts, perceptions, feelings, and experiences in order to establish credibility. The material was scrutinized for discrepant evidence and findings were reviewed and discussed with professional colleagues. Reliable records were kept to track the processes and procedures used to gather and interpret data to establish dependability. Triangulation is a useful technique for understanding different perspectives of the same topic (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). In this study, triangulation was accomplished through analysis of interview transcripts from the eight different school sites. As data were gathered and analyzed, member checking was used to share the researcher's interpretation of data with the participants and therefore allowed the participants opportunities to discuss and clarify the interpretation and contribute new or additional perspectives to the study.

Limitations of the study. The researcher's subjectivity was a limitation of a qualitative approach. Researcher bias has the potential to shape assumptions, interests, perceptions, and needs. To reduce any potential bias during data analysis, the researcher removed all participant names and coded all interview transcripts blindly so as not to associate any material or data with any particular individual (see Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Another limitation was that the participants might have censored their thoughts or otherwise inhibited themselves from giving lengthy and detailed information during the interviews. A restricted research sample was an

additional limitation of this study, which was limited to eight principals. In addition, the scope of this study was limited to five school districts in the state of Arkansas.

Chapter 4: Results

In this phenomenological study, the researcher investigated the experiences of principals as they described how their previous roles and responsibilities as assistant principals inform their current practices. Phenomenological researchers investigate experiences as they are lived by those experiencing them, and the meaning that these people attach to them (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2010). Accounts of various experiences are provided to help readers gain an accurate and deep understanding of the phenomenon.

This chapter describes data obtained from one-on-one interviews with eight novice principals. Data from the interviews give an account of how previous assistant principal duties impact the current leadership practices of novice principals. The goal of the research was to illuminate experiences, opportunities, roles, and responsibilities novice principals had while serving as assistant principals and the perceived influence of these experiences as preparation for the role of principal. Participants were employed in school districts in Central and Western Arkansas with student populations of approximately 3,400 to 25,000 students. The school districts varied in student demographics, with four districts that were predominately White and one that was predominately African American. The percentage of students receiving free or reduced-price meals ranged from 37% to 71% in the five school districts. To participate in this study, each principal must have served as an assistant principal prior to becoming a principal and he or she must have served as an elementary school principal for 1 year. Pseudonyms were used for the principals to maintain their confidentiality.

Four men and four women participated in interviews for this research study. These interviews lasted approximately 1 hour and were digitally recorded with participants' permission. During the interviews, the researcher asked open-ended questions that provided opportunities to

describe assistant principal roles, responsibilities, and experiences that they perceived to be the most beneficial to their new role of principal. As novice principals, these leaders had fresh recall of their experiences as assistant principals. The varied sample of participants afforded the researcher a significant opportunity to learn about the phenomenon under study.

Participant Profiles and Career Paths

Eight novice principals selected through criterion sampling participated in this study. Identified criterion included experience as an assistant principal prior to promoting to the position of an elementary school principal within the past two years. The researcher gave all participants a pseudonym. Table 1 presents participants' ages, gender, ethnicity, and level of education. Participants worked in five school districts that varied in size from approximately 3,400 to 25,000 students. These districts also varied in student demographics: four districts were predominately White, and one was predominately African American. The percentage of students receiving free or reduced-price meals varied from 37% to 71% in the five school districts.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant name	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Level of education
Kay	32	Female	African American	Master's degree
Gary	47	Male	White	Specialist degree
Mark	31	Male	African American	Master's degree
Adam	37	Male	White	Master's degree
Joe	40	Male	African American	Master's degree
Katy	45	Female	White	Master's degree
Kara	46	Female	White	Doctoral degree
Wanda	46	Female	White	Master's degree

Participants described the career paths they took to become elementary school principals. Table 2 presents participants' work experience after college graduation, the number of years they served as assistant principal, and at which school level. Six of the 8 participants described more traditional educational career trajectories that began with classroom teaching experience and then promotion to an assistant principal position. The other two participants had careers in the business world until they felt unfulfilled and pursued careers in education. Gary had earned his degree in education years earlier, so he was able to interview and get hired to teach at an elementary school, thereby making a smooth transition from the business world to the education world. Unlike Gary, Joe had a degree in business administration, so when he left the business world, he had to go through the nontraditional licensure program. He worked as a paraprofessional while he was in this program. Three of the 8 participants had teaching experience at the secondary level. Classroom experience ranged from 3 years to 17 years. Assistant principal experience ranged from 2 years to 4 years. Participants described their experiences in the assistant principal role, whether elementary or secondary, as providing important opportunities for both building-level and district-level administrators to recognize their leadership potential.

Table 2

Career Paths Leading to Administration

Name	Career path to AP	Years as AP	School level when AP
Kay	Kindergarten, first grade, reading recovery, counselor	2	Elementary
Gary	Career in business, third grade, fourth grade	3	Elementary
Mark	Special education	2	Middle and Elementary
Adam	Middle school teacher and coach	4	Elementary
Joe	Career in business, paraprofessional, third grade	2	Elementary
Katy	Junior high and high school math teacher	2	High school
Kara	Second grade	4	Elementary
Wanda	Paraprofessional, second grade, first grade, sixth grade, reading recovery	3	Elementary

Note. AP = assistant principal.

Kay. Kay began her teaching career as a first-grade teacher and then moved to a kindergarten classroom. She loved teaching kindergarten and welcomed the challenges that came with it. Challenges including differentiating her literacy instruction to meet the needs of students who had attended quality preschool programs and came to her class already reading to those students who had never attended a daycare or preschool and needed instruction in basic letter identification and sounds. Kay's love for literacy led her to pursue a Reading Recovery position. The Reading Recovery program involved intensive one-to-one literacy intervention lessons with the lowest achieving kindergarten and first-grade students. After teaching the Reading Recovery program for 1 year, Kay moved into a counseling position at an elementary

school with a high population of English as a second language students. As an elementary school counselor, Kay had preadministrative leadership experience that helped prepare her for the duties and responsibilities of administration. This experience taught her that she needed to strengthen relationships and make strong connections with parents.

Kay was promoted to assistant principal at the same school where she previously served as the counselor. She served as assistant principal for 2 years before she made a lateral move to a school within same the district with a very different student demographic. Kay spent 2 years as the assistant principal of a school where she worked to create a system that enriched the education of high-performing students before promoting to the role of principal at a high-poverty school within the district. Two years later, Kay was promoted to the position of principal. Kay's educational career has occurred within the same school district. Reflecting on her educational experiences which led to her position as principal, she said, "I've been able to take a little bit from each of them to create a vision to see that we're headed in the right direction." Kay is now the principal of an elementary school serving 458 students in grades prekindergarten through fifth in a large urban school district.

Gary. Gary graduated college with a degree in education, but had worked for McDonald's while he attended college. He graduated in December, a time of year when teaching jobs were not available, so he continued working at McDonald's. Gary spent 16 years managing a McDonald's restaurant, during which time he supervised hundreds of people. After leaving McDonald's he worked in a dental laboratory for 4 years before he felt like it was time for a change, and he decided to use his teaching degree for the first time. Gary began teaching third grade and looped up to fourth grade with one of his classes. Looping, in education, refers to the practice of a teacher remaining with the same group of students for more than one school

year. After 3 years as a classroom teacher, he moved into administration at a larger school district.

He went back to school and earned his master's degree. He credits the McDonald's Management Program with helping him feel prepared for administration. Gary reflected:

The fast-paced environment of McDonald's, being flexible to change, and dealing with customers that were not happy if the sandwich got messed up all prepared me to deal with parents that get upset with us, or a kid, or whatever. And so, I think the thing I was most equipped for was just dealing with people.

After 3 years in the assistant principal role, Gary was promoted to the principalship at another elementary school within the district. Gary is currently the principal of an elementary school that serves 450 students in grades kindergarten through fourth within a midsize suburban school district.

Mark. Mark was an engineering major in college where he was involved in a partnership mentor program at his old elementary school. He enjoyed working with the students so much that he decided to pursue a career that afforded him daily contact with children. Mark changed his major to education and earned a degree in special education. He began his career as a special education teacher and moved to Arkansas after 6 years to be an assistant principal at a junior high school. He spent 1 year in that role before accepting an assistant principal role at a middle school in a different school district. After 1 year at the middle school, Mark moved to an elementary school to serve as an assistant principal. One year later he was promoted to the principalship at yet another elementary school within the same school district. Today, Mark is the principal of 489 kindergarten through fifth-grade students in a midsize rural school district.

Adam. Adam comes from a family of educators. His grandmother worked in a school cafeteria; his father was a teacher, coach, and principal; he also has an aunt who is a retired teacher. Adam taught and coached at the secondary level for 9 years prior to moving into

administration. As a coach, he learned how to handle hostile people. He worked with upset parents and upset administration when the team did not have a winning season or when he made tough disciplinary decisions. He also learned how to set a vision and motivate a group of people to work toward a common goal. He spent a lot of time building relationships with his players, their families, and his assistant coaches. Establishing and maintaining trust was a big part of his coaching philosophy.

Adam believed his background in coaching was an important asset for his role in administration. He served as an elementary school assistant principal for 4 years before becoming the principal of another elementary school. All his teaching, coaching, and administration experience has been within the same school district, which is home to 546 students in kindergarten through fifth grades.

Joe. Joe earned a degree in business administration and managed operations of a skin care company that made pharmaceutical-grade skin care products. Even though the company was thriving, something was missing for Joe. He didn't feel satisfied or fulfilled. He had always worked with kids through coaching and felt like a job in education might be his true calling. In order to reconnect with children, Joe began working as a paraprofessional at an elementary school during the day and he continued working at the skin care company in the evenings. He quickly fell in love with the field of education and decided to go through the nontraditional licensure program to become a classroom teacher. Once he completed the program, he left his job with the skin care company and began teaching third grade, which he did for 8 years. His educational career has been in a large urban school district.

During this time, Joe earned a master's degree in education leadership. After 8 years, the school in which he was teaching had low enrollment numbers and he was forced out due to his

lack of seniority. That is when Joe decided to pursue a job in administration and he was hired as an assistant principal at the same school where he served as a paraprofessional. He was an assistant principal for 2 years before being promoted to principal at another school within the school district.

After serving as assistant principal for 3 months, Joe was called out of the building to be an acting principal at a school where the principal had suffered from a severe injury and was unable to complete her/his job. The superintendent had confidence in him and knew that the experience would give him a lot of leadership opportunities. Joe referred to the experience as “baptism by fire.” He said, “I had some successes and was able to put out a few fires and turn things around at that school. I was there 3 to 4 months.”

Joe returned to his role as an assistant principal, but the next school year he took over for a principal who was out of the position for the year due to a family emergency. The superintendent asked him to step in as acting principal again. Joe said, “This school had a completely different culture and I learned a lot from it. I had some successes and had some failures. I was humbled by both opportunities and I grew in a lot of ways.” After 2 years of serving in the assistant principal and acting principal roles, Joe became the principal of an elementary school. Joe’s school has 425 students enrolled in prekindergarten through fifth grades.

Katy. Katy knew that she wanted to be a math teacher since seventh grade and never deviated from that goal. She taught high school math for 4 years at a private school and then transitioned to public school, where she taught junior high math. Katy described her teaching experience in the private sector as “fabulous.” She stated:

I learned in private school that parents are your clients, which is really no different than a public school. Parents are still your clients. It's just free education. There were just a lot of things that I learned in that setting that I think were very beneficial for me.

Katy left the private sector after 4 years to begin teaching math at a public junior high school. She taught there for 4 years and then transferred to the high school, where she spent the next 11 years teaching calculus. Katy became the lead math teacher for Grades 6th through 12th in her district through the Arkansas Advanced Initiative for Math and Science grant. She worked on vertical alignment, curriculum issues, and building the calculus and statistics programs in the district. She visited sixth through ninth grade math classrooms and talked to the students about taking calculus one day. Katy's calculus students tutored struggling students in the lower grades. She said, "It was just really collaborative, really interactive, and we really developed a strong math department."

Katy decided to pursue a curriculum specialist degree because she saw the positive effect having vertical alignment and having curriculum conversations was for the math department in her district. However, while she was pursuing the specialist degree, an assistant principal position became available at her high school and the director of personnel from the district administration office encouraged her to pursue a degree in educational leadership so she could be a candidate for that position. After 19 years of teaching secondary math, Katy transitioned from the role of lead teacher to assistant principal at the high school. Two years later, she left secondary education and became a principal at an elementary school in the same school district. Katy is now the principal of an elementary school with 595 students in grades pre-kindergarten through fifth in a midsize rural school district.

Kara. Kara taught second grade at a mid-sized rural school district for 6 years before moving into administration within the same school district. Even as a classroom teacher, Kara

was already focused on helping principals be better leaders. She spent 2 years at a school where she did not teach because her district administrators did not want her leading her peers, thinking it would be difficult for her. Kara said, “Going to another building gave me a different perspective on leadership and how that building’s climate was.” She then made a lateral move back to the campus where she previously taught second grade. Kara was very open with her expectations, so her former peers did not have a difficult time accepting her as a boss. She loved learning so much that she continued taking classes after she earned her master’s degree. As a classroom teacher, she began working on her doctorate degree and she completed her dissertation the year she began her administrative career. Kara’s research focused on coteaching and its effective implementation in the classroom. Her study provided evidence of specific indicators for implementing the coteaching model to help principals identify effective classroom practice. After 4 total years in the assistant principal role, Kara was promoted to the principalship.

Wanda. Wanda worked at an after-school program for sixty students in grades kindergarten through sixth while she was studying education in college. She learned how to set up stations and keep a large group of students busy for 3 hours every day after school. Wanda graduated and was hired as a paraprofessional for summer school at an elementary school. She continued as a paraprofessional in the fall but in the middle of that school year she was offered a second-grade class when a teacher resigned at semester. Wanda then moved to a first-grade classroom where she taught for 2 years. She spent the next 6 years teaching Reading Recovery and working on her master’s degree in administration.

While teaching Reading Recovery, Wanda’s director of personnel recommended that she receive upper elementary teaching experience as she was pursuing her degree in administration. Upon receiving that advice, Wanda transferred to another school within her district and taught

sixth grade for 2 years. She then moved into administration and spent 2 years as an assistant principal at a high-poverty school and 2 years as an assistant principal at a low-poverty school. She spent 1 year as an assistant principal working with a 1st-year principal. They worked together on creating a vision and setting procedures for the school. The next 2 years she spent working as an assistant principal for a veteran principal. Wanda described this experience as “seeing how a well-oiled machine runs.” She then became a principal at another elementary school within the same school district. Wanda is currently the principal of a school with 570 students in prekindergarten through sixth grades in the same large urban school district where all her educational experience has taken place.

Data Analysis

Through the analysis of data, the researcher gained an accurate and deep understanding of how duties performed while serving as assistant principals inform and influence the leadership practices of current principals. The coding process began by developing a set of initial descriptive codes based on the research questions and familiarity with the content of the interviews. Preliminary descriptive codes in order of frequency of code are as follows: leadership, building relationships, communication, duties, mentors, student achievement, discipline, curriculum, instruction, data interpretation, hiring, vision, school culture, teacher buy-in, concerns, professional development, management, teacher evaluation, and administrative tasks. Additional codes were created as emerging ideas were discovered during multiple passes through the interview transcripts.

Versus coding was utilized for the next coding pass through the interview transcripts. Participants described assistant principal duties and responsibilities versus principal duties and responsibilities. They also described their relationships with students, parents, teachers, and

district personnel when they were assistant principals versus those relationships once they became principals. Another area of focus during the interviews was assistant principal professional development opportunities versus principal professional development opportunities. These three versus codes captured the participants' experiences as assistant principals versus their experiences as principals (Saldana, 2013).

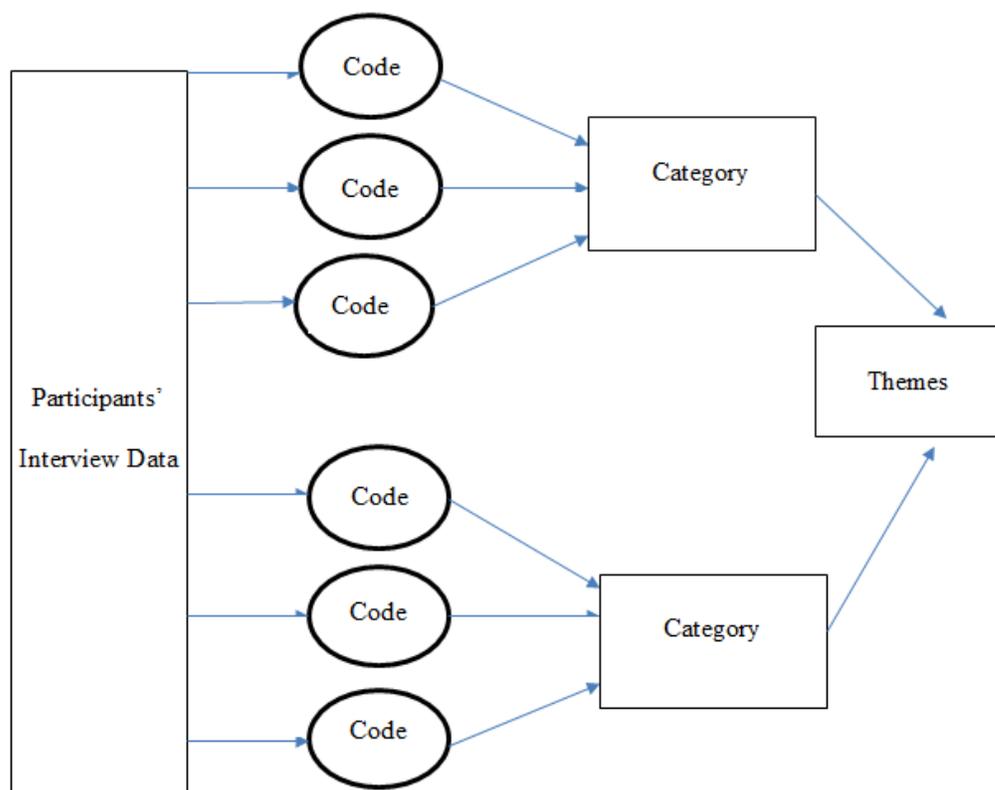


Figure 2. Data analysis framework.

These codes were then organized into categories, words, or phrases that describe a group of codes. The four categories that emerged are as follows: (a) preparation for the principalship, (b) deliberate leadership succession planning, (c) role perceptions and demands, and (d) involves relationships with stakeholders. The themes that surfaced from the data analysis process were narrowed to relationships, leadership development, and job responsibilities for assistant

principals and principals. These themes are discussed in detail throughout the remainder of this chapter.

Findings

This section presents data obtained via in-depth interviews with eight novice elementary school principals. Interview data were analyzed and categorized by themes. The researcher organized the findings thematically in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of the succession of elementary school principals through the experiences and perspectives of novice elementary school principals who had previously served as assistant principals. Findings from the eight interviews are organized according to themes that emerged in the data analysis, including (a) relationships, (b) leadership development, and (c) job responsibilities.

Theme 1: Relationships. According to participants, strong relationship-building skills were essential for successful school leadership. Administrators spent large amounts of time developing, improving, and investing in relationships. Participants believed that positive relationships were the foundation of successful schools. All participants felt comfortable working with others and building relationships with both adults and students. Theme 1 contained two supporting subthemes: relationship with students and relationship with mentor principals.

Subtheme 1A: Relationship with students. This subtheme is described by the ways in which participants spoke of their relationships with their students. These were significant relationships to them as principals and they believed that these relationships fostered a sense of trust in their students. Joe learned from his previous principal that 80% of the job was working with parents or the community. This mentor told him that by investing in those relationships, he

would never lose. His mentor conveyed to him that this could be “the difference between a kid listening to you one day just because you shook his hand so many days ago.” As a result, the child knows that the administrator is on their side. This was especially important because participants acknowledged the perception that if a principal knows a student’s name, this meant that the student was in trouble often. Participants were working to change that perception by building closer relationships with students in order to meet their social-emotional needs. To do this, participants would greet students by name and were familiar with their families, interests, and achievements in school.

“You have to be passionate about educating children,” said Adam. “You have to like children. I think it has to be a calling,” he continued. He believed that this passion was the key to building relationships with students. According to Adam, leadership abilities were only part of what it took to be a good principal. “I think there’s something inward that you just have to be passionate about that goes beyond your salary range and it goes beyond where you are located,” he shared. To be a successful leader, Adam believed, “it has to go down to your core; this is who you are. I think those things have to be intact to be a successful and effective leader.”

Katy believed a difference existed in relationships between administrators and students at the elementary level and secondary levels. “When you ask a secondary person what they teach, they give you a subject,” she said. “If you ask an elementary teacher what they teach, they are going to say, ‘Children.’” She attributed this to elementary school teachers’ belief that they teach the whole child, whereas secondary teachers are “content-driven.” According to Katy, this was where the relationships became important. She relayed:

A big difference between secondary and elementary is how difficult it is to get in and know a lot about each individual student at the secondary level. In elementary, you have to know a lot about each individual student. That requires a lot of conversation, a lot of communication.

Principals must get to know teachers on a personal and professional level to blend their unique strengths into a successful team. Administrators can facilitate teachers' growth by giving feedback on lessons and leading them to focus on continuous improvements. Positive relationships between teachers and principals occur when there is open communication. Two participants spoke about the importance of gathering feedback from teachers and making changes based on that feedback. Mark explained an administrator's relationship to teachers using a coaching analogy:

A lot of people approach administration in terms of treating teachers like they are our students. I have teachers who know more about the art of teaching that I do. I look at administration like coaching a professional team. You don't want to make people do what you want them to do. You have to trick them into what you want them to do: that is the key.

Gary believed relationships with teachers are like relationships with students. "Someone that has the ability to build relationships and get to know people not just on a professional level, but on a personal level, because principals have to wear many hats throughout the day and school year," Gary stated. He shared, "Not only does every child need something different, most of the adults need something different as well." As a result, he felt that the better his administration got to know their staff and faculty, the better they were able to get the best from them.

Adam's perspective was also that principals must have positive working relationships with staff. He felt that principals must like people and "be able to work with different personalities." He continued:

You have to be able to keep a level head through many situations and be able to have a mindset and a personality that sets the tone in your building. I always say, be a thermostat rather than a thermometer. One of my strengths is dealing with people and just building those relationships with your staff and community. That is what it's all about. If you have a good relationship you can have a lot of tough conversations and you can do a lot just being respectful.

Subtheme 1B: Relationship with mentor principals. Assistant principals develop a repertoire of skills through on-the-job experiences and day-to-day mentorship with their principals. This theme is described by the ways in which the principals spoke of the relationships they had with their mentor principals, and how these relationships contributed to their learning and development. Some mentor principals presented compelling visions that engaged their staff in working toward goals. Other mentor principals solicited ideas and input from their staff in order to drive change and innovation. Regardless of which leadership style the participants observed while serving in the role of assistant principal, they all perceived their principals provided them with a variety of opportunities to observe and learn leadership skills.

Wanda described the relationship she witnessed between her former principal and staff while serving as an assistant principal and how those experiences guide her today as a principal. She described the principal as a consistent person who was always clear in communicating her expectations. Wanda has tried to emulate this in her own principalship, as she believed this was very important. She stated:

I've had to work on that kind of balance because you've got those ones that want to be that teacher's pet and then you've got the ones that just want to do their job and then you've got the ones that no matter what you do they are going to have something negative to say. She never wavers. She just says that this is how she expects it and this is what it is going to look like and she just stayed the course. They either wanted to stay on the team or they got off the team.

Mark reflected on his relationships with former principals while serving as an assistant principal and how those relationships prepared him for the role of principal. He felt that he was helped the most during his assistant principalships when the principals "turned over some of their control to me," because this provided the opportunity for Mark to handle some of the challenges he would encounter as a principal.

These collaborative assistant principal-principal relationships were felt commonly amongst other participants. Open conversations and trust allowed assistant principals to learn the skills and knowledge required of principals. Kara described how her principal modeled behavior for her during her time as assistant principal. She said this relationship began by the principal delegating tasks to Kara, but the more work she put in, the more her principal began asking for her input. “She would give me roles and what I needed to do and what I needed to help out with,” said Kara. She continued, “The way the principal worked with me and questioned me about things was really the biggest thing that helped me get ready.” After working with three different principals in 4 years, Kara had a good understanding of what helped her learn to be principal and what did not. She relayed:

Seeing what one [principal] did that I didn’t like helped me grow and change. Seeing what one [principal] did that I really liked, although we had two very different leadership styles, I took a lot of good from her, too. And then having my most recent principal as a mentor that helped me kind of mold and shape what I want to be as a principal. I think that seeing as many different role models as possible is very valuable because you are not going to be exactly the same as someone else. The support and encouragement I got was invaluable.

Katy described the “wonderful working relationship” she had with her principal during her time as an assistant principal. She believed she had full support of her principal, who “had strong, strong leadership and was a great mentor.” Of her principal, Katy relayed, “He taught me a lot. He did the same thing my former principal did where he explained to me why he did what he did. We had lots of communication, lots of conversation.” In addition, Katy’s former principal suggested she get experience in elementary education. Katy said this first principal “strongly encouraged it because she said it would be very powerful for me in a district-level position.” Katy spent a lot of time researching and studying based on her principal’s suggestions, and successfully obtained a principalship when she applied.

Adam believed this relationship between the assistant principal and principal works two ways, in that assistant principals should “be supportive of the principal” and “share their vision.” He stated assistant principals should share the passion for education of the principal. He also felt that assistant principals need not always aspire to principalship and believed there is value in recognizing that an individual might best serve in a supporting capacity of assistant principal.

Wanda spoke of the relationship teachers have with their assistant principals, and contrasted this relationship with that between teachers and principals. “As assistant principal, your role is to be supportive,” Wanda said. “The teachers come to you as an assistant principal and they want to play mama against daddy,” she continued. She believed that teachers often trust and communicate with their assistant principals rather than their principals. As principal, Wanda has found helping teachers get along with one another more stressful than when she was assistant principal.

Theme 2: Leadership development. In every school, there are teachers whose vision extends beyond their classrooms. These individuals may not have any positional authority, but they influence their peers through their expertise with curriculum and instruction. Principals can enlist these teacher leaders to improve school-wide teaching and learning. There were five discernible supporting subthemes contained within this theme: building a leadership team, personal leadership development, building assistant principal leadership, providing training opportunities for assistant principals, and help for assistant principals.

Subtheme 2A: Building a leadership team. This theme was characterized by ways in which the participants and their assistant principals worked together to build strong leadership teams in their schools. Mark described the process he and his assistant principal used to cultivate teacher leaders. He relayed that they held a summer retreat where, together, teachers and

administrators “worked on redoing the mission statement and completed a wall activity where we described the perfect school.” Drawing from the results of that activity, Mark and his assistant principal worked to create the school’s mission statement.

Adam and his assistant principal have a leadership team consisting of one teacher leader from each grade level and a representative from the specialty teachers. They believe in shared decision making. Adam said, “I have a great support staff around me so I don’t feel like it’s totally on me. They help me shoulder the load in a lot of things.”

Kay’s feelings about her leadership team were like Adam’s. Kay acknowledged that her leadership team was everything to her, and they were an integral part of her success as principal. She described working with her leadership team on ways to improve upon discipline. Together, Kay and her leadership team also determined “communication and doing things in a timely manner were areas to improve.” She continued:

I’m very intentional about if we have something coming up that teachers know dates in advance. Our parent-student handbook has our calendar in it and I send out calendar e-vites. Changes were made to show that I am listening to what they said they needed growth. I’ve gotten positive feedback about improvements in area of discipline. I’m empowering teachers in their classroom environment.

Subtheme 2B: Personal leadership development. This subtheme is defined by participants’ reflections on how they developed as leaders when they were assistant principals. Adam reflected on his leadership development experiences when serving as an assistant principal. “The principal really set forth the expectations,” said Adam. He participated in different professional development programs and trainings, and he was an eSchool trainer in the district. School systems in Arkansas use eSchool, an easy to use web-based software tool, to manage, track, and report various types of school funds. While Adam participated in much professional development, Kara reported that her school district “didn’t provide any training

other than things I needed to know, like for testing.” She reported one training session that was particularly helpful for her, but “being with my principal was the thing that helped me the most.” This was because she learned on the job, which worked well for her. She learned aspects of leadership, like budgeting as the director of a preschool program, but her principal let her take over and guided her, and she believed this was an effective training method.

Joe’s leadership experiences at the assistant principal level involved not only his principals but also district personnel. He reported that the associate superintendent directed his principal to teach Joe everything his principal knew. The associate superintendent wanted Joe and his principal to be partners. Joe shared, “Our roles were like dual leadership roles. Even though . . . he still had the greater responsibility, the exposure to see so many different aspects of his job helped out.” Further, Joe believed “the assistant principalship broadens your scope coming out of the classroom.” As a teacher, Joe recognized that his understanding of his principal’s decision-making processes was narrow, but “when you become an assistant principal, you see how this purchase will affect the whole building budget,” something the classroom teacher often does not see. “Being in the assistant principal role, it helped me take baby steps to see the bigger scope,” he recalled, “I just think if I am straight from the classroom to building principal it would be a huge shock factor.” He believed moving slowly from assistant principal to principal helped prepare him and eased his stress about the transition.

Kay worked with three different principals during her time as assistant principal, and reported her duties were dependent on those principals. She described what she learned from these principals:

When a principal empowers an assistant principal, it is just like he is right there with her. As a level of respect, I never stepped outside of my bounds. I had conversations with my principal just letting him know I was getting ready to do something and ask what he thought about it or I’d just run something by him and make sure he was okay with it. I

looked at him as the leader in the building and I had a shared vision with him. One principal I worked for was just me doing what he wanted me to do. He had me mainly deal with discipline. When I start making decisions as far as discipline, I need to know that we are in agreement because at any given time that parent can say they want to speak to the principal and we aren't in agreement, what will that say to the parent? You have to be aligned together. You have to pretty much mirror the same vision, interact the same way, and as assistant principal, you just know you don't step out of bounds.

Even with formal training, Katy felt like the confidence her principals instilled in her while she was serving as assistant principal had the greatest impact on her preparedness for the principalship. She felt fortunate to have strong mentor principals who were preparing her for a principalship from the beginning. They shared with her their belief that she was ready to be a principal on numerous occasions, thereby building her confidence in her ability.

Subtheme 2C: Building assistant principal leadership. Principals are tasked with cultivating leadership in their assistant principals. They must ensure they have specific systems in place that support the growth of their assistant principals and prepare them to become effective principals. This theme is characterized by the approaches that principals take to build and develop their assistant principals. Wanda applied what she learned as an assistant principal to developing her own assistant principals in her current position. "I've been very open and transparent with my assistant principal because I want her to be ready," Wanda stated. This was something she learned from her own mentor principals. Wanda said of her assistant principal, "She has been with a very veteran principal and a novice principal, so she is getting two very different leadership experiences." Wanda tries to be very transparent with her assistant principal and keep her abreast of everything going on in the school.

Principals also facilitate their assistant principals' growth by being supportive and providing quality professional development. Strong communication between the principal and assistant principal is vitally important for the leadership development of the assistant principal.

Gary's relationship with his assistant principal involved giving her opportunities to reflect on growth areas. For example, one area his assistant principal chose to focus on is being more organized. He said that she worked hard to improve, and even created a shared document with a to-do list of the things she is working on that both can collaborate on. He reported, "This organizational tool has been good for both of us because it is just an extra way to communicate and know some of the things that she is working on."

Gary also works to include his assistant principal in the new things he is learning on the job. When he had to fill out hiring paperwork for a job posting, he took his assistant principal with him so she would learn this process. Gary has also given his assistant principal more responsibilities and opportunities to learn new aspects of principalship, like overseeing teacher committees. He said he does this because

I know when I was an assistant principal there were things that I wished my principal would have given me more opportunities to do, but for whatever reason they just felt like the need was that they had to do it all instead of it being a shared responsibility.

Gary described being careful not to micromanage his assistant principal, preferring instead to trust her to do the necessary work and be part of the team. He believed his responsibility was to communicate clearly with his assistant principal, to develop her based on the ways in which she learned best, and to provide her on-the-job training that would serve her in her future principalship.

Katy shared Gary's ideas of assistant principal development. She said, "I try to communicate with her on everything because I would like for her to step in as principal when I promote to a central office position." To do this, Katy has been forthcoming with her assistant principal about her reasoning behind decisions she makes and being transparent about anything happening within the school.

Adam further explained the leadership development of assistant principals, stating that a fine balance exists between blending your vision and goals with those of your assistant principal. He spoke of how he advises assistant principals to “get into everything that they can,” and “to be a part of every single aspect of the day because you are going to be making the call one day.” He felt that nothing could completely prepare assistant principals for the demands of a principalship, but shadowing mentor principals closely to be entrenched in daily life was very helpful.

Mark described taking advantage of teachable moments with his assistant principal, something he learned when he was an assistant principal. He said of his assistant principal, “If she makes a mistake, I back her play in public but in private I offer suggestions about ways to do it differently next time.” He admits that he manages his assistant principal, but that she is good about running decisions through him.

Subtheme 2D: Providing training opportunities for assistant principals. In addition to principals mentoring their assistant principals, they also ensure their assistant principals have access to professional development that builds their leadership capacity. In this subtheme, principals highlighted the training that they and their school district provide to their assistant principals. One way that participants did this was through the Leadership Academy. Mark’s assistant principal is currently in the Leadership Academy, and Mark is as well. He reported that he is “sending her as an assistant principal just to try to get us on the same page.” He has been clear with his assistant principal that we likely will not be in his position forever, and when he leaves, he does not, “want there to be any question about who needs to be the principal of this school.” Katy and her assistant principal are also training at the Leadership Academy.

As novice principals, participants described the leadership development opportunities their school districts provided. Participants met monthly with district administrators to receive

district news. Participants also described additional monthly meetings district administrators had with elementary principals to discuss grade-specific curriculum and instruction initiatives.

Wanda's school district meets for a monthly round table, so all principals receive the same information. She said that during these meetings "we talk about curriculum and assessments, special education, dyslexia, and student safety." She continued, "We also meet as a district administration team monthly. This includes principals and central office people, support staff, administration. We usually talk about what happened at the school board meeting the night before."

Adam's district provides similar professional development. He stated this professional development came in two forms: a monthly district leadership meeting and a monthly or twice-monthly elementary principal leadership meeting. During the district meetings, administrators discuss what is happening in the district, whereas elementary meetings "get more into curriculum and how we're implementing stuff." He reported the central office accounts for specific buildings needs and the teachers' strengths and weaknesses. The principals are responsible for determining the structure of the day and the scheduling, but this is done in partnership with the central office.

Wanda's professional development opportunities were not limited to only what her district provided, as she also attends a support academy. In this academy, her colleagues read and discuss professional books, share their experiences, and visit other schools.

Subtheme 2E: Help for assistant principals. Participants highlighted specific tasks and duties they believed would have benefitted them in preparation for the principalship, and these statements served as the basis for the creation of this subtheme. Participants described their lack of exposure to curriculum when they served as assistant principals. Adam said that as an

assistant principal, he spent more time in the day-to-day tasks than on working with curriculum. He felt like he had little choice in this matter, and that having more training in curriculum “would have better prepared me for where I’m at today.”

Mark also wanted more in the way of learning curriculum. An instructional supervisor handled the curriculum in his building, and so “we were running the building-type stuff and learning as we went,” but the principals learned more about curriculum than he did. He reported that he “learned more how to run the building, and that’s the assistant principal.”

Learning to budget was another area in which participants felt their training lacked. Gary said he “felt least prepared to deal with the budget as it relates to federal funds, Title I funds, the building codes, and funds.” Adam said, “I felt least comfortable dealing with our budgets. I had to dig in and get people to help me and then it wasn’t that big of a deal.”

Finally, Gary suggested a formal curriculum that principals could use when training assistant principals. He believed principals would benefit from a list of specific skills every assistant principal should learn, so “we could make sure that we’re training our assistant principals so that they’re ready for that next step whenever it comes available.” Gary said, “You never really know when that next step is going to come” and as such, “just having a list of eight or 10 things or whatever, that you can say, this is really important” would benefit principals and assistant principals.

Theme 3: Job responsibilities. Assistant principals are being tapped earlier in their careers and more frequently than in previous years for principalships. Therefore, their roles need to include a variety of training opportunities in a short time span. Participants provided concrete examples of their roles and responsibilities while serving in the assistant principal role and how those experiences shaped how they mentor their assistant principals. Four subthemes were

created that supported this theme: assistant principal responsibilities, principal mentoring responsibilities, differences between principal and assistant principal responsibilities, and community and school building.

Subtheme 3A: Assistant principal responsibilities. This subtheme is defined by the responsibilities that participants were tasked with when they were assistant principals and developing the skills required of the principalship. Participants shared that one of their responsibilities as assistant principal was to muster teacher buy-in for schoolwide initiatives. In Wanda's first year as an assistant principal she worked with a 1st-year principal. Together, they spent time early in the year observing how their school functioned "without direct leadership, so that we knew things that needed to be changed or things that needed to be kept." She and her principal felt it important not to change traditions "because we knew that would come back to bite us." They worked collaboratively through decision-making processes related to their shared vision for the school and the steps they would take to achieve that. She contrasted this experience with her second principal, a 10-year veteran who already had the school set up to run "like a well-oiled machine." She described how her second principal allowed her to do instructional leadership tasks, professional learning communities (PLCs), and interventions. They worked together to implement an intervention schedule, sending support staff to each grade level for 30 minutes.

Wanda described teachers as resistant to this process, and the importance of interventions, despite empirical evidence showing their positive impact on student achievement. "My principal put me in charge of working with the resistant teachers to get them on board with interventions," Wanda shared. She highlighted the changes that took place from the 1st year of intervention implementation to 2 years later, when she observed better communication between

teachers and a “huge amount” of growth in the students. Wanda took steps to make the teachers comfortable and familiar with the interventions. To gain this support from teachers, Wanda and her principal took four teachers to a conference on PLCs.

As assistant principal, Joe described the difficulty he felt “when I desired for classrooms to look a certain way with instruction.” As assistant principal, he felt more like a peer to his teachers than a boss. This posed a challenge for him because he felt “it was hard to hold them accountable to do certain things just because they want to hear directly from the boss.” He said this made gathering teacher buy-in difficult because teachers did not look to him as a leader.

Subtheme 3B: Principal mentoring responsibilities. In this subtheme, participants described their mentoring responsibilities to their assistant principals. Successful mentoring occurs when principals have supportive relationships with their assistant principals. Principals help their assistant principals with role socialization and role clarification. Conversations between them require strong listening skills. This relationship between principal and assistant principal is about more than skill development.

Kara described how she is mentoring her assistant principal and how the duties she has her assistant principal perform relate to her own experiences when she was in the role of assistant principal. Kara shared, “I definitely want her input, so I involve her in decisions that I make and then ask her opinion.” She learned to do this when, as assistant principal, she felt that she was “just kind of thrown into things” and she was not confident she knew what she was doing. She said, “I should have had a life raft there for me to let me be safe in the decisions I was making,” but this did not happen for her in her 1st year as assistant principal. She works with her assistant principal on testing, scheduling, and discipline. As Kara’s assistant principal becomes more comfortable, Kara has had her take on more responsibilities, and she had started new clubs at the

school and worked to generate teacher buy-in for the school's Response to Intervention (RTI) program.

Katy has divided tasks and duties between her and her assistant principal, and her assistant principal is almost completely responsible for discipline. For Katy, communication between her and her assistant principal is crucial, and her assistant principal is communicative with her about the things she is doing. Katy stated she avoids micromanaging her assistant principal, but requires her assistant principal tell her about the tasks she is working on. Katy uses what she learned from her instructional supervisor when she was an assistant principal at the elementary school level to guide her assistant principal.

Katy said her assistant principal is "working side-by-side with me with our student intervention team and our RTI process. We do that together. We communicate on all those kids. That's a big part of her role". Important to Katy was the fact that teachers were aware of the collaborative, communicative relationship between the principal leadership team. They conduct classroom observations together and have difficult conversations with teachers together, if necessary. "We're a team," Kara said. She believed this was essential because her role as mentor principal was to prepare her assistant principal for principalship.

Mark believed that the assistant principal is "learning on the job," and that as assistant principal they are preparing for a job as principal. He shared his belief that allowing assistant principals to handle disciplinary problems only will not effectively prepare for principalship. "They have got to be able to multitask," Mark shared. "The biggest thing is giving assistant principals opportunities to engage in everything that a principal does," which, according to Mark, helped them learn to effectively multitask. "Anything that I do, my assistant principal needs to learn how to do it. She does not just do discipline. I handle a lot of the discipline and she has

the curriculum,” Mark continued. He thought those experiences were crucial for preparing his assistant principal.

Katy recalled the ways in which her duties as assistant principal varied depending on which principal she was serving with. In her 1st year as assistant principal, Katy did discipline, curriculum, and instructional tasks, and she believed her principal was an effective mentor. In her next position, Katy was responsible for curriculum and instruction only. She described her first mentor principal:

She taught me so much because, what she did for me was, she explained the thought process behind her decisions. She communicated with the two assistant principals. She was constantly teaching why she did what she did and why she made the decision she had. She would give us background, she would have us look way ahead, taught us how to be that visionary kind of person and think about what is going to impact and how’s that going to look.

Subtheme 3C: Differences between principal and assistant principal responsibilities.

Principal job responsibilities are broader in scope and carry more weight than assistant principal job responsibilities. This subtheme was created based on the statements that participants provided about their understandings of the different roles of principals and assistant principals. Principals are in middle management positions because they are positioned between their superiors at central district offices who want their directives followed and their teachers, who are doing the classroom teaching work.

Kara described seeing early on as a principal why her own mentor principal had difficulty making time for classroom observations. “I get pulled in so many directions as principal,” Kara said. As an assistant principal, Kara was largely responsible for disciplinary issues, but was able to be in the classrooms if there were few disciplinary issues that required response. As principal, “I feel like I have to be in 50 places at once,” she said.

Mark felt the pressure of a heavier workload as principal than as assistant principal. “The biggest difference between assistant principal and principal is a lot more e-mails,” he shared. He described working longer hours at home and on the weekend and answering, “a ton more e-mails.” He noted that as a naturally competitive person, his job is always on his mind. As assistant principal, he was able to leave his job at the end of the day and stop thinking about it, but as principal, “You have to think about the end goal, so it’s constantly on your mind.” He acknowledged he struggles to turn this off, in part because he always has to be aware of everything happening in the school to be accountable to his own bosses. He was also acutely aware of the pressures related to the hiring process, a duty he was tasked with for five new teachers in his 1st year as principal.

Adam shared his struggle to get everything done as principal, because he felt that “everybody wants a piece of your time.” He perceived that he had more time to complete his responsibilities as assistant principal and so “learning how to manage time in the right way is a big thing that I’ve noticed as principal,” he said. He continued:

As an assistant principal you are not the one making the call, you are not the one who has to answer to teachers and parents and your upper level administration. You know when it’s on you, that’s where the buck stops. The biggest adjustment for me has been learning how to manage time and do it effectively and still be effective in my role as being an instructional leader, like planning for PLCs. Trying to juggle that has been a learning curve for me.

Like Adam, Kara used the phrase, “the buck stops here” when describing the difference between her roles as assistant principal and principal. She shared, “I could feel the stress level in me rise as soon as I took over as principal because, as assistant principal, it wasn’t on my shoulders.” Now, her role is to make those difficult decisions, which requires possessing “the drive to make sure that you’re always at the top of your game.”

Subtheme 3D: Community and school building. In this subtheme, participants discussed their responsibilities as principals to build community in and around the school and improve school wide. Adam strives to achieve a better school culture, because “this school has had three different principals in the last 3 years.” Building trust and community is a central goal for him as principal. This goal extends to the community as well, as Adam described working on “developing our culture with the community.” His school is located in a small, country area in the state, and the building, as he described is “a neat place because it is an old school.” Because his town has a community feel, he shared that he wanted to find ways to improve upon that.

Joe’s insights into his principal job duties are focused on building-wide expectations. In the 1st year of a principalship, “you can get away with a lot of mistakes,” said Joe. In the 2nd year, however, superiors may be less forgiving of principals. He described the challenges of budgeting, wishing that he had received more mentorship on this when he was assistant principal. As principal, his leadership team planned over the summer and set behavior expectations, ensuring teacher buy-in. Adam believed that “investment on the front end paid huge dividends.” His team now meets throughout the year to revisit those expectations, and he said that all of this investment has “set the tone and just built a good culture around the building.” Adam also described steps he has taken as principal to combat behavioral concerns that student present with. He said:

Playground and recess was one of those busy times when referrals went through the roof, but now it’s manageable. District personnel has a team of people that came in and helped with PBIS, Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports, and RTI, and they are focusing a lot of our Tier I strategies. Tiers II and III we’ve got mastered. The preventative and proactive way is to pay attention to those Tier I strategies. Doing that has paid huge dividends.

Wanda described most important job responsibility as “ensuring safety for the kids and also making sure that all my teachers do what’s best for all kids.” She believed that teachers and

administrators must be respectful and hold each other accountable. When she became principal, she used team-building activities to get to know her staff. What she learned from this was that she did not have anyone analytical on her staff, so no one had looked at the school's data or developed a performance plan based on these data. However, she stated,

This year we met with instructional support and came up with a year-long professional development plan. We taught our teachers to know what they had to look at, what is important, what a common assessment is, what an essential standard is, what an essential question is, what we are going to do with the data we collect and how that data is going to drive our instruction. We started unpacking the standards and doing some job-embedded professional development. The teachers now understand why data is important.

Joe articulated the complexity inherent in a principal's job. No matter the training, he said, "you don't really know that role as a principal until you walk into it." He felt the difficulty of moving from assistant principal to principal in terms scope, which changed from small to "super big," where, as principal, "you have to have your eyes on everything." He felt the pressure of responsibility and described it this as, "Your name might as well be on the front of that building because that is who you are, that is who you represent." In the eyes of the community, Joe believed the principal was the school, and the assistant principal did not carry this same kind of clout.

Findings by Research Question

This section summarizes the data collected from interviews in the context of the research questions that guided this study. The themes of leadership development, job responsibilities, and relationships were evident in each research question.

Question 1. How are school districts mentoring and training assistant principals to prepare them for future principalships? Leadership succession planning is integral to school districts in order to ensure the most talented candidates succeed to the principalship (Turnbull et al., 2015). Six of the principals interviewed worked with two different principals during the time they served in the

role of assistant principal. Serving with more than one principal allowed them to have different leadership experiences because leadership styles varied, years of experience varied, and they experienced different socioeconomic student populations.

Participants described the training their school districts provided to them when they served as assistant principals as being specific to their job responsibilities. Adam shared, “There were different programs I participated in and so the district would send me to trainings [for those programs].” Kara said, “My district didn’t provide any training other than things I needed to know, like for testing.” Three participants went to the Assistant Principal Institute with the Leadership Academy while their principals were also in the Leadership Academy. Their school districts sent them to get everybody going in the same direction and speaking a common language. They learned a lot of strategies about creating and effecting change in their schools.

One participant described a directive given by the associate superintendent to his principal to make sure that he knew everything that his principal knew. She charged his principal with making sure that his duties included more than just bus duty and discipline. She wanted him to participate in the school’s budget specifically and to be partners with him in all things. Another participant described an assistant principal meeting his superintendent quarterly with assistant principals in the district who aspire to the principalship. The superintendent offers this voluntary training to cover topics of his choice that will give him an opportunity to not only give the assistant principals information but also allow him to get to know the assistant principals better. This district was the only 1 out of the 5 in the study to have a pipeline for promotion.

Question 2. How do novice principals perceive their roles regarding the career development of assistant principals? The participants described a responsibility they feel to prepare their assistant principals for the principalship. They focused on being open and

transparent with their assistant principals with everything possible. They noted that there were some things they could not share with their assistant principals. A common goal was to allow their assistant principals to experience as much as possible so that when those assistant principals were promoted to the principalship, they were fully prepared.

Three participants described the value of attending the Leadership Academy as principals while their assistant principals were also going through the Leadership Academy. They discussed the importance of speaking the same language and being on the same page with instructional strategies. Two participants discussed their career aspirations and how they are preparing their assistant principals to take over their schools whenever they promote to a central office position. They do not want there to be any question about who should take over the school, so they work closely with their assistant principals and communicate everything they are doing and why they are doing it.

A common theme was how the principals communicate their relationships with their assistant principals to their school staff. They make sure the teachers know that they are communicating about everything so that their teachers do not try to play one against the other. They also ensure their assistant principal receives hands-on training to experience everything. The participants perform teacher evaluations with their assistant principals to discuss evidence and ensure they agree on ratings.

Participants mentioned their desire to broaden their assistant principals' perspectives by helping them see the big picture of a school with budgets, hiring, and scheduling. Giving their assistant principals experience with budgets was mentioned specifically because several participants did not feel like they had been given enough exposure to budgets when they served as assistant principals. Participants also described committees that their assistant principals

oversee that provide them leadership responsibilities. Leadership is cultivated in their assistant principals through conversations about expectations. All participants are mentoring their assistant principals based on experiences they learned from, as well as experiences they wished they had, when they were assistant principals. Participants discussed giving their assistant principals opportunities to do more than they did when they served as assistant principals because there were areas they would have enjoyed having more exposure to prior to being in the principal role. Participants explained that they must constantly communicate with their assistant principals because they must explain why they are making the decisions they are making. They felt like they had to explain the thought process behind their decisions to their assistant principals.

Question 3. How do novice principals perceive their leadership practices have been influenced by their past experiences as assistant principals? Each of the novice principals in this study stated they used a variety of leadership strategies that they learned from their previous roles as an assistant principal in their current roles. They set expectations, create a vision, and established procedures for students and staff. They also had good communication with students, staff, parents, and the community. In order to have a positive school culture, they gain teacher buy-in. As assistant principals, they learned how to disaggregate data in order to lead PLCs and plan intentional response-to-intervention strategies for struggling learners. They also learned how to write 504 Plans for students who have a disability under the law and need accommodations to ensure their academic success as well as how to refer students for special education when RTI strategies did not meet the students' needs.

Participants learned the importance of having a clear vision for a school by working with principals who exercised their roles as instructional leaders to ensure quality instruction in their

schools. They also highlighted the value of collaboration they learned during their assistant principal experience. Their principals influenced staff members to work together to improve teaching and learning. Their principals also taught them that they cannot reach their school goals alone; rather, they must build a team and share responsibility. They witnessed their principals developing teacher leaders within their schools to build a collaborative learning community. Their principals modeled finding the expertise, skills, and abilities of their teachers and cultivating those. They also saw principals and teachers as lifelong learners, participating together in meaningful professional development.

Participants reflected on learning how to use data to make instructional decisions for PLCs, for 504 plans, and for RTI. The assistant principal role was their first experience with teacher evaluations. They learned the importance of building relationships and establishing trust with teachers so that when they visited classrooms, teachers were open to their feedback.

Participants also discussed how important the assistant principal role was for them in gaining specific curriculum knowledge for an entire school because their instructional responsibilities were narrowly focused on a single classroom prior to that administrative experience. Even though some participants described their assistant principal role as disciplinary, they noted their main goal was to help students succeed. The assistant principal role also taught the participants trustworthiness. They learned to deal with sensitive information in an honest and discreet manner.

Summary

Qualitative analysis of eight in-depth interviews was conducted to identify thematic units that illuminate the experiences of principals as they described how their previous roles and responsibilities as assistant principals inform their current practices. These thematic units

included relationships, leadership development, and job responsibilities. Subthemes included relationships with students, relationships with mentor principals, building a leadership team, personal leadership development, building assistant principal leadership, providing training opportunities for assistant principals, help for assistant principals, assistant principal responsibilities, principal responsibilities, differences between principal and assistant principal responsibilities, and responsibilities as principal.

This chapter presented the findings that emerged from a phenomenological qualitative study focusing on the experiences, opportunities, roles, and responsibilities novice principals had while serving as assistant principals and the perceived influence of these experiences as preparation for the role of principal. Participant profiles and career paths were presented. Survey and interview data obtained from eight novice principals were used to gain an accurate and deep understanding of how duties performed while serving as assistant principals inform and influence the leadership practices of current principals. The findings were presented both thematically and by research question. In Chapter 5, the results of this study are summarized and implications discussed. Recommendations for future research are also identified.

Chapter 5: Summary, Discussion, and Future Research

Introduction

A problem inherent in school organization is the absence of structures geared to the socialization and support of assistant principals (Houchens, 2012; Oleszewski et al., 2012). This phenomenological study presents the experiences of eight novice elementary school principals as they described how their leadership practices are informed and influenced by their past roles and responsibilities as assistant principals. A qualitative study was used to elucidate these perceptions in depth. Elementary school principals in Central Arkansas were the focus of this study. Arkansas, like many states, is facing a shortage of qualified administrators (Eadens et al., 2011). The lack of suitable candidates for the position of building principal is a concern for many school districts. This reflective study of principal succession identified relationships between expectations and realities of the principalship as well as formal and informal socialization experiences for the position.

This study was driven by the following research questions:

- Research Question 1: How are school districts mentoring and training assistant principals to prepare them for future principalships?
- Research Question 2: How do novice principals perceive their roles regarding the career development of assistant principals?
- Research Question 3: How do novice principals perceive their leadership practices have been influenced by their past experiences as assistant principals?

Review of the Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the question of how, or whether, the role of assistant principal prepares job incumbents to be effective principals. A phenomenological approach was selected as the best method for exploring the perceptions and experiences of novice principals. The researcher invited novice principals to elaborate on the meanings they ascribed to the role of assistant principal. The researcher analyzed data for key statements, units of meaning, textual and structural description, and description that portrayed the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The phenomenological approach allowed the researcher to gain insight into the experiences of the participants. Arkansas has a shortage of qualified school administrators who are both willing and qualified to be principals (Eadens et al., 2011). Knowledge of the experiences of novice principals who had been promoted from assistant principal should help to illuminate the nature of the assistant principalship, the extent to which it prepares assistant principals to assume school leadership, and the succession from assistant principal to building principal.

Only those principals who had experienced organizational socialization as assistant principals and had been promoted from assistant principal to building principal were considered for this study. Eight purposefully selected early-career principals serving at different elementary schools in Arkansas were selected to participate. Principal participants, four men and four women, engaged individually in 1-hour digitally recorded interviews in which they were asked open-ended questions. The researcher reviewed the data against emergent themes and literature. The researcher also scrutinized data for discrepant evidence and reviewed and discussed findings with professional colleagues. Triangulation was a useful technique for understanding different

perspectives of the topic; the researcher accomplished this through analysis of interview transcripts from the eight different school sites.

Knowledge gained from this study may be used to guide the development of systematic approaches to the professional and organizational socialization of elementary school principals. Such a strategic approach would assure that principals are equipped to develop assistant principals' leadership capabilities through techniques such as mentoring, coaching, training, and providing them with opportunities to exercise leadership. With input from principals who previously served as assistant principals, the two school administrative positions can be effectively aligned to maximize leadership talent at the school level.

Summary of Findings

This study's three research questions guided the researcher to several key findings. The findings were organized into three themes: relationships, leadership development, and job responsibilities. A summary of the findings from interviews with novice principals that were studied is provided below.

The professional trajectories of most of the principals in this study were similar; they began their careers as classroom teachers, served as assistant principals, and then advanced to the principalship. In addition to classroom teaching experience, some of the participants in this study also had experience as a counselor, Reading Recovery teacher, paraprofessional, or coach. Through those pre-administrative experiences, novice principals acquired knowledge of effective teaching practices. Additionally, to move into an administrative position, a leadership degree from a university preparation program had to be earned. Classes on law and finance were essential for understanding leadership.

While serving in the role of assistant principal, participants described their responsibilities as being primarily determined by the principals they worked with. Tasks ranged in nature from managerial to instructional. Some of the principals acted as mentors and coaches for the participants to ensure they had leadership opportunities that would prepare them for the principalship. Participants who had collaborative relationships with their principals while serving as assistant principals felt valued and satisfied in that role.

Succession planning for several of the districts was as informal as superintendents asking principals if they felt like their assistant principals were ready to be principals. In other districts, superintendents placed more talented assistant principals with principals who would mentor and train them. One district's succession planning consisted of a voluntary quarterly meeting between aspiring assistant principals and the superintendent. The superintendent used this training as an opportunity to not only provide information to the assistant principals but also to get to know them better. This district was the only 1 out of the 5 districts in the study to have a pipeline for promotion. Six of the principals interviewed worked with two different principals during the time they served in the role of assistant principal. Serving with more than one principal allowed them to have different leadership experiences because leadership styles varied, years of experience varied, and they experienced different socioeconomic student populations.

Leadership development of assistant principals is perceived as the principal's responsibility. Participants reported supporting their assistant principals by being as transparent as they can be as they model aspects of leading a school. Participants reported that the only leadership development provided by their school districts was training specific to their assistant principal job responsibilities. One out of the 5 districts under study sent their assistant principals to the Assistant Principal Institute at the Arkansas Leadership Academy, while their principals

participated in the Master Principal Program. The purpose of the Master Principal Program is to provide opportunities to expand the knowledge-base and leadership skills of public-school participants. Upon completion of the three-phase program, principals achieve Master Principal Designation and the Arkansas Department of Education pays bonuses annually for 5 years. Assistant principals whose building principals are graduates of Phase I or more of the Master Principal Program are then encouraged to participate in the Assistant Principal Institute. The Assistant Principal Institute offers learning experiences to increase the leadership capacity of assistant principals and positively impact their schools' learning environments and student achievement. Participants indicated that the Assistant Principal Institute allowed assistant principals to have standardized education and allowed for better communication with principals.

Assistant principal job responsibilities include state testing, special education policies, and 504 procedures. The participants identified discipline as the main job responsibility of assistant principals. Additionally, some of their principals allowed them to lead school-wide committees, including Response to Intervention and PLCs. Through these committees, the participants learned how to use data to drive interventions for struggling students. However, participants expressed a need for more exposure to curriculum, hiring, and budgets before becoming a principal because those are key responsibilities for principals but were not included in training for assistant principals.

Additionally, participants voiced higher degrees of satisfaction when their principals explicitly defined their expectations for assistant principals. They appreciated open communication about teacher observations, student needs, and parenting meetings, among other things. Once open communication and expectations were established, assistant principals and principals could better work together toward shared goals. Effective principals helped their

assistant principals increase their communication skills and helped them feel more comfortable working with others.

Participants expressed surprise regarding how different the roles of principal and assistant principal are. Participants reported thinking about school all the time, working longer hours, answering more e-mails, and making many more decisions upon moving into the role of principal. However, participants described the assistant principal role as primarily supportive of their principal. Participants said that when people think of the school, they think of the principal. They summed up the responsibility of being a principal by noting that it is only the principal's name attached to a school in Arkansas, which was perceived as negative for both principals and assistant principals, as principals are considered solely responsible for schools' successes and failures, despite the roles assistant principals may play.

Findings Related to the Literature

The three themes: relationships, leadership development, and job responsibilities organized the findings from this research. These findings are related here to the literature in Chapter 2. Together, the findings from this study and extant literature on assistant principal development advance knowledge and understanding of the trajectories assistant principals take when advancing to principalships and the role of principal mentorship in this process.

Research suggests an overwhelming majority of principals and superintendents believe that the best strategy for advancing effective school leadership lies in promoting promising assistant principals and teachers (Coggshall et al., 2008). In this study, the novice principals reported the importance of their mentor principals and central office personnel seeing their potential while serving as assistant principals as a catalyst to being promoted to the role of principal. This was highlighted by a participant's experience of being placed in the role of

interim principal twice while serving as an assistant principal. His superintendent had him step in for 3 months when a principal suffered an illness, and again the following year when a principal had to step away for an extended period. His superintendent was so impressed with his performance during both of those interim experiences that he promoted him from assistant principal to principal shortly thereafter.

Novice principals in this study reported beginning their 1st year as principal with no formal mentor and having no clear direction from their supervisors. They relied on their experiences, good and bad, from serving as assistant principals to run their own schools. This finding was consistent with previous research indicating that traditionally, principals were placed in a leadership position and left to learn for themselves how to perform their job (Gray et al., 2007; Hall, 2008). This proved true for the participants in this study as well. While they were still learning their new roles and responsibilities, they were thrust into mentoring their own assistant principals.

Since the mid-20th century, principals have been delegating administrative, supervisory, and support tasks to their assistant principals (Muijs & Harris, 2003). The principals in this study reported that they determine the leadership opportunities for their assistant principals. Though their districts may have set some assistant principal job expectations, ultimately the principals decided their day-to-day responsibilities of their assistant principals. All the principals felt an obligation to ensure their assistant principals would be qualified to apply for principal jobs in the future. The approach they took regarding that career development varied from delegating discipline and managerial tasks to allowing their assistant principals to participate in the leadership development of teachers.

Participants in this study expressed that they had little-to-no input in their leadership and professional development experiences while serving as assistant principals. Researchers on this topic have suggested that by being under the direction of a principal who shapes their professional role, assistant principals do not have the opportunity to insist that they act as instructional leaders (Chan et al., 2003; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Muijs & Harris, 2003). Despite recognizing they had no input on these experiences as assistant principals, they continue this cycle now as principals. As novice principals, participants did not seek input from their assistant principals as to what leadership opportunities or training they would like to participate in.

The assistant principalship is often described as a profession that discourages risk taking and innovation. Enforcing social and organizational norms has been a defining feature of the assistant principal's role since its inception (Glanz, 1994). Educators today receive mixed messages. They are told to be innovators and change leaders while at the same time they are subjected to external accountability mandates that impinge on the professional autonomy of teachers and school leaders alike. As assistant principals, the participants worked to be supportive and helpful to their principals. Moving into the principal role required them to no longer be followers and instead become leaders of a school. All the novice principals reported feeling noticeably more pressure in the role of principal than when they were assistant principals. They discussed delegating tasks and wanting to fully trust their assistant principals, but knew that they were ultimately responsible for every decision that was made. This put pressure on novice principals to carefully select what they allowed their assistant principals to do. Once the assistant principals had transitioned to the role of principal, they more fully understood the reasoning behind their principals' actions when they were serving as assistant principals.

As part of a continuum of professional growth and development, Barnett et al. (2012) recommended mentoring and job-embedded professional development. Hutton (2012) viewed job-embedded professional development as essential to prepare assistant principals for the principalship. Leithwood and Azah (2014) recommended that leadership training be tailored to fit the specific characteristics of each school and community, as well as the unique learning needs of the individual school leader. Consistent with that recommendation, the principals in this study experienced leadership training that benefited their school districts while they served as assistant principals. Each school district was committed to providing their assistant principals with the necessary training to successfully carry out their job responsibilities. However, only one of the districts had a formal plan for assistant principals desiring upward promotion. Assistant principals who wanted to promote to the role of principal were expected to meet quarterly after school with the superintendent in an effort for him to get to know them better and for them to better understand his expectations for the principals in the district.

Singletary-Dixon (2012) recommended mentorships for assistant principals; in particular, mentoring programs that are designed by assistant principals or in which they have input. District leaders who participated in the Principal Pipeline Initiative expressed a desire to deploy assistant principals strategically, as “both apprenticeship and proving ground for future principals” (Turnbull et al., 2015, p. 15). None of the participants in this study had any input in who mentored them or what they learned when they were serving as assistant principals. In fact, several of the participants noted that they were placed with principals who were thought of as excellent leaders but who did not make good mentors. Research suggests effective mentoring programs include a formal structure, mutually defined roles and responsibilities, careful attention to the selection and training of mentors, and a good match between the mentor and protégé (Gray

et al., 2008; Hall, 2008). There has been no systematic endeavor to describe and evaluate principal mentoring programs and almost no attention to mentoring assistant principals apart from studies including lead principals and assistant principals (Hall, 2008). The principals in this study received no formal mentoring while serving as assistant principals. Rather, the principals to whom they were assigned dictated their job responsibilities and determined their professional development. Now in the role of principal they are largely determining the responsibilities of their assistant principals without any formal mentor training.

Finally, this study's findings indicated no evidence of support for coleadership. Principals were the bosses and assistant principals were their subordinates. However, according to Eckman (2007), in view of the escalating complexity of the principal's role there is increasing support for coleadership. Through a search of the NASSP database and other online sources, Eckman discovered 170 individuals serving as coprincipals in public and private elementary, middle, and high schools in the United States. Eckman noted that the coprincipal's emphasis on being "teachers of teachers" is illustrative of the value they ascribe to the instructional leadership function. Despite Eckman's findings of increasing support for coleadership between principals and assistant principals, the results of this study did not indicate a similar level of support. Instead, the results of this study showed that district personnel expect principals to be the leaders of their buildings and assistant principals as second in command.

Implications for Practice

Despite an abundance of research on educational leadership, there is very little literature pertaining specifically to assistant principals. In many respects, the role has evolved from its roots in supervision, school discipline, and attendance. The assistant principal role has evolved into cultivating the school culture both inside the school building as well as within the

community; building a leadership team of teachers and administrators; developing relationships with students, teachers, district leaders, and mentor principal; and having a shared vision with their building principal. However, in one respect the role has not changed: in most schools: the principal determines the assistant principal's responsibilities, which plays a decisive role in whether the assistant principal is prepared to assume the principalship.

School districts might benefit from leadership succession planning that better prepares future leaders by revising aspiring leadership programs to prepare both mentors and protégés. In contrast to the traditional practice of allowing principals to shape the responsibilities of their assistant principals, district leaders should reframe the assistant principalship and deploy assistant principals strategically to ensure principals regard their assistants as valuable partners and share leadership responsibilities with them. Hall (2009) suggested that district leaders provide assistant principals with extensive opportunities for formal mentoring by placing them with experienced principals who are excellent leaders and mentors. Features of an effective mentoring program include a formal structure, mutually-defined roles and responsibilities, careful attention to the selection and training of mentors, and a good match between the mentor principal and assistant principal (Gray et al., 2008; Hall, 2008). School districts can establish a successful mentoring program to include shaping a vision of academic success for all students through curriculum and instruction, goal setting, community outreach, developing leadership capacity in others, communication skills, personal growth, time management skills, self-reflection, strategic planning, and organizational culture.

This study provides scholars with an understanding of how the roles of principal and assistant principal are connected. The participants described the scope of the work, time, priorities, and accountability as all being different when serving in the assistant principal and

principal roles. School districts could provide more leadership development opportunities for assistant principals to help them with the gaps the participants described related to their preparation for the principalship. District leaders and principals need to ensure assistant principals have opportunities to positively affect student achievement and feel prepared to assume the role of principal.

The information in this study may prove beneficial to the field of education through helping school districts improve the socialization experiences of assistant principals. Eight novice principals shared their experiences working as assistant principals and how those experiences prepared them for principalship. Their perspectives give other educators information to consider for their own leadership succession initiatives. The following list represents recommendations directly from the participants in the study.

- District preparation initiatives for assistant principals should include formal succession plans with cohorts, job shadowing, and mentoring.
- District leaders should determine the responsibilities of assistant principals and deploy them strategically by selecting principals who are qualified and willing to mentor an assistant principal.
- District leaders should work with principals to accurately determine the work needed to cultivate the leadership of assistant principals by capturing data points from school improvement goals; school performance data from state assessment scores; and surveys from parents, teachers, and students.

- Mentor principals and district leaders should use the assistant principalship to develop networking skills because district politics plays a powerful role in the upward promotion of assistant principals.
- Mentor principals and district leaders should solicit input from assistant principals regarding how they perceive their roles and their needs and preferences for leadership development.
- Mentor principals and district leaders should give assistant principals the opportunity to engage in everything the principal does.

Recommendations for Future Research

According to Marshall and Hooley (2006), the assistant principal position represents the inception of a socialization process that is likely to culminate in a principalship or superintendency. Research has shown that most assistant principals aspire to become principals (Chan et al., 2003; Edwards, 2010; Singletary-Dixon, 2012; Turnbull, Riley, & MacFarlane, 2013). Principals and superintendents overwhelmingly support the promotion of promising assistant principals and teachers as the best strategy for cultivating a force of highly effective school leaders (Cogshall et al., 2008). However, assistant principals frequently lack the knowledge, skills, and confidence to assume the leadership role because they were not sufficiently prepared by their experience as vice principals. Mentoring, coaching, internships (or apprenticeships), job-embedded professional development, and ongoing opportunities for professional learning are essential components of exemplary leadership development programs (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). However, the preliminary results of the Principal Pipeline Initiative show that even projects that integrate these strategies can fail to produce the desired results, presumably because of how they are implemented (Turnbull et al., 2015). Soliciting

input from current assistant principals regarding how they perceive their roles and their needs and preferences for leadership development may improve the quality of assistant principal leadership development. Assistant principals play a critical role in schools and school improvement and warrant more research attention.

This study sought to fill the gap in knowledge regarding socialization experiences of assistant principals. This study was designed to explore the succession of elementary school principals through the experiences and perspectives of novice elementary school principals who had previously served as assistant principals. As cited in the limitations, a small, nonrandom sample was obtained for analysis in this study, which limited the generalizability of the results to other populations. Future research conducted in this area should use a larger sample size of novice principals and seek to obtain participants in elementary and secondary districts across the state. Future research should also compare school district succession plans across the state of Arkansas to discover how they are developing future leaders. Using a quantitative approach to study a large group of current assistant principals could help quantify their perceived needs and preferences for leadership development.

Limitations

The study was restricted to the experiences and perceptions of eight building principals from elementary schools in five Central Arkansas school districts. By design, qualitative research involves a small number of purposefully chosen participants whose experiences are not necessarily representative of the larger population or professional group. School level (elementary or secondary) affects the workload and support sources of principals (Leithwood & Azah, 2014). Furthermore, elementary schools often have a collegial and informal atmosphere. Therefore, the findings may not generalize beyond the elementary school level.

Interview data have limitations, including the possibility of participants censoring thoughts or otherwise limiting the amount of information they are willing to share. From a personal standpoint, the researcher served as an elementary school assistant principal for 2 years prior to becoming an elementary school principal. Thus, despite deliberate efforts to minimize any subjective bias, the findings may inadvertently reflect researcher bias.

Conclusion

Reflections made by novice principals participating in this study clearly indicate that their leadership practices are informed and influenced by their past experiences as assistant principals. As a result of on-the-job experiences as well as mentorship with their principals, the participants studied felt comfortable working with others and building relationships with both adults and students. They build strong leadership teams by enlisting teacher leaders to improve school-wide teaching and learning. They cultivate leadership in their assistant principals by giving them opportunities to engage in everything they do. They take advantage of teachable moments with their assistant principals just like their principals did with them when they were assistant principals. The assistant principal role taught the participants trustworthiness. They deal with sensitive information in an honest and discreet manner.

Assistant principal roles and responsibilities were identified and defined through concrete examples provided by the participants. As assistant principals they were expected to muster teacher buy-in for schoolwide initiatives. They worked collaboratively with their principals on school culture, teacher evaluation, student interventions, PLCs, and instructional leadership tasks. They were responsible for discipline, standardized testing, special education, 504, and scheduling. They learned how to manage a school building. They highlighted specific tasks and duties they believed would have benefitted them in preparation for the principalship. These

include curriculum, budgeting, and hiring. It is clear that the participants perceive assistant principals are never fully prepared to assume the role of principal. Although the small sample size of this study prevents the researcher from making generalizations about the assistant principal role as preparation for the principalship, it does provide the reader with insights into the vast differences of their roles and responsibilities.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent

I, _____, agree to participate in the research study titled “Examining the phenomenon of elementary school principal succession through the perspectives and experiences of novice principals.” This research is being conducted by Dayna K. Lewis (University of Arkansas). I understand that my participation is voluntary. First contact is expected to take place in September, 2016, and the expected last contact will be in November, 2016. I can refuse to participate, or stop participating at any time, without giving any reason and without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I can ask to have all of the information about me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the experiences, opportunities, and roles novice principals had while serving as assistant principals at elementary schools in Arkansas; of particular importance is the perceived influence of these accounts on how prepared they felt to assume such a pivotal leadership role. The data sought will assist in contributing to scholarly research regarding the views on the role of the assistant principal in preparation for the role of principal.

If I volunteer to take part in this study, I may be asked to do the following things:

- Be personally interviewed up to two times, with the audiotaped interview lasting approximately one hour.
- Answer via telephone or email any follow-up questions the researcher may have.
- Review interview transcripts and findings for accuracy.

I will not receive any monetary compensation for participation in this study. Any compensation I receive is in the form of perceived benefit from possible feedback and insight gained by reviewing the said recordings. I understand that I may be asked to discuss sensitive topics and difficult subject matter; however, it is believed that the benefits of participating in this study outweigh any potential risks. Benefits of this research include contributing to the knowledge base of effective principal succession.

This study poses minimal to no risk to the participant. However, every precaution possible will be taken to assure that the rights and privacy of the participants are protected at all times. In addition, participants of this study will be permitted to review the transcripts of their interviews to assure accuracy of their words. Participants may choose to leave the study at any time, and may also request that any data collected from them not be used in the study.

Information collected will be stored in a secure, locked location. Unless required by law, no individually identifiable information about me will be publicly disseminated. Participants and their districts will be provided pseudonyms, and all persons or places to which they refer will also be provided pseudonyms. Where details might allow outsiders to intuit identities, such details will be removed or changed. Records of participant names will be kept in a separate file from any other documents. Audio files will be stored on a secured computer in the researcher's office in Conway, Arkansas. Only the researcher will have access to these files. Audio files will be destroyed following the completion of transcription. Confidentiality will be protected to the extent of the law and University policy. The investigator will answer any further questions about the research now or during the course of the project.

I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in this research project and understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records.

For questions about your rights as a research participant, please call or write:

Ro Windwalker, CIP

Institutional Review Board Coordinator

Research Compliance

University of Arkansas

109 MLKG Building

Fayetteville, Arkansas 72701-1201

Telephone (479) 575-2208

irb@uark.edu

August 26, 2016

Name of Researcher: Dayna K. Lewis

Researcher's Signature:

Researcher's Telephone:

Researcher's Email:

Faculty Advisor: John Pijanowski

Advisor's Email:

Name of Subject: _____

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Project: Examining the Phenomenon of Elementary School Principal Succession Through the Perspectives and Experiences of Novice Principals

Date _____

Time _____

Location _____

Interviewee _____

Interviewer Dayna K. Lewis

Introductory Protocol

To facilitate my note-taking, I would like to audio tape our conversations today. Explain consent form and have them sign it. Highlight that the researcher will be the only person privy to the tapes which will be destroyed after they are transcribed.

Notes to Interviewee:

Thank you for your participation. I have planned this interview to last no longer than one hour. During this time, I have several questions that I would like to cover. I believe your input will be valuable to this research and in helping grow all of our professional practice.

Introduction

You have been selected to participate in this project because you have been identified as a person who has a great deal to share about your experiences as both an assistant principal and principal of an elementary school. My research project as a whole focuses on the perceptions of novice principals regarding how their past experiences in the role of assistant principal informs and influences their leadership practices. This study aims to understand your experiences and

perceptions on the subject of principal succession through the role of assistant principal. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Interviewee Background

How long have you been in your present position? _____

How long were you in the role of assistant principal? _____

What degrees and certifications do you hold? _____

Tell me about your career path that brought you to the role of principal.

Interview Questions

- What characteristics do you believe are needed to be successful as a principal?
- Probe: What attributes or qualities do you possess that make you a successful principal?
- What do you think are the most important job requirements of your position?
- Probe: What are your duties and responsibilities?
- Probe: What tasks do you perform on any given day?
- Describe the major differences between being an assistant principal and being a principal.
- Probe: How does a typical day as a principal differ from your typical day as an assistant principal?
- Describe how your former principal facilitated your development as a leader.
- What experiences or opportunities did you have as an assistant principal that most prepared you for the principal's role?
- What are some memorable challenges you faced in your role as an assistant principal?

- What were you best prepared to deal with when you became a principal?
- What were you least prepared to deal with?
- What, if anything, would you change about your leadership training for the principal role?
- Are there experiences you wished you had as an assistant principal? If so, list them and describe how these experiences might have better prepared you for your current role as principal.
- What are the primary job responsibilities of your assistant principal?
- Probe: What are his/her duties?
- Probe: What tasks does he/she perform on any given day?
- How do you view your role in career development for your assistant principal?
- Probe: Is mentoring and building leadership capacity for your assistant principal part of your job description? Is it tied to your evaluation?
- Do you feel the experiences and opportunities your assistant principal is having under your leadership will have him/her prepared to assume the role of principal?
- Have your feelings about the assistant principal role changed since becoming a principal?
- Probe: Do you have your assistant principal performing the same kinds of tasks you performed when you were an assistant principal?

- Is there anything else that you believe would help me better understand how past experiences in the role of assistant principal informs and influences your leadership practices?

Post Interview Comments and/or Observations:

Interview will be transcribed and then sent to the interviewee for his/her review and approval.

A second shorter interview will be set up if the researcher needs clarification on anything.

Appendix C

E-mail Script

The following is the script for an email -to potential participants:

Dayna Lewis of the University of Arkansas is conducting a research study regarding the perceptions of novice principals regarding how their past experiences in the role of assistant principal informs and influences their current leadership practices and to explore the perceptions of veteran assistant principals regarding how their duties and responsibilities serve as learning opportunities for the principalship. You have been asked to participate in this project because you have been identified as a person who has a great deal to share about your experiences in a leadership role in an elementary school.

If you would like to participate, please let me know. You are not required to participate in this study but if you choose to participate, we will engage in one interview that will last no longer than one hour. Participation in this study will be confidential. There is no incentive or pay for participating, but you will probably enjoy talking with the researcher, and you will be able to assist her in communicating to school districts and universities potential professional development needs for assistant principals who aspire to become principals.

Dayna Lewis

Appendix D

Phone Script

The following is the script for a phone call to potential participants:

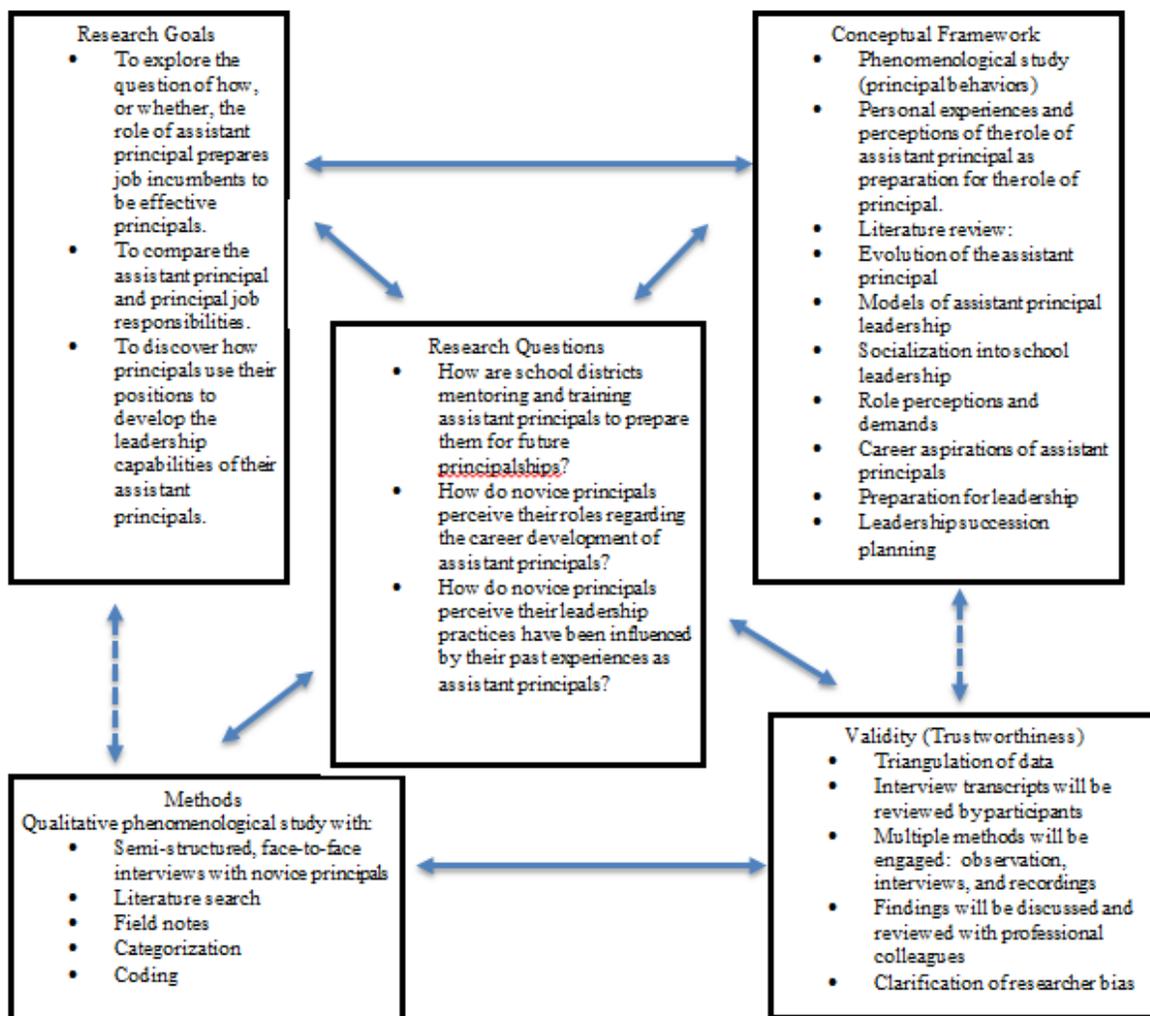
Hello, this is Dayna Lewis. I am a graduate student at the University of Arkansas. I am conducting a research study regarding the perceptions of novice principals regarding how their past experiences in the role of assistant principal informs and influences their current leadership practices and to explore the perceptions of veteran assistant principals regarding how their duties and responsibilities serve as learning opportunities for the principalship. You have been asked to participate in this project because you have been identified as a person who has a great deal to share about your experiences in a leadership role in an elementary school.

You are not required to participate in this study but if you choose to participate, we will engage in one interview that will last no longer than one hour. Participation in this study will be confidential. There is no incentive or pay for participating, but you will probably enjoy talking with the researcher, and you will be able to assist her in communicating to school districts and universities potential professional development needs for assistant principals who aspire to become principals. Would you be willing to participate in the study?

Dayna Lewis

Appendix E

Research Design of the Study



Based on Maxwell, J. A., 2013

Appendix F

IRB Approval



Office of Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board

September 8, 2016

MEMORANDUM

TO: Dayna Lewis
John Pijanowski

FROM: Ro Wlodawker
IRB Coordinator

RE: New Protocol Approval

IRB Protocol #: 16-08-058

Protocol Title: *Examining the Phenomenon of Elementary School Principal Succession Through the Perspectives and Experiences of Novice Principals*

Review Type: EXEMPT EXPEDITED FULL IRB

Approved Project Period: Start Date: 09/02/2016...Expiration Date: 09/01/2017

Your protocol has been approved by the IRB. Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. If you wish to continue the project past the approved project period (see above), you must submit a request, using the form *Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects*, prior to the expiration date. This form is available from the IRB Coordinator or on the Research Compliance website (<https://vprel.uark.edu/units/iscp/index.php>). As a courtesy, you will be sent a reminder two months in advance of that date. However, failure to receive a reminder does not negate your obligation to make the request in sufficient time for review and approval. Federal regulations prohibit retroactive approval of continuation. Failure to receive approval to continue the project prior to the expiration date will result in Termination of the protocol approval. The IRB Coordinator can give you guidance on submission times.

This protocol has been approved for 10 participants. If you wish to make any modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more than this number, you must seek approval prior to implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.