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Master Principals' Perceptions of the Impact of the Arkansas Leadership Academy's Master Principal Program on Leadership Practices, School Cultures and Student Achievement

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MASTER PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACT OF THE ARKANSAS
LEADERSHIP ACADEMY'S MASTER PRINCIPAL PROGRAM ON LEADERSHIP
PRACTICES, SCHOOL CULTURES, AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

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LEADERSHIP ACADEMY'S MASTER PRINCIPAL PROGRAM ON LEADERSHIP
PRACTICES, SCHOOL CULTURES, AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

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

A qualitative dissertation study was conducted to examine the impact of the Arkansas Leadership Academy's Master Principal Program through the perspective of those who have completed the entire program and attained designation as a Master Principal. A logic model for the Master Principal Program offered a context for the study. A review of relevant literature provided the identification of gaps in the research which included limited findings for a program comparable to the Master Principal Program. Research methods for this phenomenological study were explained. The research sample included Master Principals, as of 2011. Interviews and a focus group using collaborative tools for reflection were the primary data collection methods.

Five major findings emerged from this study as areas of impact of the MPP grounded both by the individuals' strong convictions and practice, and from the collection of information from all participants:

1. The universal and almost immediate reaction from principals when asked about their reaction to the MPP was, "It was the best professional development I have ever had!"
2. Significant changes in the performance of Master Principals' leadership practices occurred as a result of the knowledge and skills they acquired from Institute experiences.
3. A strong element in each principal's story was the culture change within their school toward one of collaborative stakeholder involvement, a commitment to continuous improvement and high expectations, and an increased sense of efficacy and respect.
4. Though never satisfied, all principals noted positive changes in student achievement results both during their participation in the MPP and since Designation as a Master Principal.

5. Though all principals expressed a humble attitude about their success and influence, increases in Master Principals' influence beyond the school was found at the local, state, and national levels.

Acquiring the knowledge and skills of effective leadership in all five performance areas of the MPP, with the support of work assignments to help them implement the learning, and a network for collegial reflection, summarizes the participant described take-away from the Master Principal Program. Synthesis of the findings indicated that it was the principals' implementation of their new knowledge and skills that, over time, changed school culture which subsequently had a positive impact on student learning.

This dissertation is approved for recommendation
to the Graduate Council.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY	1
Introduction to the Master Principal Program	1
Background and Context.....	3
Logic Model for the Master Principal Program	3
The situation.....	4
Assumptions and external factors.	5
Visual clues of the model.....	6
Contributing inputs.	7
Curriculum outputs.	9
Participant outputs and outcomes.	10
Impact.	12
Stakeholders.....	13
Problem Statement	13
Statement of Purpose and Research Questions.....	14
Research Approach.....	14
Assumptions.....	15
Conditions for Adult Learning.....	15
Change	16
Principal Efficacy.....	17
Effective Leadership	18
The Researcher.....	20
Rationale and Significance	21
Definitions of Key Terminology Used in This Study.....	23
CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW	26
Introduction and Overview	26
Summary of the Literature	28
Examples of Inquiry Methods.....	29
Comprehensive Professional Development Programs.....	31
Master Principal Program	34
Limitations of Methodology	35

Unresolved Questions	37
Addressing the Gaps	38
CHAPTER THREE - METHODOLOGY.....	41
Introduction and Overview	41
Theoretical Framework.....	43
Sample.....	44
Overview of Information Needed	47
Contextual	48
Demographic.....	49
Perceptual.....	49
Theoretical	49
Research Design.....	50
Data Collection	53
Data Analysis	58
Ethical Issues	61
Trustworthiness.....	64
Limitations	66
Timeline	67
CHAPTER FOUR – FINDINGS	69
Introduction.....	69
Summary of Research Participants	69
Overview of Major Findings.....	71
Roadmap of the Chapter	72
Finding One	72
Learning Activities and Tools.....	73
Reflective Practice	75
Relationships.....	77
Summary of Finding One.....	77
Finding Two.....	78
Shared Beliefs, Vision and Mission.....	78
Data-driven Decision Making and Strategic Planning.....	79

Capacity Building and Shared Leadership.....	80
Change	83
Summary of Finding Two.....	84
Finding Three.....	84
Stakeholder Involvement and Collaboration	84
Continuous Improvement.....	86
High Expectations and Efficacy.....	87
Relentlessly Respectful.....	88
Summary of Finding Three.....	90
Finding Four.....	90
Accountability Systems for Teaching and Learning.....	91
Results-Oriented	98
Student Achievement Gains.....	100
Summary of Finding Four.....	101
Finding Five	102
Local Influence	102
State Influence	103
National Influence.....	104
Summary of Finding Five	105
Chapter Summary	105
Leadership Practices	106
School Cultures.....	107
Living the mission, vision and beliefs.	107
Building and maintaining collaborative relationships.	108
Leading and managing change.....	110
Developing deep knowledge of teaching and learning.	111
Building and sustaining accountability systems.	111
Student Achievement	112
Conclusion	113
CHAPTER FIVE – ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS	115

Introduction to the Chapter	115
Analysis.....	116
Interpretation of the Findings.....	120
Creating and Living the Mission, Vision and Beliefs.....	121
Learning culture.....	121
Leadership culture.....	121
Collaborative culture.....	122
Leading and Managing Change	123
Depth.....	123
Spread.....	124
Sustainability.....	124
Shift of ownership.....	125
Developing Deep Knowledge about Teaching and Learning.....	126
Building and Maintaining Collaborative Relationships.....	127
Building and Sustaining Accountability Systems.....	128
Synthesis of the Findings	130
Chapter Summary	133
CHAPTER SIX - CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	135
Introduction.....	135
Conclusions.....	135
Conclusions from Finding 1.....	135
Conclusions from Finding 2.....	137
Conclusions from Finding 3.....	138
Conclusions from Finding 4.....	139
Conclusions from Finding 5.....	140
Implications.....	141
Final Thoughts	144
REFERENCES.....	147
APPENDICES.....	153
Appendix A Arkansas Leadership Academy Theory of System Change.....	154
Appendix B Master Principal Program Logic Model.....	155

Appendix C Arkansas Leadership Academy Partners	156
Appendix E Sample Section from the Leading and Managing Change Master Principal Program Rubric.....	160
Appendix F Master Principal Program Conceptual Scoring Framework	161
Appendix G Interview Protocol	162
Appendix H Focus Group Protocol.....	166
Appendix I Initial E-Mail Contact with Research Participants	169
Appendix J Informed Consent and Risk/Benefits Form for a Qualitative Research Project..	170
Appendix K Demographic Data of Research Participants and their Schools by Pseudonym	174
Appendix L ALA’s Hourglass Model.....	175
Appendix M ALA’s Rail Road Model.....	176
Appendix N Code Family	177
Appendix O Network of Codes.....	178
Appendix P Copyright Permission.....	179

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure 1.1 Visual Clues for the Master Principal Program Logic Model.....	7
Figure 1.2 Arkansas Leadership Academy Partners	8
Figure 1.3 Guskey's Five Levels of Evaluation	21
Table 3.1 Overview of Information Needed.....	48
Figure 3.1 Overview of Research Design.....	53
Figure 5.1 Sample Code Family	117
Figure 5.2 Sample Network of Codes.....	118
Figure 5.3 Co-occurrence Table	119
Figure 5.4 MPP Learning Changing Culture and Results.....	131

CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction to the Master Principal Program

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the impact of the Arkansas Leadership Academy's Master Principal Program through the perspective of those who have completed the entire program and attained designation as a Master Principal. The purpose of the Master Principal Program is to provide training programs and opportunities to expand the knowledge base and leadership skills of Arkansas' public school principals.

The Master Principal Program (MPP) was established by the 84th Arkansas General Assembly in the Second Extraordinary Session of 2003 and signed into law as Act 44 by the governor (An Act to Improve, 2004). Act 44 outlined the goals, target population, and financial incentives of the program which was developed and is administered by the Arkansas Leadership Academy (ALA). The rules and regulations for the program were subsequently promulgated by the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE). Appendix A is an unpublished document which shows the nested placement of the MPP in relation to the overall systems approach which the Arkansas Leadership Academy (ALA) takes to creating educational change (Arkansas Leadership Academy, 2006). Because of the success of ALA with Individual, Team, Teacher, Principal, and Superintendent Institutes, state funds were awarded to the Academy to design and implement the MPP. Each Arkansas General Assembly since 2004 has funded the program.

The Master Principal Program is intended to improve principal leadership in Arkansas through professional development and by identifying Master Principals who will serve as role models and serve high-needs schools. The professional development offered by the Master Principal Program consists of three phases, or years, for a total of 10 multi-day residential setting professional development institutes with work assignments between institutes for job-embedded

application of learning. Three to four institutes occur in each of the one-year phases for a cohort of principals. The participants must submit evidence of implementation to proceed through this three-year, state funded, voluntary program. Since change occurs over time and implementation in diverse school settings requires flexibility, the three-year program may be completed within a six-year window. In addition to the 265 principals who attended the ALA Principal Institute, a pre-cursor to the MPP, 370 principals have attended Phase I of the program since its inception in 2004, with total participation for Phase II during this period of 124, and 80 principals who have graduated from Phase III.

The rigorous Master Principal Designation assessment process may occur after the principal completes Phase III of the program based upon the principal's self-determined readiness to apply for designation. The assessment consists of:

- a comprehensive portfolio presenting evidence of effective principal and school practices as compared to the MPP's performance rubric,
- a thorough evaluation of student achievement trajectories on high stakes tests, and
- a three-day site visit by state and national educational leaders to capture the perceptions and actions of all stakeholders associated with the performance of the principal and the impact of that performance on the school's culture and achievement.

Seventeen Arkansas principals were designated as Master Principals in the period between 2007 and 2011. Due to the research-based expectations for effective practice and the rigorous evaluation process aligned to those expectations, as well as demonstrated gain in student achievement results, stakeholders can be confident that these principals have become more

effective and their schools more successful over the course of their participation in the MPP. They have been identified as role models for others in the state as was part of the intent of Act 44. Each of these principals experienced the common phenomenon of participation in the Master Principal Program. They did not experience it at the same time or as a cohort, but rather over several different years. How they each applied their learning from the program in their unique contexts over time has never been studied or publically shared. After five years of designating Master Principals and with a pool of seventeen different leaders in unique contexts, there is much to learn from hearing from the Master Principals themselves about the changes that occurred in their practice and in the schools they lead as a result of their participation in the MPP and their ongoing experience as a Master Principal. This phenomenological qualitative study addressed this gap in our collective knowledge base.

This chapter begins with an explanation of the Master Principal Program through a logic model to establish the background and context for the proposed study. A problem statement will demonstrate the “discrepancy between what we already know and what we want to know” (Bloomberg and Volpe, 2008, p. 34). A clear statement of purpose for the study and the research questions that guided the study will be provided. This chapter also includes an overview of the research approach, assumptions, and a description of the researcher in relation to the research. A rationale for the study, its significance, and definitions of key terminology will conclude the chapter.

Background and Context

Logic Model for the Master Principal Program

Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) describe contextual information as, “...knowledge about an organization’s history, vision, objectives, products or services, operating principles, and business

strategy” (p. 70). The Master Principal Program Logic Model (see Appendix B) provides a graphic representation of the inputs, outputs, and outcomes of the program as well as identifying some major assumptions and external influences. Fitzpatrick, Sanders, and Worthen (2011) stated that, “Logic models have developed as an extension of objectives oriented evaluation and are designed to fill in those steps between the program and its objectives” (p. 159). The overall design of the graphic and its contents was heavily influenced by the information and examples found on the University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension Program Development and Evaluation website (n.d.). Many resources from the Arkansas Leadership Academy contributed to this program theory model including data from internal documents, interviews with program staff, observation of the program in action both as a participant and staff member, and a review of the research underlying the program’s development and delivery. This logic model provides relevant background and context knowledge for the dissertation study.

The situation.

The Master Principal Program, through the use of research and best practices, delivers innovative approaches which connect principals from across the state into professional learning communities, develop leadership skills, and impact learning for adults and students in Arkansas schools. It is a three-phased program built on five areas of leadership which improve school performance through expansion of the influence of effective leadership with each phase. Successful completion of the program and the evidence based evaluation process results in designated Master Principals who demonstrate leadership taken to scale in the performance areas and an upward trajectory in student achievement. This information regarding the purposes and format of the MPP is stated in the situation section at the top of the Logic Model to assist with a contextual understanding of the program (see Appendix B).

Assumptions and external factors.

Assumptions and external factors that both influence and which may be influenced by the program are listed at the bottom of the graphic model. The two-way arrows on the graphic represent the reciprocal nature of these factors. The assumptions have been vetted through an ongoing process of research and reflection by the ALA staff, partners and participants. The four assumptions included on the Logic Model represent summary statements I created after conversations with ALA staff. These statements are:

- Effective instructional leaders (principals) are necessary for school success.
- Effective leaders have knowledge, skills and dispositions which can be taught, practiced, and learned.
- Effective leaders are life-long learners who demonstrate efficacy.
- All four dimensions of scale are necessary for sustainable impact.

The four dimensions of scale referred to in the last assumption are depth, spread, shift of ownership, and sustainability (Coburn, 2003). These four dimensions form the conceptual framework for the five levels of the Master Principal Rubric and will be discussed in a later section of this description of the logic model. The MPP Rubric describes practices along the way toward fully operationalized scale for each of the five performance areas of the program.

External factors must be constantly scanned and mapped to ensure the relevance of the MPP. Additionally, external factors may present opportunities or threats to the program. The arrow goes both ways, however. If the MPP has the desired impact, it may also be an influence on external factors. For example, the ALA staff and MPP rubric were an instrumental influence in the development of the National Board Certification for Principals. The five external factors

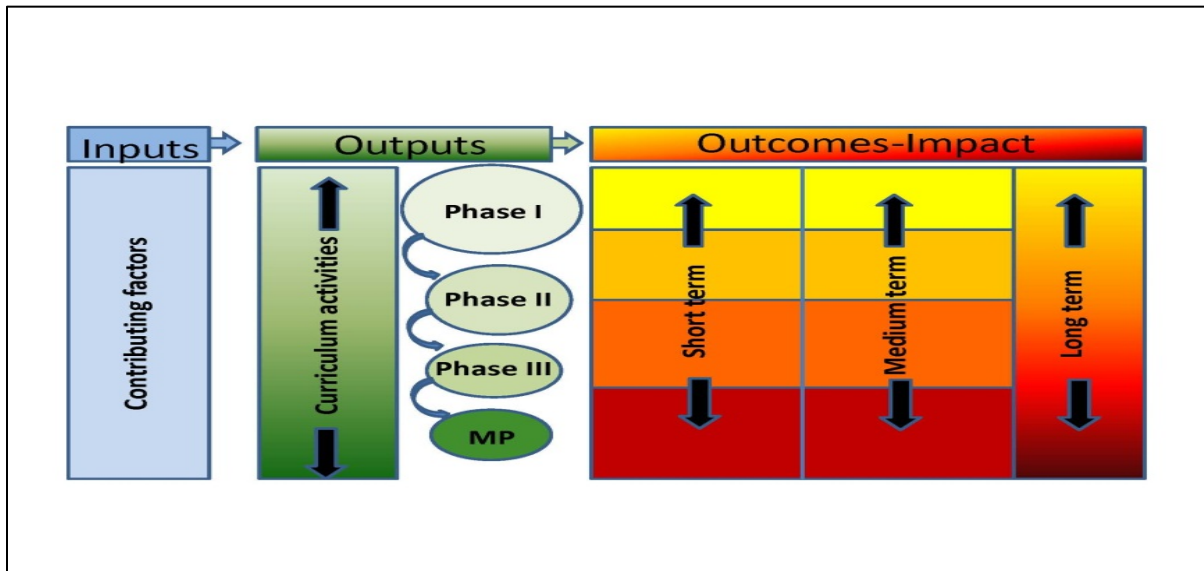
identified in conversation with the ALA staff important for understanding opportunities or threats and relevance are:

- Evolving national and state contexts.
- Legislation and regulations for ALA and other school improvement initiatives.
- Financial support from legislative, ADE, grants and local districts.
- Developing beliefs, research, and training for school leaders.
- Other emerging leadership development programs.

Visual clues of the model.

The graphic representation of the Logic Model (see Appendix B) provides visual clues to both program and implementation theories for the Master Principal Program. Figure 1.1 illustrates the use of these visual clues. Inputs, outputs, and outcomes-impact are represented in the diagram by three different colors, shapes, and directional arrows. The horizontal arrows indicate the flow from one part of the process to the next over time. The color variations in the outputs and outcomes-impact areas show degrees of intensity and scale of the activity and its expected impact. The vertical arrows in Figure 1.1 indicate that the outputs vary in intensity and depth from introductory to full implementation and adaptation. Outcomes also vary on a continuum from minimal impact to systems impact and positive results for student achievement. The size of the ovals represents the size of the annual cohort group for each phase of the program. Because the program design demands accountability for implementation before acceptance to the next phase, each cohort diminishes in size over time due to fewer numbers of applicants and the rigorous evaluation process. These areas shown in Figure 1.1 are represented with more specificity in the diagram of the model in Appendix B and will be discussed in detail in this narrative.

Figure 1.1 Visual Clues for the Master Principal Program Logic Model



Contributing inputs.

Contributing inputs, shown in the blue rectangle on the left side of the model, include a variety of historical, contextual, conditional, and philosophical elements. Legislators (An Act to Improve, 2004) established the Master Principal Program in response to the state’s need for improved principal leadership and student achievement results. Now led by graduates of the Master Principal Program, ALA has a twenty-year history and culture that has been experienced by over 10,000 institute participants. Evidence of success and a strong reputation of effective professional development practices led to the Academy’s influence in leadership development programs in other states and organizations (ALA, 2006).

The ALA Partner Organizations, which are represented in Figure 1.2, create support for the Academy and participants in numerous ways from learning activities to political influence. A complete list of ALA Partners may be found in Appendix C. Both Arkansas public schools and the Partner Organizations respond to and influence the context within which all flourish or fail. From its inception, the ALA was designed to drive positive systems change. For schools, that

includes changes in the leadership of the school board, superintendent, central office staff, principals, teachers, students, and local stakeholders. The Partners represent the external systems context. As the Partners change their own internal leadership practices, they conversely influence the context for the other Partners and the ALA.

Figure 1.2 Arkansas Leadership Academy Partners



Figure 1.2. Through a systems approach to leadership development and organizational change, Partners of the Arkansas Leadership Academy represent a diverse group of stakeholders interested in improving school leadership and student success in Arkansas' schools as well as the leadership capacity of their own organization. The arrows in the model indicate contextual influence rather than direct or linear impact. (ALA, 2012).

ALA core beliefs and systems change theory guide every aspect of the MPP and all institutes and programs offered by the Academy including

- Assistant Principal Institute
- Facilitator Training

- Master Principal Program
- School Support Program
- Superintendent Institute
- Teacher Leader Institute
- Team Leadership Institute

The research-based curriculum and constructivist approach to learning create an environment for professional growth that is unlike others the principals have encountered. The Master Principal Program Rubrics clearly describe what leadership looks like along the way toward proven successful practices in five performance areas. As a quick-response organization, the Academy and its programs are innovative and adaptive to the changing needs of educational leaders.

Curriculum outputs.

The curriculum activities portion of the outputs in this logic model name the five performance areas of the Master Principal Program.

- Creating and Living the Mission, Vision and Beliefs
- Leading and Managing Change
- Developing Deep Knowledge about Teaching and Learning
- Building and Maintaining Collaborative Relationships
- Building and Sustaining Accountability Systems

These performance areas capture the essence of best practices in educational leadership. Greater detail for each of the performance areas may be found in the Curriculum Framework in Appendix D (Arkansas Leadership Academy, 2011). The curriculum activities are designed to build the knowledge and skills of the principals in each of the performance areas through a spiral

curriculum. Implementation through a systems approach to change takes the principal and the school community closer to scale in each of the areas.

Admission to Phase I of the MPP is through an application and a process of selection based on factors such as state-wide representation, superintendent support, and the fiscal capacity of the Academy to accommodate a certain number of principals. That number has ranged from 34 to 65 each academic year with an average of 46 principals in Phase I. Participants meet at a conference retreat center four times during the year for a total of thirteen days. The learning activities are collaborative and constructivist in nature, based on the performance areas, and relevant to the real work of instructional leaders. Principals experience learning and working in new ways, are challenged to become reflective practitioners, and are expected to implement their knowledge and skills at their school through multiple, differentiated work assignments between sessions. Each phase of the program goes deeper in the performance areas and is intended to increase the principal's leadership capacity.

Participant outputs and outcomes.

The outcomes for Phase I participation are the acquisition and application of knowledge and skills related to the five performance areas, the development of reflective practices, and the introduction of culture-changing practices for themselves and their school. Doing so will support both individual and school development and build a culture that is focused on results, all leading to a higher performing school with improved student achievement. The graphic in the Logic Model (see Appendix B) uses the lightest color of the spectrum to indicate that, as research has established, substantial change takes three to five years. The expectations for implementation are relative to one year of training.

Acceptance into Phases II and III requires submission and scoring of a portfolio of evidence. The Master Principal Rubrics (ALA, 2011) provide descriptions of practice for each of the five performance areas. A sample page from the Leading and Managing Change Rubric may be found in Appendix E (ALA, 2011). Portfolios are externally scored by a team of highly qualified evaluators from across the state and nation. Since state funds are used to support this professional development, accountability for implementation is key to justification for continued participation. On a five-point scale, the average score for entering Phase II principals is 2-3, with Phase III principals usually in the 3-4 range. Such scores demonstrate implementation of the learning so far and readiness to go deeper. The Conceptual Scoring Framework found in Appendix F provides a global frame for the expectations along the continuum of minimal to exemplary effectiveness (ALA, 2006). The feedback provided to principals by the scorers offers a platform for improvement planning for the next year. The smaller ovals and deeper colors on the Logic Model (see Appendix B) represent both the smaller size of the participant group and the greater depth and level of learning and application expected for Phases II and III.

In addition to the intended outcomes from Phase I, Phase II principals are expected to more fully apply their learning for themselves and their school community. Phase III principals have operationalized the five performance levels at greater scale and have an established culture of collaborative capacity building for all stakeholders. They engage the community in meaningful ways, have expanded their influence beyond the local district, and are succeeding in improving student achievement. Phases II and III each have a total of ten days of professional development activities in three residential institutes during the academic year. As principals progress, differentiated work assignments become increasingly systems oriented.

After graduating from Phase III, principals may elect to apply for designation as a Master Principal. This year long process involves another portfolio application providing evidence of scale in the five performance areas, context information and letters of reference, and an extensive set of student achievement data demonstrating an upward trajectory over three or more years along with accompanying analysis. If the documents provided to the external scoring team warrant, a site visit is conducted by a team of evaluators. This involves examination of practices of the principal and school through observation, interviews and focus groups with all faculty, the district office, and representatives from students, parents, and community members. To be designated, a principal must score at the 4-5 levels in all areas of the rubric and have a proven upward trajectory of student achievement for all subgroups. Legislation provides \$9,000 a year for five years as a bonus for Master Principals. If a Master Principal accepts a position to serve a high-needs school, an additional \$25,000 per year for up to five years is awarded. Operating at the top end of the MPP Rubrics for the performance areas, with sustainable positive cultures and results, Master Principals are effective instructional leaders with broad influence on educational systems. The Logic Model (see Appendix B) illustrates this impact with the deepest color on the outcomes graphic.

Impact.

The far right column the Logic Model (see Appendix B) showing long term outcomes represents the degrees of impact made by the MPP based on the outputs. Greater in number than any other group, single year participants have an expected long term impact relative to their acquisition and application of knowledge and skills. Though the impact on the individuals may be less significant than in subsequent years, the sheer size of this group holds potential for state-wide impact due to what Coburn (2003) would refer to as spread of common language, skills,

and knowledge. By design, with each successive phase of the program, the individual impact should increase. Each participant that implements positive changes contributes to the collective leadership capacity of the state and to attaining the ultimate program goal of high achieving students in Arkansas. This increasing impact is shown by the deepening hue from yellow to red.

Stakeholders

There are many stakeholders who benefit from the MPP in addition to principal participants including teachers, students, school districts, and communities. The Arkansas Leadership Academy's partner organizations collectively represent a variety of stakeholders from businesses, universities, professional educational associations, and state education agencies. Ultimately, everyone is a stakeholder. As education improves, so does the economy and quality of life for all citizens.

Problem Statement

Due to the comprehensive and rigorous evaluation process used to identify Master Principals, it can be said with confidence that these principals are effective leaders. The problem was to identify what has changed in their practice and in their schools over time to enable this effectiveness, and to determine if these changes were perceived to be a result of their participation in the Master Principal Program. In a repeated measures quantitative analysis, Bengtson, Airola, Peer, and Davis (2012) examined changes in the portfolio scores of 59 participants from Phase II to Phase III applications. The study revealed that significant change occurred over time for these program participants. "The effect represents a large or meaningful difference ($d = 1.06$) in principals' knowledge and skills from the beginning of Phase 2 to the beginning of Phase 3 MPP" (Bengtson et al., p.12). On a five point scale, most principals obtain an average score of 2.5 when applying for Phase II and 3.5 when applying for Phase III. Since

designation requires scores of 4.5-5, significant growth over time is evident for Master Principals. The problem addressed in this study was to identify the perceived nature of the changes in leadership practice and in the schools of Master Principals as a result of their participation in the MPP.

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine what Master Principals perceive the effect to be of the Master Principal Program on their school cultures, student achievement, and leadership practices. The study sought to answer the primary research question: How have the knowledge base and leadership skills of Master Principals changed as a result of their participation in the Master Principal Program? Secondary questions included:

- (a) How have Master Principals reacted to MPP Institutes?
- (b) How has the performance of Master Principals changed?
- (c) How has school culture changed in the Master Principal's schools?
- (d) How have student results changed in the schools of Master Principals?
- (e) How has influence beyond the school changed for Master Principals?

Research Approach

A phenomenological qualitative approach was used to describe and interpret the impact of the Master Principal Program on leadership practices, school cultures, and student achievement as perceived by Master Principals. A qualitative approach to this research was appropriate since the research should contribute to an understanding of the complex nature of leadership development to school improvement. Several characteristics of phenomenology identified by Creswell (2007) that are a good fit for this study include:

- understanding the essence of an experience by studying several individuals that have shared that experience,
- interviews are a common means of data collection, and
- strategies usually include analyzing the data for significant statements and meaning units.

To some degree, the researcher engaged in a philosophical perspective to accomplish what Creswell (2007) described as reporting the meaning individuals ascribe to an experience.

Assumptions

Four assumptions regarding the Master Principal Program form a foundation for the study. First, there are conditions which best support adult learners and those conditions are provided for by the MPP. The knowledge and skills that adults acquire and apply in context take time to manifest as changed beliefs and practices. Thus the three-year model of the MPP creates time and space to support effective change. An effective principal is a central influence on all aspects of the school and a leader of change. Efficacy of the principal is fundamental to the MPP. Finally, the philosophy and practices outlined in the research-based MPP curriculum, when evidenced at the highest levels of the MPP Rubric, comprise best practices for principal performance.

Conditions for Adult Learning

While principals share the common characteristics of most adult learners, it is assumed that there are specific conditions which support learning that will lead to more effective principal leadership. Evans and Mohr (1999) listed seven core beliefs about principal professional development:

1. Principal learning is personal yet takes place most effectively while working in groups.
2. Principals foster more powerful faculty and student learning by focusing on their own learning.
3. While we honor principals' thinking and voices, we want to push principals to move beyond their assumptions.
4. Focused reflection takes time away from "doing the work," and yet it is essential.
5. It takes strong leadership in order to have truly democratic learning.
6. Rigorous planning is necessary for flexible and responsive implementation.
7. New learning depends on protected dissonance. Providing a safe setting within which to stretch makes all the difference.

The Master Principal Program attempts to meet all these criteria for principal professional development. The theory of change associated with the MPP assumes that the adult learning that occurs during MPP Institute sessions, through application at school, and with reflective practice will have a lasting impact on the principals and the schools they serve.

Change

A major assumption associated with this study was that significant and lasting change takes time. Hall and Hord (2011) describe change as "a process through which people and organizations move as they gradually learn, come to understand, and become skilled and competent in the use of new ways" (p. 8). Hall and Hord (2011) go on to say that, "Our research and that of others documents that most changes in education take three to five years to be implemented at a high level" (p. 8). This assumption is fundamental to the study because principal participants will be asked to describe changes in their practice and that of their schools

that have occurred over time. The change necessary for meaningful school improvement often requires what Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) refer to as second order change. The magnitude of change is different for each person and each school context. The principal must tailor their own leadership practices based on what is appropriate for their school.

Principal Efficacy

The third assumption underpinning this study was that the ALA and this researcher believe in the efficacy of principal leadership. The principal's influence is central to school culture and student results. In a meta-analysis of 30 years of research by Waters et al. (2003), the findings indicated that, "there is, in fact, a substantial relationship between leadership and student achievement" (p. 3). Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) found that, "Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school" (p. 5). Referring to a subsequent 2010 study, the same authors stated,

In developing a starting point for this six-year study, we claimed, based on a preliminary review of research, that leadership is second only to classroom instruction as an influence on student learning. After six additional years of research, we are even more confident about this claim (Seashore Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010 as cited in Wallace, 2011, p. 3).

Robinson (2011) stated that though it is difficult to isolate the contribution of leadership to student growth, the "ruler for judging the effectiveness of educational leadership is its impact on the learning and achievement of students for whom the leader is responsible" (p. 4).

Effective Leadership

Finally, it is assumed that the dispositions, beliefs, and practices outlined in the five Master Principal Performance areas are essential to effective school leadership and improvement. The ALA built the curriculum and assessment of principals, as reflected in the MPP Rubric, on research and continues to refine it as new evidence of effective leadership practices emerge. The ALA has internally reviewed the MPP Rubric and found alignment with the Educational Leadership Policy Standards (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008) by which Arkansas principals are licensed, the National Board Standards for Accomplished Principals (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2010), and the recently developed Principal Evaluation Plan (Arkansas Department of Education, 2011) being piloted in Arkansas in 2012-2013.

All twenty-one of the principal leadership responsibilities with the greatest effect size identified by the research of Waters et al. (2003, p. 4) are embedded in the curriculum of the Master Principal Program. The MPP's five performance areas of school leadership are also echoed in the findings of a review of multiple studies by the Wallace Foundation (2011) which identified five key functions or responsibilities of effective school leaders:

1. Shaping a vision of academic success for all students.
2. Creating a climate hospitable to education.
3. Cultivating leadership in others.
4. Improving instruction.
5. Managing people, data and processes to foster school improvement.(p. 4)

The MPP Rubric is congruent with the following five leadership dimensions that have large effect sizes on student outcomes identified from a meta-analysis of 11 studies by Robinson (2011):

1. Establishing goals and expectations
2. Strategic resourcing
3. Planning, coordinating and evaluating teaching and the curriculum
4. Promoting and participating in teaching, learning, and development
5. Ensuring an orderly and supportive environment.

Shaw (2012) described effective leadership that illustrates:

the value and importance of modeling, demonstrating, and valuing the virtues and behaviors necessary to facilitate the continuously learning and improving organization. Leaders of leaders foster and engage in inquiry, reading, risk-taking, informed dialogue, and reflection. They demonstrate vulnerability and curiosity and ask many questions of substance in order to deepen their own and their colleagues' understanding of the work and actions to be taken. They are learners extraordinaire and make this practice transparent to all. (p. 206)

It is assumed that the dispositions and practices in evidence when the performance of principals and their schools are operating at the highest levels of the MPP Rubric in all performance areas are aligned with best practices as identified by multiple sources of research.

The Researcher

The researcher has been a participant in the Master Principal Program, was one of the first four designated Master Principals, and is currently employed by the Arkansas Leadership Academy as the Master Principal Leader. Because of these experiences, I am uniquely situated to care deeply that the story of the Master Principals is told. “What we have to learn to do, we learn by doing” (Aristotle as cited in Guskey, 2000, p. 185). Approaching the MPP curriculum from both the position of learner-practitioner and as developer-deliverer further stimulates the demand for my personal learning. Discovering the context specific applications of the MPP made by all the Master Principals broadened understanding for the researcher personally and professionally as well as fulfilling a personal and academic goal of contributing to the field of research on principal development and best practices.

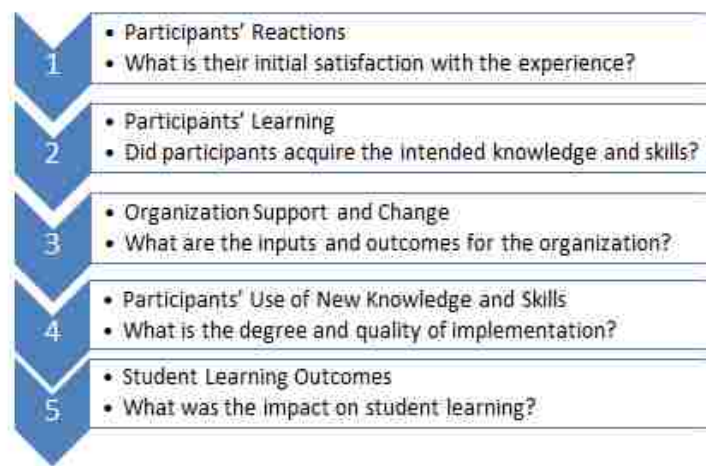
The challenges of researcher bias and the trustworthiness of the study were addressed in several ways including participant validation through member checking, prolonged engagement, triangulation of data, and discussion of the findings with colleagues. Careful bracketing was employed so that researcher bias would not be perceived as an issue of trustworthiness. As a researcher, I was uniquely situated to be well informed about the MPP. Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) pointed out that substantial involvement in the field can be a source of credibility. Triangulation included data from interviews, a focus group, and portfolio scores. It is the practice of the Arkansas Leadership Academy to ensure inter-rater reliability in portfolio scoring. It was appropriate for me to conduct a similar strategy to ensure dependability of coding and analysis of this research data by having a few of the interview transcripts independently coded by ALA staff.

Rationale and Significance

The information gained from answering the study's research questions will inform program developers of the Arkansas Leadership Academy of areas for improvement and strengths of the Master Principal Program. It also served the research participants as a reflective learning activity during the data collection process. Other stakeholders such as the Arkansas General Assembly and the Arkansas Leadership Academy partners will benefit from a deeper understanding of the outcomes of the program upon review of the findings. The research may also inform other program developers and researchers about the MPP and of the value of a phenomenological approach to understanding a comprehensive professional development program.

The data collected, analyzed and reported in the study does in effect provide the kind of rich information referred to by Guskey (2000) in Level 4 evaluations which provide insight into the participants' use of knowledge and skills. Guskey's (2000) five levels of evaluation for professional development are shown in Figure 1.3.

Figure 1.3 Guskey's Five Levels of Evaluation



The idea of examining the impact of leaders based on their implementation of new learning and the consequential results was echoed by Goldsmith (2006), "Leaders need to be measured on the degree to which they apply what they learn in training, and the degree by which they are seen as becoming effective by everyone around them" (para. 9). One to five years have passed since Master Principals finished the program and were designated. Examining the sustainability of implementation and change over time offers a valuable contribution to the research on professional development initiatives. "Measures of the use of newly acquired knowledge and skills must be made after participants have had sufficient time to reflect on what they learned and to adapt the new ideas to their particular setting" (Guskey, 2000, p. 178). Guskey (2000) also advised that it is important to ask participants about change to clarify whether the practices were already in place or have changed because of the development experience.

"Leadership is about taking the risk of managing meaning" (Shaw, 2012, p. 39). Principals today must be informed managers of meaning. As a professional developer of principals, this researcher was intent on using the research process in a manner that would contribute meaning to the experiences of Master Principals for multiple stakeholders. The study can and should be a learning and meaning-making process for the researcher, the dissertation committee, the research participants, the Arkansas Leadership Academy, and any stakeholders who care to be consumers of this dissertation.

Definitions of Key Terminology Used in This Study

Arkansas Comprehensive School Improvement Planning (ACSIP): the improvement planning model required for all Arkansas public and charter schools

Accountability: acceptance and transparency of internal as well as external and systems of responsibility

Action Research: a reflective process of problem solving employing a cycle of planning, implementation, and monitoring

Capacity building: improving the knowledge and skills of people as individuals or as an organization

Collaboration: working together to achieve a common goal that cannot be achieved alone

Critical Friend: a trusted person who asks probing questions, suggests information to be considered, and offers critique of a person's work to support their learning

Culture: the customs, beliefs, and structures of an environment or organization, often referred to as "the way we do things here"

Depth: one of the dimensions scale identified by Coburn (2003) referring to change that goes beyond surface structures or procedures to alter beliefs and norms of behavior

Distributed Leadership: responsibilities for leadership are held by several people through formal or informal structures

Leadership: social influence whether or not from formal positional power

Mission: a statement of an organization's value-based proposition

Model: an organizational framework or theoretical construct representing processes

Performance Areas: five groups of expected dispositions and behaviors the ALA (2011)

associates with highly effective principals:

- Creating and Living the Mission, Vision, and Beliefs
- Leading and Managing Change
- Developing Deep Knowledge about Teaching and Learning
- Building and Maintaining Collaborative Relationships
- Building and Sustaining Accountability Systems:

Professional Development: facilitated learning opportunity to develop knowledge and skills

Professional Learning Community (PLC): group of colleagues engaged in ongoing, collaborative learning

Reflective Practice: the capacity to reflect at multiple levels to engage in a process of continuous learning

Relevance: a framework for analyzing learning expectations based on complexity of thought on a continuum from acquisition to assimilation of knowledge

Rigor: a framework for analyzing learning expectations based on an action continuum from acquisition to application of knowledge

Scale: four interrelated dimensions (depth, sustainability, spread and transfer of ownership) suggested by Coburn (2003) through which leaders should view change

Shared Decision-Making: group decision making using processes for collaboration and shared responsibility for results

Shareholders or Stakeholders: any person or group with an interest in or influence on the outcomes of an organization

Shift of Ownership: one of the dimensions scale identified by Coburn (2003) referring to who has buy-in and accepts the knowledge and authority of implementation of a change initiative

Spread: one of the dimensions scale identified by Coburn (2003) referring to change through greater numbers of people or groups holding the beliefs, norms, and practices of the initiative

Standards: established expectations for performance

Sustainability: one of the dimensions scale identified by Coburn (2003) referring to change

Systems thinker: one who understands how individual actions, events, or people interact and influence others within or external to the whole

Teacher Leader: a teacher, with or without positional responsibilities, who positively influences change in others

Tools: activities (such as brainstorm or jigsaw) which support collaborative processes

Trajectory or Trend: the path of a targeted measurement (such as student achievement scores) over time

Vision: identification of the preferred future

CHAPTER TWO – LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction and Overview

The qualitative study examined the impact of the Arkansas Leadership Academy’s Master Principal Program (MPP) through the perspective of those who have completed the entire program and attained designation as a Master Principal. “The purpose of the Master Principal Program is to provide training programs and opportunities to expand the knowledge base and leadership skills of public school principals” (ALA, 2011, para.4). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover what Master Principals perceive the effect to be of the Master Principal Program on their leadership practices, school cultures, and student achievement. The study sought to answer the primary research question: How have the knowledge base and leadership skills of Master Principals changed as a result of their participation in the Master Principal Program? Secondary questions included:

- (a) How have Master Principals reacted to MPP Institutes?
- (b) How has the performance of Master Principals changed?
- (c) How has school culture changed in the Master Principal's schools?
- (d) How have student results changed in the schools of Master Principals?
- (e) How has influence beyond the school changed for Master Principals?

Discovering relationships between adult learning and outcomes in schools is an important topic of research in this age of accountability. This chapter begins with a brief explanation of the context for comprehensive principal professional development and its evaluation. Four studies offer examples of the kinds of research being conducted on the impact of principal professional

development programs. Three comprehensive programs and studies on their impact provide the closest match to the Master Principal Program. Two existing studies on the MPP will be reviewed. Limitations and unresolved questions from the literature will be discussed. The chapter concludes with an explanation of how the proposed research will address gaps in the literature.

Increased expectation for both educational equity and excellence for the twenty-first century has made it clear that schools must change in fundamental ways. To achieve our national goal that every student will be successful, schools, professional organizations, and states have created systems to support the learning of the adults who are responsible for creating the conditions for improved student achievement. Discovering relationships between professional development and changes in school culture and student outcomes has become an important topic of research and discussion. In this age of accountability, stakeholders now expect to see a return on the investment of resources. For schools, return on investment in professional development is often singularly measured as improved student achievement. A concern of this single focus is that the work of teachers and school leaders is complex and determining a causal relationship to one variable may be problematic.

Guskey (2000) and the National Staff Development Council Standards for Professional Development (2001) both advocated that a complete picture of the worth of a professional development experience requires multiple measures and various depths of analysis. A more complete picture of the effect of professional development should include the adult participants' perceptions of its worth and a measure of their actions toward implementation of the content and skills of the learning experience. Douglas Reeves (2010) revealed that the critical variable for gains in student achievement is deep implementation of professional learning at scale.

Comprehensive professional development should also be examined through its influence on

attitudes, knowledge, and leadership practices of principals. In addition to meeting the evaluation needs of external stakeholders, reflective self-assessment of the value added to the principal's knowledge and skills as a result of the professional development should serve as a type of formative assessment to monitor progress toward larger change goals. Leadership is by definition about leading others. The role of the principal as leader means that the impact of professional development in leadership can only truly be understood by examining the changes that occur in the behaviors of teachers, students, staff, families, and even the community.

To accurately interpret the research on outcomes of comprehensive principal professional development programs, it is also necessary to understand the design and delivery of them. For the purposes of this researcher, the term comprehensive implies that the professional development is multi-faceted, not a single event, nor intended to deliver a single content piece, but rather takes a systems approach to change. Hirsh (2004) said that three essential qualities of comprehensive professional development are that it is results-driven, standards-based, and focused on daily work. Principal leadership is complex and involves many attributes, a wide variety of knowledge and skills, and by definition will impact all aspects of school culture. It is that complexity that makes examination of the effectiveness of comprehensive leadership development programs difficult.

Summary of the Literature

Since the findings of the study were intended to describe the effects of the Master Principal Program through the perspective of the Master Principals, the researcher was interested in placing the study in the context of research on similar programs. In a review of the literature, few comprehensive principal professional development programs were discovered. Several examples will illustrate the kinds of principal professional development programs and research

practices which have been employed to describe their impact. Though the programs are not as comprehensive as the MPP, four studies offered examples of inquiry methods. Three comprehensive principal professional development programs were examined along with related research studies. One dissertation study has been conducted on the Arkansas Leadership Academy's Principal Institute and the researcher also examined a working draft of a 2011 study on the MPP's use of reflective practice and peer learning networks.

Examples of Inquiry Methods

Nettles and Petscher (2007) acknowledged that though principal behaviors influence school culture and the implementation of instructional initiatives, there is a lack of common agreement on effective measures of principal leadership. In Guskey's (2000) view, full evaluation of the effectiveness of professional development requires multiple measures and several levels of analysis. Four examples of methods used to investigate the outcomes of professional development for principals offer an overview of the types of inquiry methods found in the literature. The first study reviewed in this chapter sought to link specific principal behaviors to implementation of an instructional initiative. The second study was selected as an example of a program designed to give principals tools for self-evaluation. Two studies were reviewed for programs that were aligned with standards for professional development. The reviewed literature was selected because of its representative nature of inquiry methods for programs with elements similar to the Master Principal Program.

The study of the MPP examined implementation of principal practices addressed during the professional development experience. The Principal Implementation Questionnaire (PIQ) attempted to establish reliable measures of implementation of professional development for a complex set of skills and dispositions. The PIQ was created to provide quantitative evidence of

the implementation of selected principal behaviors that support the use of *Reading First* strategies in schools. Nettles and Petscher (2007) contended there are few research based evaluation methods currently available to assess the strengths and weaknesses of principals' leadership practices. This is particularly true when an evaluation of a principal's implementation of the requisite leadership activities to support a complex innovation such as *Reading First* is desired. Nettles and Petscher (2007) stated a weakness of the study was the use of only self-reported data. There is a need for further study into methods of evaluating principal practices in general and for assessing implementation of specific leadership practices that are related to unique change efforts.

Reflection and self-assessment are key elements of the Master Principal Program. The study included principal perceptions of changes that have occurred in their leadership as reflective practitioners. The Leadership Assessment Academy, designed by Region VII Education Service Center located in Kilgore, Texas, provided a protected environment for principals to evaluate their own performance. White, Crooks, and Melton (2002) explained the intended result of this self-assessment process was that principals would develop a personal performance profile based on multiple assessments and use the information gained to craft their professional growth plans. The researchers used a field study strategy during ten 3-day sessions over a four year period to collect data for analysis based on their conceptual framework of authenticity, multiplicity, and interactivity.

The Master Principal Program, designed to meet the standards for professional development (National Staff Development Council, 2001), employs several methods to evaluate the effectiveness of the program. Daily feedback from participants and session evaluations are used to collect participant perceptions of value. Self-reported portfolios move the level of

evaluation deeper to examine implementation. The comprehensive assessment for Master Principal designation covers all aspects of Guskey's (2000) five levels of evaluation of professional development. The Pennsylvania study, *The Use of Formative Evaluation in Professional Development and Student Achievement* (Johnson, 2008), and the North Carolina study on Union County Public Schools (Jones, 2009) were included in the review because of their alignment with standards for professional development. "Advancing schools demonstrated significantly higher use of professional development standards for evaluation than static schools" (Johnson, 2008, p.v). Though professional development based on standards was associated with achievement, the research hypothesis that there is a correlation between the use of the higher levels of evaluation of professional development and student achievement was rejected. An interesting comment in the conclusion of this dissertation was that one might infer that the quality of professional development evaluation has not advanced at the same pace as the quality of the professional development itself. The Jones (2009) study of the Union County Public Schools employed mixed methods and showed positive perceptions of principals and their preparation to be effective as described by the standards.

Comprehensive Professional Development Programs

Three comprehensive principal professional development programs were found that somewhat align with the Master Principal Program. The review was intended to locate similar programs and to identify methods used to determine their outcomes. Each of these programs used multiple measures to evaluate effectiveness. Case studies, participant surveys, and comparisons of student achievement results between treatment and control groups were the methods discovered in the review of literature.

The Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement (Georgia Leadership Institute, 2011) provides comprehensive training for current school leaders through the Executive Development, Base Camp and Leadership Summit programs. A case study method was used as a means of understanding and communicating effectiveness.

Since education leaders in Georgia are engaged in multiple improvement interventions, GLISI has adopted a proven process – the Success Case Method – for finding out what’s working, what barriers are preventing those we serve from implementing solutions effectively, and the impact our work is making locally. (Georgia Leadership, 2011, Results)

Based on 2008 data, Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement (GLISI) schools achieved Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) 3.3-5% more than non-GLISI schools. Almost all participants (92%) indicated in a survey that their schools have improved as a result of their work with GLISI. (GLISI, 2009)

The curriculum for the National Institute for School Leadership (NISL) Executive Development Program (National Institute for School Leadership, 2011) as outlined on their website seems a close match to that of the MPP. The effectiveness of the NISL was examined in a longitudinal study using control and treatment groups. Nunnery, Ross, and Yen (2010) stated,

The program emphasizes the role of principals as strategic thinkers, instructional leaders, and creators of a just, fair, and caring culture in which all students meet high standards. Its primary goal is to ensure that the participating school leaders have the knowledge, skills, and tools to effectively set direction for teachers, support their staffs, and design an efficient organization. (p.6)

Nunnery et al. (2010) concluded that the schools with NISL trained principals surpassed the comparison schools in expected achievement gains. Because half the participants had only one year of training before this study was conducted, and acknowledging that substantial change takes more than one year to accomplish, additional studies were recommended, anticipating that an even more significant difference will be found in the future. In an ex post facto study of the NISL's impact on schools in Massachusetts, Nunnery, Ross, Chappell, Pribesh, and Hoag-Carhart (2011) found a significant positive difference in the math and literacy performance of schools with NISL trained principals when compared to the Commonwealth as a whole. "Increased knowledge and skills in these roles clearly take time to filter down from principals' activities to teacher attitudes and practices, to the quality of classroom instruction, and ultimately, to improved student achievement on state assessments" (Nunnery et al., 2011, p. 12).

The New York City (NYC) Leadership Academy (New York City Leadership Academy, 2011) provides coaching, workshops, and conferences for current principals and intensive support for principals in their first year of service who are opening new small schools at the secondary level. Principals acquire new skills and knowledge through differentiated and job-embedded learning experiences.

In the 2008-09 end-of-year survey of coaching participants, 95% of principals indicated that the Leadership Academy coaching support they received had an impact on their effectiveness as a school leader, and 93% reported that the coaching support increased the leadership capacity at their school. (New York City, 2011, Results)

Master Principal Program

Two studies were found of the Master Principal Program which examined the comprehensive nature of the professional development's impact over time. A dissertation study employed mixed methods to examine results based on a self-reported survey and a comparison of student achievement data of respondents and state averages. A 2011 study sought to explore the relationship between the number of institute experiences, the reflective language of principals, and changes in MPP portfolio scores over time.

The Principal Institute was the predecessor to the current three-year Master Principal Program. Morledge (2007) conducted a dissertation study to determine the impact of the Arkansas Leadership Academy Principal Institute on the behaviors of principals after three years. Respondents reported using the content, skills, tools, and models more than before their participation in the program. Gains in student achievement for the principals who were still at the same school after three years (n=57) were compared to state averages. Eleventh grade literacy scores were the only place where the participant schools had greater gains than would be expected when compared to the state means. One limitation was that only 25% of the target group (57 of 226) qualified to the restriction of having remained at the same school for three years. A total response rate of 38.9% is low creating a further limitation. "Phase II participants appear to make greater use of these tools, thus it follows that principals who continue in the program past Phase I gain a clearer understanding of the application of the content, skills, tools, and models" (Morledge, 2007, p.96). Morledge (2007) pointed out that principal professional development is several steps removed from changes in student achievement. She recommended that further study should be done to evaluate the changes in teacher behaviors that occur as a result of the changes in principal leadership.

In a recent study, Bengtson et al. (2012) found a positive association for higher application scores when participants had more experience in the Master Principal Program. A repeated measure analysis of the scores of 59 principals who submitted both Phase II and Phase III portfolios revealed, “Principals scored 37.14 ($\sigma=5.46$) points on average for Phase 3 application portfolios compared to 30.20 ($\sigma=6.12$) for Phase 2 portfolios” (Bengtson et al., 2012, p.11). Using dimensions of reflection as preconceived categories, the qualitative analysis of 14 portfolios suggested, “principals had developed into more holistic reflective practitioners as they moved from Phase II to Phase III of the MPP” (Bengtson et al., 2012, p.14). A major limitation to this study was the use of self-reported, extant qualitative data from the archives of the ALA.

Limitations of Methodology

Because this review of the literature sought to place into context the study’s examination of participant perceptions of the impact of a professional development experience, a conceptual framework often used for evaluation purposes was appropriate. Thomas Guskey (2000) proposed five levels for evaluation of professional development which were referenced in Chapter One of this proposal and shown in Figure 1.3. Collecting the reactions of participants through concluding surveys is the easiest and probably the most common method of evaluating professional development. Simulations, demonstrations, portfolios and other means are sometimes used to determine the learning of participants. The third level involves examining the ways in which the organization supports the change efforts that will be an outcome of the professional development. The most difficult, and therefore less commonly used assessments, are described in the fourth and fifth levels. They provide data collection and analysis of the participants use of the new knowledge and skills and finally in determining the impact on student

learning outcomes. These five levels of evaluation provide a conceptual framework for reflecting on the purposes and value of research on the effects of professional development programs.

The literature review revealed that various levels of inquiry into professional development outcomes were employed by researchers for the programs reviewed. The two most common methods are at either end of the spectrum of possibilities involving either participants' initial reactions or an investigation founded on assessing the principal's performance by examining student achievement gains. Some included leading indicators such as self-reported implementation of the new learning. Hall and Hord (2011) stated that, "A serious problem in most research and evaluation studies has been the failure to document implementation before making judgments about the effects of various treatments, programs, and innovations" (p.63). None of the studies included an external review of implementation. Several studies claimed changes in student outcomes as a result of the professional development program while also acknowledging the limitation of not concluding a direct causal relationship. The case study approach adopted by GLISI (Georgia Leadership, 2009) as an evaluation method provided a rich description of the practices and outcomes in a limited number of schools where the principal participated in the professional development program. The dissertation study on the ALA Principal Institute (Morledge, 2007) focused only on the use of knowledge, tools, and skills that were provided to participants who had been in the Principal Institute from the 1999-2000 to the 2003-2004 school years, before the development of the MPP. The Bengtson et al. (2012) study offered evidence of interim outcomes of the program for principals seeking to enter Phase III. Prior to this dissertation study, there have been no studies of the entire three-year program or of the program's impact from the perspective of the designated Master Principals.

Unresolved Questions

None of the professional development programs discovered in the review of literature were a tight match in design for the Master Principal Program. The research and evaluation measures used for the programs varied widely with few addressing all of the levels proposed by Guskey (2000). For principal professional development programs similar to and including the Master Principal Program, questions remain about the scale of implementation and change including depth, spread, shift of ownership, and sustainability (Coburn, 2003). It is unclear:

- how the learning from a comprehensive professional development program is implemented in divergent contexts,
- what transformative changes occur in the leadership practices and school culture as a result of the professional development,
- what knowledge and skills gained in the professional development are being sustained, and
- what the participants' perception of value is toward meeting the adaptive challenges of the future.

The MPP was built on research-based best practices in educational leadership and the vision and creativity of the staff and the Arkansas Leadership Academy partners. Due to the complexity of variables and the relatively short life of the program, a comprehensive evaluation of the impact of the MPP has not been conducted, though several levels of research and evaluation are in process. The Arkansas Leadership Academy collects and analyzes several forms of participant perceptual and demographic descriptive data, addressing the lower levels of evaluation as described by Guskey (2000). The Bengtson et al. (2012) study could be viewed as evidence of the fourth level of evaluation offering evidence of impact on participant practices.

Further research is underway by the ALA to investigate the relationship between participation in the MPP's various phases and significant and meaningful effects on student achievement over time. Though the data is unpublished, all Master Principals, by definition of their designation, have demonstrated both application of the knowledge and skills identified as exemplary and gains in student achievement over time.

With five years of designated Master Principals who have completed the entire program, it is time to tell the story of this innovative program from the perspective of those who experienced it. The findings of this phenomenological study provide a description of the perception of personal value and impact of the program on Master Principals' leadership performance and on their schools.

Addressing the Gaps

Creswell (2007) identified several characteristics of phenomenology which are a good match for this research including understanding the essence of an experience by studying several individuals that have shared that experience. A qualitative approach to the study generated description and interpretation which will contribute to an understanding of the complex nature of a comprehensive professional development program designed to support a systems approach to school improvement. This information in conjunction with an explanation of the extensive evaluation and high standards of principal performance, school culture, and student achievement trajectories for Master Principals provides a more complete picture of the impact of the MPP than was previously available.

There are several ways that this study addresses gaps in the field of practice for principals, professional developers, educational researchers, and stakeholders of the Arkansas

Leadership Academy (ALA). The information gained from answering the research questions will inform ALA program developers in determining areas for improvement and strengths of the program. Stakeholders such as the Arkansas General Assembly and the ALA partners will benefit from a deeper understanding of the outcomes of the program. Yarbrough, Shulha, Hopson, and Caruthers (2011) indicated several potential purposes of inquiry including the improvement of programs. The findings of this study may be included in a comprehensive program evaluation in the future. The data collection process served the research participants as a reflective learning activity. Additionally, principals not involved in the Master Principal Program may use the findings to inform their own learning and leadership practices. The research may also inform other program developers about the curriculum and expectations of the MPP. Value is added to the field of educational research as this study provides an example of a phenomenological approach to understanding a comprehensive professional development program.

Conclusion

Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) counseled beginning researchers, “The literature review identifies what is already known about your topic/problem and what consensus or lack there is around your topic/problem under study” (p. 18). The review of the literature on comprehensive principal professional development programs and measures of their impact provided a context for this research and for further study of the Master Principal Program. Diversity in both the design of programs and in the methods used to determine their impact was revealed.

This study was the first ever conducted of the three-year Master Principal Program and the perceptions of Master Principals. The phenomenological study provided a description of the

Master Principal Program's impact through the voices of those who have experienced all facets of the program and successfully implemented the knowledge and skills gained in diverse contexts.

CHAPTER THREE - METHODOLOGY

Introduction and Overview

The purpose of the Master Principal Program is to provide training programs and opportunities to expand the knowledge base and leadership skills of public school principals. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine what Master Principals perceive the effect to be of the Master Principal Program on their leadership practices, school cultures, and student achievement. The study sought to answer the primary research question: How have the knowledge base and leadership skills of Master Principals changed as a result of their participation in the Master Principal Program? Secondary questions included:

- (a) How have Master Principals reacted to MPP Institutes?
- (b) How has the performance of Master Principals changed?
- (c) How has school culture changed in the Master Principal's schools?
- (d) How have student results changed in the schools of Master Principals?
- (e) How has influence beyond the school changed for Master Principals?

According to the topology offered by Sandelowski and Barroso (2003), this study would be classified well within the category of qualitative research which is designed to be descriptive and interpretive. A phenomenological qualitative approach was used to describe and interpret the impact of the Master Principal Program (MPP) on school cultures, student achievement, and leadership practices of Master Principals, as perceived by Master Principals. As Creswell (2007) stated, "...a phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon" (p.57). Creswell (2007) went on to explain that the

researcher collects data so that they can provide a composite description of the essence of the experience. This phenomenological approach provided an understanding of Master Principals' common experience of receiving and applying professional development from the Arkansas Leadership Academy. Shank (2006) explained that, "Most forms of phenomenological inquiry in qualitative research follow the empirical approach. We are interested in seeing how people interpret their worlds, and how we can in turn interpret their interpretations" (p.132). Collecting data through an interview process and then coding that data to identify major themes and unique experiences of the participants allowed the researcher to better understand the impact of the MPP on the practices and outcomes in schools of Master Principals.

There are several ways that this study may impact the field of practice for principals, professional developers, and stakeholders of the Arkansas Leadership Academy (ALA). The information gained from answering the research questions will inform ALA program developers in determining areas for improvement and strengths of the program. Stakeholders such as the Arkansas General Assembly and the ALA partners will benefit from a deeper understanding of the outcomes of the program. The finding of this study may be included in a comprehensive program evaluation in the future. The research may also inform other program developers about the curriculum and expectations of the MPP. There will be value added to the field of educational research as this study provides an example of a phenomenological approach to understanding a comprehensive professional development program. It also served the research participants as a reflective learning activity. Additionally, principals not involved in the Master Principal Program may use the findings to inform their own learning and leadership practices.

Theoretical Framework

Because of the thick nature of the data collected and analyzed for the study, changes in principal knowledge and skills and the impact on their schools were revealed. Though the study was not a program evaluation, frames for evaluation offered by Guskey (2000) and the National Staff Development Council Standards for Professional Development (2001) provided a perspective for construction of the study's guiding questions and interpretation of the data collected. A complete picture of the worth of a professional development experience requires multiple measures and various depths of analysis. Seeking to understand how the common learning experiences of Master Principals has been implemented in their diverse contexts involved higher levels of examination than merely reporting participant satisfaction or providing a collection of anecdotal stories.

The study dealt with the interpretation of data collected through the voices of respondents as they described their perceptions of the experiences of their unique learning and work as a Master Principal and program participant. Two foundational theories for the study were constructivism and interpretivism. This researcher sought to interpret how Master Principals constructed new meanings for themselves and their schools as a result of participation in the program. Shank (2006) told us, "...you and I might differ somewhat in our knowledge and understanding of key concepts and ideas, but at heart we can work together because our individual 'takes' on knowledge are ultimately grounded in similar social and cultural concepts and models" (p.96). Participants in the MPP shared common learning experiences during institute sessions and yet applied that learning in their own school in very different ways. The ontological assumption was that "reality is subjective and multiple as seen by participants in the study" (Creswell, 2007, p.

17). For this reason, emergent themes and quotes from the participants have been employed to help frame the findings of the study.

Understanding the impact of the MPP was only possible with a research method that honors the complexity of leadership and school and personal change issues and processes. A phenomenological data analysis revealed clusters of meaning and assisted with a structured description of the program's impact on principal practices. Creswell (2007) offered four broad philosophical perspectives of phenomenology: 1) philosophy as the search for wisdom, 2) holding no presuppositions about what is real, 3) the intentionality of consciousness, and 4) that there is no subject-object dichotomy (pp. 58-59). Each of these four perspectives influenced the study. Without the first perspective, a search for wisdom, there would have been no motivation for research. The second philosophical perspective, holding no pre-suppositions of reality, was critical for this study due to the epoche (or bracketing) that was necessary as the researcher set aside her own personal experiences. The last two perspectives merged for this researcher just as Creswell (2007) stated, "The reality of an object is only perceived within the meaning of the experience of an individual" (p. 59). The basis of the phenomenological study was the reality of the common experience in divergent contexts as discovered and described through individual perceptions and meaning-making for each of the participants.

Sample

The research participants were selected based on purposeful sampling. Creswell (2007) explained, "This [purposeful sampling] means that the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (p. 125). Creswell offered that this sampling strategy may be well suited to collecting data valuable to answering the research questions related to a phenomenon.

He further indicated that a criterion sampling strategy will be the best approach so that the essence of their common experience is central to the inquiry. The criteria for selection of study participants was that they have each completed the entire three-year Master Principal program and been designated as Master Principals.

Taylor-Powell (1998) suggested that when the study seeks to examine the common experience from a specific group of people, all of the participants are the population of interest. Since the number of Master Principals in 2011 was only seventeen, it was reasonable and do-able to include all designated Master Principals in the study. Another reason to include all Master Principals in the study was that after analyzing various characteristics, it was useful to analyze data by subgroups based on various criteria. Geographic regions of the state, age of the principals, number of years of experience, size of the school, and several other characteristics were identified through analysis which helped provide depth to the interpretation of the data.

In the event saturation had been reached before all potential candidates were interviewed, a second sampling strategy was designed to efficiently use time for data collection. Marshall and Rossman (2011) cautioned beginning researchers that, “The proposal describes the plan, as conceived before the research begins, that will guide sample selection, the researcher being always mindful of the need to retain flexibility” (p.104). A stratified purposeful sampling strategy was held in reserve as an option to illustrate the experiences of subgroups. Based on prior knowledge, the three subgroups would have been those Master Principals who have remained in their original school, those that have changed schools, and those that now have a position other than as a building principal. The greatest potential for saturation was anticipated in the largest strata, those who are still principals in the schools they were serving when designated.

Because the other two groups are small, all of the Master Principals who have moved to another school or left the principalship were to be in the sample.

All qualified candidates were interviewed, however the planned second tier sampling strategy was an important lens for analysis to ensure all voices were represented. Explaining sampling size, Taylor-Powell (1998) informed readers that, “It depends on what you want to know, what will be useful, what will be credible, and what can be accomplished within the time and resources you have available” (p. 6). The size of the participant group is not as important as the unique contribution each makes to the understanding of the phenomenon. Data collection with Master Principals who have remained in the school where they were working when designated was the largest group. An obvious second strata was comprised of the Master Principals who have changed schools and uniquely contributed information regarding the impact of the program on their leadership within the context of each school. One Master Principal has moved to a high-needs school and provided an example of a tight fit to the imagined model of the program’s founding legislation. There are three Master Principals who now work for the Arkansas Leadership Academy and constituted the third strata. The director of the Academy, one of these three, offered information on the impact of the professional development in her school experiences, of her perceptions of her influence on the Academy, and on her state leadership role. Another Master Principal now works for the Academy as a Capacity Builder serving as a consultant to four high- needs schools. For these leaders, the Master Principal’s professional position influenced their application of the professional development’s skills and knowledge differently than the majority of participants. Though this stratification was not used to limit the size of the research sample, it was important to examine the data through the lens of these various criteria.

As a Master Principal and now the Master Principal Leader, decisions about the ways the voice of the principal researcher were included in the research was carefully weighed. The sampling strategy was inclusive of the entire population of interest. The principal researcher meets the criteria. The voice of the researcher as part of the data set could have been an insurmountable limitation to credibility. Because of this possible limitation, the sampling plan excluded the personal story of the researcher as a data set. The personal experiences and reflections of the researcher were included as part of the reflexive acts of data collection and analysis through the voice of a researcher. Careful bracketing was necessary because of the researcher's unique position in this arena.

In addition to participant perceptual data gained through interviews and a focus group, context information was collected from both published and unpublished documents from the Arkansas Leadership Academy related to the Master Principal Program.

Overview of Information Needed

The data collection, analysis, interpretation and reporting of the research lead to a thick, rich description and interpretation of the experience of the Master Principals. Several different kinds of information were needed to answer the study's research questions. The matrix shown in Table 3.1, which was designed as modeled by Bloomberg and Volpe (2008), explained the alignment between the types of information, what the research required, and the method which was used. Bloomberg and Volpe stated that, "Creating this type of alignment ensures that the information you intend to collect is directly related to the research questions, therefore providing answers to the respective research questions" (p. 71).

Table 3.1 Overview of Information Needed

<i>Type of Information</i>	<i>What the Researcher Required</i>	<i>Method</i>
Contextual	Background and organizational information of the MPP	MPP document review Personal experience
Demographic	Descriptive information regarding participants and their schools	Interviews
Perceptual	Thick perceptual description of the participants' experience of the MPP and subsequent changes in their leadership and school	Interviews Focus group
Theoretical	Research and theory relevant to the larger context of the study	Literature review Data analysis MPP document review

Contextual

Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) described contextual information as, "...knowledge about an organization's history, vision, objectives, products or services, operating principles, and business strategy" (p. 70). This information was gained by reviewing the Master Principal Program's internal documents and from my own personal knowledge of the program. Of particular relevance to this study is the explanation of the Master Principal designation requirements and process. Data placing the study participants within the context of the MPP was also obtained through the document review.

Demographic

Basic demographic information for each participant was needed to understand their personal context and that of the group as a whole. This data has been displayed by pseudonym within a table in Appendix K which includes: gender, number of years in education, number of years as a principal, and their education level. Pseudonyms were created to represent the name of the school. The general location of the schools where the principals serve and the ethnic make-up and socio economic status are shown. Information regarding changes in employment during or since the Master Principal's experience with the program was also required. Some principals remained working in the same place as when they began the Master Principal Program while others changed schools or left the principalship. Career information regarding their path to the principalship and career goals which may have influenced their perceptions and response to the program were collected.

Perceptual

Perceptions were the core of the participant data needed for study. To answer the research questions, semi-structured interview questions helped the respondents reflect on their experiences and the changes that, in their view, have occurred in their leadership and in their school as a result of the Master Principal Program. The perceptual information gained during data collection was essential to telling the story of what the participants believe to be true in this phenomenological study.

Theoretical

A review of relevant literature contributed to an understanding of the theoretical foundations of the Master Principal Program including the theories of constructivism, adult learning, change, and leadership. Additionally, literature regarding standards for school

leadership, professional development, evaluation of professional development, and qualitative methodologies informed and supported the conceptual framework, methodological approaches, analysis, interpretation, and conclusions of this study. Reviewing previous studies of the Master Principal Program and similar principal professional development programs also contributed to the rationale for methodological choices for this qualitative study. Review of MPP documents contributed to a deeper understanding of the underlying program theory and context for the study. During the course of data analysis, further research was required to deepen theoretical understanding of emergent themes and was referenced along with the report of the findings.

Research Design

The research design included many steps. Yin shared, “The design is the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study’s initial research questions and, ultimately, to its conclusions” (as cited in Creswell, 2007, p.5). Some of these actions were taken sequentially yet many were cyclical or concurrent in nature. Accomplishing the objectives of the study required a commitment to decision making regarding the research design that was both focused and efficient while remaining flexible. Discussing the emergent nature of qualitative research, Creswell (2007) stated, “This means that the initial plan for research cannot be tightly prescribed, and that all phases of the process may change or shift after the researchers enter the field and begin to collect data” (p. 39).

Documents and research that were used during the design of the Master Principal Program contributed to the literature review and an understanding of the MPP. Document review included reviewing processes within the program and an understanding of the performance requirements to be named a Master Principal.

A field test of the semi-structured interview protocol and first cycle coding was conducted in the fall of 2010. A one hour interview was conducted with one of the Master Principals. The interview was audio recorded and transcribed. A table was created to capture first cycle codes for the data. Field notes and analytical memos were written to capture my observations and reflective analysis. Based on reflection and analysis of the field test, the protocol was determined to be an effective tool for the interview. It was also decided that adding focus groups to the interviews would enrich the data collection. The coding and analysis experience from the field test also indicated that the use of an electronic resource such as ATLAS.ti would be helpful and it subsequently became a crucial part of data organization and analysis.

After approval from the University of Arkansas' Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the dissertation committee, interviews with potential respondents were scheduled and signed consent forms obtained. One-to-one interviews were conducted to collect perceptual data from most of the Master Principals using the protocol found in Appendix G. Two of the principals were interviewed together. Two interviews were conducted over the telephone while all the others were face-to-face and lasted from 30 to 60 minutes each.

A focus group was facilitated by the researcher at Winthrop Rockefeller Institute in January, 2012, using tools for collaborative reflection and data collection, as shown in the protocol (Appendix H). Nine Master Principals participated in the two-hour focus group session. This data enriched and corroborated the perceptual data collected from individual interviews. Sentence Stems were used to collect data about participant reactions to institute experiences. Participants brainstormed together to supply data around implementation of learning through the five performance areas of the MPP. Cause and effect diagrams collected data on changes in

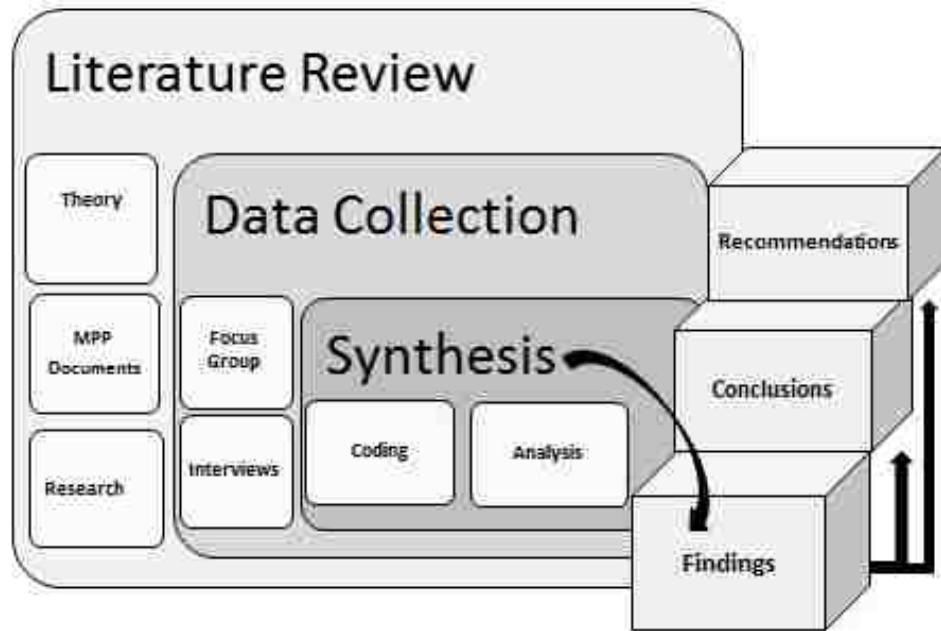
school culture and student results. Co-construction of a Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) chart provided data collection related to several of the research questions. The focus group occurred before or after a principal was individually interviewed based on convenience scheduling.

Interviews and the focus group were recorded on redundant devices to capture reliable data. Field notes were written immediately after the interviews and focus group. Transcription of recorded interviews and focus group data occurred as soon as possible by a professional transcriptionist. Charts and documents created during the focus group provided additional sources of data.

First cycle coding of data included in vivo and descriptive codes. This was followed by cluster coding based on MPP performance areas, elements of scale, and other emergent codes. Pattern, focused, and axial coding methods were employed along with codeweaving. Analytic memoing occurred throughout the reflexive analysis process. Data collection, coding, and analytic memoing were concurrent and ongoing activities.

The creation of a matrix aligning literature, research questions, and coded data contributed to the analysis and synthesis of all research activities. Interpretation and findings were constructed from these collective, nested, and interwoven activities. Findings formed the basis for conclusions, and recommendations. Figure 3.1 illustrates an overview of the research design showing the nested relationship of major activities.

Figure 3.1 Overview of Research Design



Data Collection

The study sought to describe and offer interpretation of the Master Principals' common experience of receiving and applying professional development from the Arkansas Leadership Academy. While referring to the inadequacy of data sources such as surveys and short-answer questionnaires, Polkinghorne (2005) explained, "Thus, the data gathered for study of experience need to consist of first-person or self-reports of participants' own experiences" (p. 138). Because a rich understanding of this common experience was sought, one-to-one semi-structured interviews with Master Principals provided the primary data source for this study. Questions were asked during the interview appointment to collect demographic information. A focus group created the opportunity for further data collection from Master Principals.

Entry into the field was easy to accomplish without gatekeepers who sometimes inhibit access to the participants or the interviewee's own internal gatekeeping that would limit data

collection (Reeves, 2010). The researcher was personally acquainted with the proposed participants and also holds designation as a Master Principal and was therefore a shareholder in the common experience. To varying degrees an established rapport between the researcher and the participants existed as professional colleagues and co-learners.

One of the explicit expectations of the Master Principal Program experience is that designees will contribute to the advancement of leadership in Arkansas in a variety of ways. Clark (2010) discussed several motivations for participation in research such as the respondents desire to have a voice, to inform change, and for personal enjoyment stating, “This opportunity to be openly introspective in an environment that is perceived to be relatively secure is an unusual one, and offers something potentially novel and attractive to those who engage” (p.407). Motivation of purpose increased the likelihood of participation and extent of revelation. Additionally, Master Principals have been trained to be reflective practitioners so it was not surprising that the interview process seemed to contribute to their own reflection and personal satisfaction. Master Principals did not hesitate to participate in the study which offered a venue for sharing their experience and outcomes for a variety of stakeholders. In addition to research for a dissertation, it was explained to candidates that the information gained may be used to inform the public, Academy partners, legislators, and school leaders of the outcomes of the program through the voices of the most experienced participants. Since the purpose of the study was not to evaluate the program or the principals, but rather to more fully tell the story of implementation and outcomes in diverse contexts, there was no pressure to exaggerate the effectiveness of the program to paint the experience in an overly positive light. Participants were assured that data would not be attached to a particular person to protect the confidentiality of the

respondents. Confidentiality has been ensured through the use of pseudonyms for individual names and places of employment.

Interviews were scheduled in advance through personal telephone contact with respondents and set at a time and location of mutual convenience. A quiet location such as the principal's office was arranged with one hour of uninterrupted time for a face-to-face interview. The pilot interview indicated that one hour would be sufficient to allow the principal to respond to the planned interview questions and add additional information as desired. During an initial phone conversation, the purpose and protocol of the interview was explained. Consent forms were signed on location and any questions answered regarding the interview process, uses of the data, and confidentiality before each interview began to ensure each respondent was comfortable. Demographic data were collected during the initial phone conversation or on site before the interview began. Polkinghorne (2005) reminded interviewers that how we listen and respond to interviewees affects the account of their story. After explaining that this may not feel like the customary dialogic pattern, the researcher asked questions from an interview protocol while also being reflexive toward the flow of the conversation.

Interviews were recorded with a small digital voice recorder and an iPad application. Relevant field notes were taken to assist with interpretation and recall of context details, while being careful to not interrupt the flow of the conversation. The audio recorded data was professionally transcribed to increase accuracy and efficiency. A possible limitation imposed by the use of a professional transcriptionist was the loss of reflection by the researcher that occurs during the process of transcription. To mitigate this potential limitation, I listened to the recording while reading the text to ensure the transcription was accurate and to allow the time for reflection and analysis that more skilled researchers may engage in as they transcribe themselves.

Member checking was employed by offering transcriptions to some participants for their review of intent. Data from the focus group was collected by voice and redundant video recording as well as through the documents which were collaboratively created. All data collected was stored in a system of files which will be retained in both digital and paper form. An external drive and *Dropbox*, an online file sharing site, provided back- up of all digital files on my computer and the print copies of transcripts were stored in a fire-proof locked box.

Polkinghorne (2005) suggested that one-shot interviews are often not sufficient to glean in-depth information from participants. Because rapport was quickly established due to existing relationships, a single one-to-one interview with each Master Principal was sufficient for the collection of rich data. If another topic or issue arose that was not addressed in the initial interview or further explanation was needed to clarify intent, a second interview was conducted by telephone.

As a second source of self-reported data, a focus group conversation with nine Master Principals offered participants the opportunity to reflect collaboratively with their peer group about their experiences both during the Master Principal Program and since designation.

Creswell (2007) summarized that:

Focus groups are advantageous when the interaction among interviewees will likely yield the best information, when interviewees are similar and cooperative with each other, when time to collect information is limited, and when individuals interviewed one-on-one may be hesitant to provide information. (p.133)

Focus group participants were similar in their professional role and participation in the Master Principal Program and have a history of cooperation. The focus group provided a timely method of adding to the data collected during individual interviews. As suggested by Roulston (2010),

the discussion was facilitated with open-ended questions in an environment that was made comfortable through orienting activities as shown in Appendix H.

For group settings, both Creswell (2007) and Roulston (2010) counseled researchers to carefully consider procedures to encourage all participants to talk and to carefully monitor those who may dominate. Creswell (2007) further cautioned researchers to adequately record data. These data were collected in several formats. Because all participants have experienced actively engaging tools as learners while in the Master Principal Program, similar tools were used during the focus group to solicit information. The session was facilitated using a variety of group process tools such as Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) group analysis, carousel brainstorming, root cause analysis, and discussion around open ended questions. Each of the tools was selected and designed to collect data related to one or more of the research questions as indicated on the Focus Group Protocol found in Appendix H. Through this collaborative session, participants were prompted to a deeper level of recall, reflection, and synthesis of meaning than may have occurred individually. Roulston (2010) noted that the production of perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes (POBAs) relevant to research should also be supported with evidence from the participants by asking for descriptions. Documents constructed and researcher field notes collected during these sessions provided a rich source of data that was supplemented by video recordings of the focus group gatherings. Additional process observers were used to capture audio and video recordings as the focus group was subdivided for small group reflection and discussion.

As was previously discussed regarding individual interviews, the protocol and processes for the focus group was explained in advance, consent forms acquired, and the session was held at a time and location that was convenient to the researcher and the interviewees. In addition to

the motivations mentioned for interviews, almost all Master Principals have eagerly volunteered for similar group experiences in the past and asked for them to occur more frequently. For this reason, there was a strong reciprocity of value to the participants as well as for the researcher. The participants were so engaged in the conversation, of which they quickly took control, they had to be reminded to end the session long after the allotted time had elapsed.

Each of us has our own epistemology or way of knowing. Documenting the personal perspectives of a phenomenon another has experienced is probably the strongest method of understanding the meaning that person takes from their experience. Nunkoosing (2005) stated that we interview because, “We are interested in the person’s cognition, emotion, and behavior as a unifying whole rather than as independent parts to be researched separately” (p. 699). This study was designed to reveal what principals believe has been the impact of the Master Principal Program on their leadership, their school, and even their lives. Learning and leadership are each complex subjects. Taken together, the complexity is magnified and can best be approached as a whole through the voice of the participant. Garton and Copeland (2010) noted that a common background may create greater opportunity to access data when it is collected from interviewees who have a pre-existing relationship with the researcher. As a Master Principal and the current leader of the program, the principle researcher was uniquely situated to collect thick, rich descriptive data through interviews which contributed to an understanding of the Master Principal Program.

Data Analysis

Data for this study was organized and analyzed using ATLAS.ti. According to the product’s promotional materials and my novice use of the software, it was multi-functional and

user-friendly. Features such as the code manager, network editor, object crawler and query tool proved to increase manageability and access to data.

During the field testing of the data collection protocol and initial coding process, I created a Microsoft Word table to organize data. This table will be described here to illustrate necessary features of the data organizational plan. The table had several columns which could each be sorted, carrying with the sort all the entries for that row. Sections of text from the transcription or field notes were copied and pasted into this document. In addition to the text column, there was a column to identify the interview transcription and the exact page and lines from which the selection was drawn. Several columns for initial and subsequent codes made it possible to sort the data in a variety of ways even if a section of text had more than one code assigned. Another column created space for analytic memos. The data from the pilot interview, whether from the transcription or field notes, was entered into this table. Using a Word table for ordering and reordering the data is akin to Saldña's (2009) table top exercise of sorting. Once electronically sorted, the data could also easily be printed out and cut apart to physically cluster codes, grouping them for second cycle coding methods. Another advantage of using this electronic format was that key words could be used to quickly locate specific text from the complete file. ATLAS.ti performed these and many other functions and was a better fit for purposes of this study that included over twenty thousand of lines of text in many primary documents in addition to video recordings and other sources.

Several first cycle coding methods were employed, always keeping in mind Saldña's (2009) criterion that the chosen methods lead to insights about the phenomenon. To that end, extensive use was made of analytical memoing. Two elemental methods of coding, descriptive and in vivo, were used. A code book captured definitions and examples of codes used in first and

second cycle coding methods. Actual words from the respondents were captured in coded in vivo statements. Nine initial deductive domain codes were derived from the Master Principal Program's five performance areas (ALA, 2011) and Coburn's (2003) four dimensions of scale. Focused and axial coding were second cycle pattern methods. Saldaña (2009) suggested, "Pattern Codes not only organize the corpus but attempt to attribute meaning to that organization" (p. 150). Codes were grouped based on a focus or conceptual similarity and axial coding methods were used to discover how the categories relate to each other. These methods reduced and reassembled the coded data into categories which ATLAS.ti labels as "families." These methods assisted with making meaning of the data and the linkages between the data, clusters of data, and the research questions. Since the subject of the study is very complex, a strategy for focusing Saldaña (2009) refers to as "codeweaving" was helpful for analysis. Codeweaving involved integrating codes, themes, and selected narrative to explore how they fit together. Analytic memo writing during analysis enhanced understanding of the properties and dimensions of the categories. In addition to linguistic memos, diagrams were created to assist in understanding relationships between categories of data.

Many qualitative researchers are opposed to the development of a coding and analysis plan before data is collected. For this study, the plan was a way to begin the journey for the reflexive process of data collection and analysis. It was not restrictive, but rather flexible and responsive to emerging understandings and needs for further inquiry as data were collected and analyzed. The final steps of the research design included synthesis and interpretation of the findings to provide a thick description of the phenomenon.

Ethical Issues

Though ethics is inherent in every facet of research, four areas of this study emerge for particular attention. The first two encompass the researcher's responsibility to protect the rights and safety of participants through the methods that are customary in qualitative research including the assurance of confidentiality and gaining informed consent. The methods for the collection of data, the third area, are explicit to assure readers of trustworthiness. Finally, confidence regarding the researcher's interpretation was an ethical consideration especially pertinent to this study.

The only potential risk factor to participants in this study was that which could arise from exposure if their identity were to be revealed. Confidentiality has been assured for this study by limiting access to the original data to the researcher and one professional transcriptionist who lives and works outside the field of education in another state. During the focus group, the process observers, who assisted with recording equipment, and the participants publically agreed to a norm of confidentiality which is the custom of the Master Principal Program. Researchers are ethically bound to not divulge the identity of research participants in a study, their schools, or communities. Creswell (2007) proposed that, "A researcher protects the anonymity of the informants, for example, by assigning numbers or aliases to individuals" (p.141). Most of the description included in the final report for this research was generalized to represent groups of people. When a reference to a single community, school, or person was used, they were referred to by pseudonyms.

Each member of the target population was informed of the purposes, uses, and processes of the study through an initial e-mail (see Appendix I) which included an Informed Consent Form (see Appendix J). The consent form included several sections describing risks and benefits,

confidentiality, how the results will be used, participant's rights, and investigator verification of explanation (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Creswell (2007) indicated that a crucial ethical behavior for the researcher is to not misrepresent the nature or purposes of the study. The Informed Consent Form provided an introduction to the research, explained the purpose and how results will be used, presented brief background information, outlined the procedures to be used including recording sessions, risks and benefits, right of refusal, and presented statements of confidentiality. The researcher's signature and that of the participant indicated consent and a mutual understanding of the research process, participant rights, and researcher responsibilities. Candidates for the proposed research had the opportunity to ask questions for clarification before they were asked to sign the Consent Form.

A third area of ethical concern was that the data collected would be trustworthy. To assure accuracy in the data collection process, interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, and Richardson (2005) suggested "first level member checks" (p.201) as a method for establishing credibility of data. Transcriptions of individual interviews were offered for review by the interviewee for confirmation of accuracy and intent. Brantlinger et al. (2005) stated that as they concur about conclusions, collaborative work with other researchers will contribute to the credibility of the study. Though it does not meet this definition offered by Brantlinger et al. (2005), I posit that the creation of documents by a collaborative group of participants also offers a means of establishing trustworthiness due to the transparency of the data collection process, and that the collaborative analysis that occurred during the focus group session provided verification to the analysis of interview data. Focus group sessions were video recorded and documents which were collaboratively created were photographed and the original documents saved.

All files associated with interview and focus group data have been stored in electronic file folders on my personal computer which is password protected, on a flash drive, and on *Dropbox*, a password protected internet file storage site. Print copies of the transcriptions and documents generated or collected through the research process have been organized into file folders. Both printed and electronic records have been secured in a locked, fire-proof box to ensure retention and confidentiality. A data collection matrix was created to support retrieval of specific data.

Because I share the common experience of being a Master Principal with the research sample group, careful “bracketing” (Creswell, 2007, p.142) was necessary to focus the construction of meaning from the perspective of the participants. Choices in data collection, analysis, and reporting are always influenced by the personal values and experiences of the researcher. Bott (2010) stated that, “Central to maintaining reflexivity is the need for researchers to constantly locate and relocate themselves within their work, and to remain in dialogue with research practice, participants and methodologies” (p. 160). Any references to my personal experience within or since the program have been explicitly stated as my own. Richards (2006) suggested one response to the challenge of subjectivity can be the use of a research diary because it makes clear the relationship of the researcher to the research. A research diary helped me pay particular attention to my position as a researcher who shares the common experience of those in the study. It was also important that I attend to the ways in which I believe my subjectivity may be perceived by the participant group and future readers of reports of the research

Ethical practices in qualitative research are of primary concern to this researcher. The intent has been to conduct all data collection, preservation, analysis, interpretation, and reporting to the highest ethical standard. However, the transparency of ethical behavior is also of

importance. Brantlinger et al. (2005) offered a list of quality indicators for interview studies and data analysis which, when adhered to, address many ethical measures. If any of these indicators are not adhered to, ethical issues may be suspect. Included in their list are factors related to participant selection, reasonable questions, adequate recording of data, fair representation, assurance of confidentiality, sorting and coding of data, rationale for inclusion or exclusion, documentation of methods, reflection by the researcher, substantiated conclusions, and related research connections (Brantlinger et al., 2005). All of these quality indicators were present in the study. Explicitly addressing several areas of ethical concern including confidentiality measures, informed consent, trustworthiness of data collection, and confidence in the bracketing of personal interpretation should be helpful to the reader to understand the scope of my ethical consideration and intent.

Trustworthiness

As a qualitative researcher, the researcher is herself an instrument of data collection and analysis. Rossman and Rallis (2003) indicated that trustworthiness of qualitative research is determined by the competence with which it is conducted and the ethical behavior of the researcher. Transparency with research participants, colleagues serving as critical friends, and a dissertation committee should contribute to consumer confidence in the conduct of this qualitative research in a competent and ethical manner. Several strategies suggested by Rossman and Rallis (2003) were employed to ensure credibility and trustworthiness including triangulation, prolonged engagement, participant validation, and sustained discussion with valued colleagues.

Validity of the study was generated through triangulation of data. Comparison of the perceptual data generated through interviews, data from the focus group, and the documented

performance of participants which has been externally validated for all Master Principals, provided a means of analysis and create trustworthiness of the findings.

Because of this researcher's close relationship with the program, a positive presupposition was brought to the review of the MPP. Careful bracketing was required to ensure that researcher bias will not be perceived an issue of trustworthiness. As a researcher, I was uniquely situated to be well informed about the MPP. Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) pointed out that substantial involvement in the field can be a source of credibility. I made every attempt to employ my personal knowledge with objectivity while collecting and analyzing data through sound phenomenological methodologies. To ensure that my own biases did not influence the portrayal of participant perceptions, I conducted member checks by offering research participants an opportunity to review summaries of my findings and conclusions.

Dependability has been assured by an audit trail showing the processes and procedures used during data collection and analysis. Participants have had the opportunity to review transcriptions of interviews to ensure trustworthiness of data collection. Data, identified only by pseudonyms, will be available for future research. It is the practice of the Arkansas Leadership Academy to ensure inter-rater reliability in portfolio scoring. It was appropriate for me to conduct a similar strategy to ensure dependability of coding and analysis of this research data by having a few of the interview transcripts independently coded by qualified ALA staff.

When referring to transferability, Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) stated that, "Although qualitative researchers do not expect their findings to be generalizable to all other settings, it is likely that the lessons learned in one setting might be useful to others" (p. 78). By crafting a rich and holistic description of the experiences and perceptions of the Master Principals, the information gained should be informative and may be transferable to similar programs or to their

development. This detailed description of the Master Principal Program and its impact may provide an example of a comprehensive leadership development program to others interested in program development as well as informing MPP stakeholders.

Reviewing the criteria for grounded theory studies outlined by Charmaz (2006) offered four lenses for determining the quality of this qualitative research. First, the research is credible. This study provides a deep understanding of the phenomenological nature of Master Principal's experience during and after the MPP through appropriate data collection and analysis methods. Secondly, the study is original and contributes new knowledge to the field. Resonance on many levels, Charmaz's (2006) third criteria, will be strong for the various stakeholders of the Arkansas Leadership Academy and the field of educational leadership. Finally, the analysis supports description and interpretation of the phenomenon that will be useful for a variety of purposes. "A strong combination of originality and credibility increases resonance, usefulness, and the subsequent value of the contribution" (Charmaz, p. 183).

Limitations

The data collected for this study does not tell every facet of the story of the impact of the program. As this study was delimited to the examination of the impact of the ALA through the perceptions of a limited number of participants, the researcher acknowledges that there are other sources of data and analysis that could be used in future research. Many other sources of information either already exist or should be compiled and analyzed such as student achievement trends and perceptions of the school community. For this study, during the explanation of the Master Principal designation process, some of these issues were implicitly addressed as student achievement and 360 degree perceptual interviews are part of the assessment. Additional data

collection and analysis have been recommended for future studies in the conclusion of this dissertation.

Since I shared the experience of the participants in this research, a potential limitation was researcher bias. I guarded carefully that the reality I captured through the interview and data analysis processes is that of the interviewees and not my own. My voice as part of the data set may be perceived by some as an insurmountable limitation to credibility. Because of this potential limitation, the sampling plan excluded my personal story as a data set on the same plane as that of other respondents. I included my own experiences and reflections as part of the discussion from the voice of a researcher. It is also possible that because of that shared experience, participants may have defaulted to telling me what they thought I wanted to hear. To guard against this possibility, I carefully balanced probing for details without influencing the choices respondents made about what to share. Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) stated in their criterion for credibility that it is imperative for the researcher to clarify the bias brought to the research as well as the reflective and decision making processes (p.77). I have communicated to readers about the decisions I made and why I chose certain methods as I worked to accurately collect and represent the data provided by the participants, and transparently frame sampling strategies, analysis, interpretation, and reporting. I explicitly positioned myself within this research and explained the process used to make the decision regarding my exclusion from the sample. During the writing phases of the research careful bracketing ensured transparency of personal experiences and perceptions as separate from that of research participants.

Timeline

Approval to gather data from respondents was received from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) in October of 2011. The first interview was conducted in late December of 2011

and arrangements were agreed upon with a transcriptionist in January, 2012. An interview schedule was developed in February, 2012. At a pace of approximately two individual interviews per month, all of the potential subjects were interviewed by May of 2012. A focus group interview was conducted in January of 2012 at the Winthrop Rockefeller Institute. A filing system for printed transcriptions, consent forms, supporting materials, and field notes was created in January, 2012. Also in January, digital folders for all electronic files were established on my computer along with an external back-up flash drive and *Dropbox* folder. ATLAS.ti was purchased in February, 2012 and tutorials begun. Presentation of the completed prospectus was successfully made to the dissertation committee in March of 2012. Transcription and member checking, coding, and initial analysis were ongoing and concurrent with data collection in the spring of 2012. Review of recently published literature also occurred during the spring and summer of 2012. Final analysis and writing of the findings was conducted during the summer and early fall of 2012. The completed study was presented and defended to the dissertation committee in November of 2012.

CHAPTER FOUR – FINDINGS

Introduction

This qualitative study examined the impact of the Arkansas Leadership Academy's Master Principal Program (MPP) through the perspective of those who have completed the entire program and attained designation as a Master Principal. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine what Master Principals perceived the effect to be of the Master Principal Program on their leadership practices, school cultures, and student achievement. The study sought to answer the primary research question: How have the knowledge base and leadership skills of Master Principals changed as a result of their participation in the Master Principal Program? Secondary questions included:

- (a) How have Master Principals reacted to MPP Institutes?
- (b) How has the performance of Master Principals changed?
- (c) How has school culture changed in the Master Principal's schools?
- (d) How have student results changed in the schools of Master Principals?
- (e) How has influence beyond the school changed for Master Principals?

Summary of Research Participants

The fifteen research participants in this study, representing different parts of the state, and a variety of school characteristics, shared many personal demographic similarities. Participant and school descriptors may be found in Appendix K under assigned pseudonyms.

Participants in the study included two men and thirteen women. At the time of the interviews, all had 21 or more years of experience as educators and had served in the principalship from 7 to 23 years. Ten held a Master's Degree, three had either an Educational Specialist or multiple Masters degrees, and two held Doctorates. University preparation came

from Harding University, University of Arkansas, University of Arkansas at Little Rock, University of Hawaii, Louisiana Tech University, University of Central Oklahoma, University of Central Arkansas, Arkansas Tech University, Arkansas State University, Henderson State University, and the University of East Texas at Texarkana.

As shown in Appendix K, the Master Principals (MP) in the study served primary, elementary and middle schools at the time of their Designation. The subjects were geographically diverse with two principals from East Arkansas and two from the South-West, five from the central part of the state, and six school leaders in North-West Arkansas. Schools ranged in size from those serving 235 to 925 students and from pre-kindergarten to eighth grade. The socio-economic status of the schools also varied from 25% of students receiving free or reduced meals to 100%. The racial diversity of the state was represented by the racial make-up of these schools. From schools that were predominately Caucasian or predominately African American to those that served a balance of Hispanic, Caucasian, African American, and Marshallese students.

Since the time of their designation, four Master Principals included in the study have left the principalship to serve in the district office or have joined the staff of the Arkansas Leadership Academy. While serving a greater number of schools and students in these roles than they would have in a building principalship, they have each forgone the MP bonus according to the rules set out in the founding legislation. Four of the fifteen study participants have transferred to another school since their Designation as a Master Principal with two of those now qualifying for the additional bonus by leading “high needs” schools.

Though various grade configurations, regional and demographic variances existed within the research sample, the leadership practice described was similar among the participants. It is

also interesting to note that the responses to the interview did not vary based on the present role of the research participant. One commented that “Leadership is leadership, whatever your role.”

Overview of Major Findings

As Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) state, a qualitative study should result in the “concentration of individual responses and the concentration of responses across individuals” (p. 109). Five major findings emerged from this study as areas of impact of the MPP grounded both by the individuals’ strong convictions and practice, and from the collection of information from all participants:

1. The universal and almost immediate reaction from principals when asked about their reaction to the MPP was, “It was the best professional development I have ever had!”
2. Significant changes in the performance of Master Principals’ leadership practices occurred as a result of the knowledge and skills they acquired from Institute experiences.
3. A strong element in each principal’s story was the culture change within their school toward one of collaborative stakeholder involvement, a commitment to continuous improvement and high expectations, and an increased sense of efficacy and respect.
4. Though never satisfied, all principals noted positive changes in student achievement results both during their participation in the MPP and since Designation as a Master Principal.
5. Though all principals expressed a humble attitude about their success and influence, increases in Master Principals’ influence beyond the school was found at the local, state, and national levels.

Roadmap of the Chapter

This chapter has been organized according to the major findings as revealed in the data. One finding is reported for each of the five research questions concerning principals' reactions to the MPP, what they perceive to be the changes that occurred in their knowledge base and leadership practices, what changed in the culture and achievement results for their school, and what they believe to be their influence beyond their building. The chapter summary addresses the primary research question and reports a summary of the leadership practices, school cultures and student achievement that changed as the principals progressed through the MPP. Pseudonyms have been used to identify the principals and their schools when using specific quotes or examples to illuminate a key point or practice. The data from the interviews and the Focus Group were woven together and integrated as deemed relevant to the findings. When a sentiment was expressed by only a couple of principals, the reference was identified as "a few." The use of "several" indicated that more than two but less than half of the principals indicated a particular view or similar experience. The term "many" was used to indicate that the topic, skill, or experience was mentioned by approximately half of the participants. "Most" or "all" were used to imply that more than half or 100 percent, respectfully, of principals shared the sentiment or a very similar experience.

Finding One

The universal and almost immediate reaction from principals when asked about their reaction to the MPP was, "It was the best professional development I have ever had!"

The overall design of the MPP sessions with engaging learning experiences, ongoing work, and deepening of the curriculum over time created a unique learning experience for the principals. Holly said, "The way it was designed with ongoing work between session and then

going back a few months later was very effective for me.” After their initial enthusiastic remarks about the MPP being “the best,” principals revealed that they felt the Institutes provided relevant and engaging tools and learning activities from the five performance areas that lead to improvement of their work in schools. Most principals commented on the significance of strengthening their reflective practice during their participation in the program. All of them felt the relationships built with others through the MPP were invaluable.

Learning Activities and Tools

Learning to use a variety of tools for collecting ideas, problem solving, consensus building and planning was identified by each principal as invaluable to them as they lead their schools. Most principals referred to the general idea of using constructivist strategies as a unique learning experience for them which they then tried to re-create for the adults in their school.

Several specific tools and activities were mentioned by each principal as most meaningful and useful. “The Carpet” activity that caused reflection on change and teamwork was a powerful experience for many of the principals. More than one principal said they even made up their own “carpet” out of construction paper and tape to recreate the experience with their faculty. The jigsaw process for collaborative learning of new content, the experiential learning model which helped them learn to process experiences with a group, practicing evidence language, honing their main messages, and receiving up-to-date information on a variety of topics relevant to their schools, were some of the more frequently named activities. Kellie said a key-learning for her was that professional development should be about facilitating meaningful dialog rather than presenting. She said she learned during her MPP experience that professional development is, “not an event, it’s an ongoing process. You don’t just bring somebody in to do PD and get your six hours over with.” Jane, like several others, borrowed the videos used during sessions to share

with her staff. “They stirred my soul so I knew that was something that would stir the faculty too.”

Action research was mentioned by many principals as powerful learning for themselves and for their faculty. “Before I went through the Academy, I didn’t even know what action research was. We didn’t understand the whole process of how you try something new, collect your data, and make informed decisions,” shared Brenda. When they began to realize that it could be “anything you want to find out whether or not it’s effective,” principals said they were able to lead their school into employing action research as a tool for improvement. When wondering about whether a new practice would be a good idea or not, Jane shared that her teachers now just say, “You know we need to do an action research project on that.” Mary offered an example of combining jigsaw and action research in teams to support implementation of new high-yield strategies in her school. “Different teams taught different strategies from Marzano’s book each month. Then they did an action research project with it in the classrooms and came back to talk about it the next month.” She indicated that combination seemed to provide the learning and support for implementation her teachers needed to be successful and move the strategies out to all classrooms. As Brenda said of similar use of tools, “Taking it to scale is the point.”

A personal learning activity that was mentioned several times by principals was the assignment to track and analyze their use of time. Blake said, “I didn’t have a clue what I was doing, that was a big eye opener!” When he looked at it, he acknowledged to himself that he was spending too much time on things that had no real impact on student learning. Becoming more intentional about focusing every moment of every day on the important work of leading the

school in living the vision and mission, building collaborative relationships, and the other performance areas became a key factor in increasing effectiveness for these instructional leaders.

Each of the Master Principals remarked that they really tried to complete the assignments given between sessions. Mary said she liked them because she could really see that they worked for her own learning, with her staff and the school as a whole. “I tried to absorb it like a sponge and then come back and use it.” Brenda stated,

The teachers at Dale Elementary School embraced a lot of the things I was bringing back from the mountain. I had wanted to do some of the things that MPP teaches you how to do and I just didn’t know how to do it. So, the tools and things we learned in the program were invaluable.

Kellie and Rose both commented that they appreciated that the work assignments were relevant. They valued the learning because it was job-embedded. Kellie phrased it, “We had to look at something we actually needed to do anyway.” Rose added, “There was accountability because we knew we were coming back up to the mountain and we had to report out.” Speaking of her use of the MPP work back at school, Isabel said, “Now lots of people other than me in the building are using the tools and not just with adults, but within the classroom as well.”

Reflective Practice

Action research, gap analysis and similar tools for collaborative inquiry and reflection were often identified as important elements of principal learning. Critical friend conversations were another helpful activity to encourage reflection about their work. Dee, like most of the others, commented on the benefits of this collegial dialog, “I knew there were a bunch of smart people in that room. Half of what I’ve learned, I’ve learned from the other people who went through the process with me.” Institute sessions always involved journaling as a tool for

reflection on the past, present and future. Several principals commented that they had written something down during a session and only had time to really reflect on its meaning after some time had passed. Dee said, “I really had the opportunity to go to the mountain during our sessions and reflect on what I was doing. The light bulb really came on in Phase II.”

Putting together the portfolio each year involved reflection, self-evaluation based on the MPP rubric, summarizing, and communicating the heart of the school’s improvement efforts. Katie shared that as she first read the MPP Rubric, “I didn’t know that a good principal does some of those things. It really raised the level for me.” Digesting portfolio scores became a source of valuable feedback and a foundation for action planning for principals. Like the other Master Principals, Jane reported that she was always pleased to get her feedback from the scorers. She said, “I remember one year when my lowest score was Academic Rigor. I did my Action Research on that the next year and we really spent time thinking together about what rigor looked like in our building.”

Several of the principals said that they invited focus groups of staff and other stakeholders as reflective partners as they created their designation portfolios. “It’s really their story,” shared Isabel. Sandy said she felt validated about her own judgment and understanding of the MPP rubric during her designation site-visit. “We didn’t try to put anything on, we just were who we are and I think they found the strengths and growth areas to be the true areas we have.” Brenda admitted that like most of the other Master Principals, she is very self-critical. She said that during her site-visit for designation she asked, “Ok, for tomorrow what can we do better?” Kellie shared, “You have to love showing your school and you have to just walk your talk.” When asked how their faculty responded to the close inspection of the site-visit, each expressed that it was both an opportunity to be affirmed and to increase focus for continued improvement.

Speaking of her faculty's response, Sandy said, "They loved it and never experienced such community support." All the Master Principals indicated that the designation process prompted deep reflection, that it was like a celebration of how far they had come, and that it fueled their school's continued efforts to improve.

Relationships

A few principals remarked that they felt isolated and did not have close ties with anyone who was "out there on the cutting edge of things" before their participation in the MPP. The relationships created through the state-wide networking and collaborative learning during the Institutes became a foundation for invaluable support to principals from large and small districts for all of the Master Principals. A typical comment was shared by one principal, "I'm still friends with a lot of those people." Another principal captured the common theme, "If I have a question or need to get somebody's perspective on something, people who have been through the Academy, even if they weren't in our cohort, are the people around the state that I call."

Summary of Finding One

Master Principals reported universally that the MPP provided learning experiences that helped expand their knowledge of leadership and that they learned to use tools that impacted their work in their schools. They all said they grew as reflective practitioners through the program and that the relationships they built were and still are invaluable. Master Principals identified the major design elements of the program as intermittent sessions built with engaging learning experiences and collaborative reflection, implementation of their learning supported by relevant work assignments, and expectations for best practice defined by a rigorous rubric.

Finding Two

Significant changes in the performance of Master Principals' leadership practices occurred as a result of the knowledge and skills they acquired from Institute experiences.

Each principal applied their learning within their school's unique context. Implementation of their individual action plans over the course of their participation in the MPP resulted in increased knowledge and facilitation skills in areas of leadership which are reflective of the five performance areas of the program's curriculum. Creating a common mission and vision, collaborative data-driven decision making and strategic planning, building leadership capacity in themselves and others, sharing leadership, and managing change were areas of growth for all principals.

Shared Beliefs, Vision and Mission

All the Master Principals referred to identifying a set of shared core beliefs, defining a vision and crafting a mission statement to guide the work of the school as an important first step in their leadership journey. They each named collaborative tools such as All-on-the-Wall, Carousel Brainstorming, Dot Voting, and visioning activities learned during Phase I of the MPP as invaluable to this collaborative work with multiple stakeholders.

Brenda said, "I started with giving everybody a blank sheet of paper and said write the mission statement for the district. Not one of my staff could do that. I don't think I had ever read it." Before MPP, Isabel said that she knew her vision, but probably nobody else knew it. After she participated in the MPP, the school's stakeholders developed the vision and mission collaboratively; everybody had ownership. When she had the chance to open a new school, Isabel said:

We started looking at the highest level on the MPP rubric and saying this is what we want the new school to be like. We backwards mapped from there what we needed to do to be able to have that kind of culture. It's not on a shelf, we talk about it a couple of times a year formally to be sure we are still on track and if it is still what we believe or if we want to make changes. We live it every day.

Dee shared her experience working with a state-wide group of leaders when she realized they had jumped directly into planning actions without first establishing a shared vision or beliefs about the work. She asked the group, "What is it that we believe that this process should accomplish and what have we heard from all the constituents around the state? So, we came up with a list of 10 core values." Sandy reported that:

Even beginning at the interview process we say this is what we believe, and if this is not who you are then this is not a place that you should work. We all believe it. All the decisions that we make at our school are tied to our vision, our mission and our beliefs.

Data-driven Decision Making and Strategic Planning

The ALA's Hourglass model (1991), shown in Appendix L, formed the framework for internal strategic planning for these principals, beginning with the firm foundation of a common set of shared beliefs, vision and mission. During the Focus Group session conducted for this study, the principals discussed the Hourglass was a useful model because, before MPP they relied only on the state's school improvement model referred to as ACSIP, saying that they now understand and rely on the "bottom of the hourglass" to inform everything above the X. Broadening their view of "current reality" and how to collect a variety of data to better understand their reality was also mentioned as important learning. Learning and using these

models and tools for data-driven decision-making changed their strategic planning processes and built a sense of internal accountability for school improvement.

Principals reported that through their MPP experience they became grounded in the use of data to make systemic decisions affecting all aspects of the school. Summative, formative, growth, proficiency level, and trend data for individual students, cohorts of students, grade levels and individual teacher's classrooms were all mentioned by these leaders as tools for understanding their current reality and informing their next steps. In addition to student achievement, a variety of data gathering tools were used to collect stakeholder perceptions. Discipline referrals, attendance, and other environmental data were also mentioned as important sources of information. Master Principals use tools such as Classroom Walk-Through (CWT) to collect data on key elements of the teaching and learning occurring in their schools. They reported that they create and deploy surveys to multiple stakeholders to gain insight into perceptions for various school issues. They used focus groups to collect perceptual data with tools such as SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats). As summarized by one principal, "Before the MPP, I made decisions based on hunches. Now we make decisions based on data and we continue to get more and more focused." Principals discussed learning to use strategic planning tools such as a force field, or Fishbone, and gap analysis and establishing SMART Goals to help them focus on measurable objectives. Jane said, "Anytime we get ready to plan anything, we start with deciding what tools we need to do it. We've used them all."

Capacity Building and Shared Leadership

Master Principals grew not only in their personal ability to lead and facilitate the work of others, but also in their ability to support the growth of others as leaders. Mary said, "I could see the development of myself, but I could see the development of the school staff as a whole."

Brenda shared, “I realized that part of my responsibility is to equip the teachers in the building to be ready for leadership positions. I also learned that delegation doesn’t mean giving someone a job and leaving them to do it, but nurturing them through the process.” Isabel, like most of the other principals, found that it was important to lead by example. She said she had wanted her teachers to become National Board Certified but, “until I did it myself personally I had no idea of the real deep, deep reflective value in going through that process.”

Many principals came to the program with a philosophy of shared leadership which deepened as they increased their use of tools for collaboration. Others had to experience effective shared leadership before discovering that they also held the ALA’s core belief that “the greatest leaders are known by the number of leaders they create” (ALA, 2012). Sharing leadership was an evolving process for most principals. Many admitted that they were reluctant at first to share leadership because they either had no confidence in the ability of others or they felt they would be shirking responsibilities expected of them. They first had to examine the advantages of empowering leadership in others and the impact on school culture. Secondly, they had to build the capacity of others before they could trust that the decisions and work would be done effectively. Though the principals all acknowledged that they ultimately hold the responsibility for decisions made, they indicated that they grew to value the input from others more and more as they shared leadership. Over time, all Master Principals built a school culture founded on sharing leadership and realized benefits most had not even imagined possible before MPP. Isabel said that now, “We all work together to make decisions and we all work together to learn.”

Learning the skills and tools of shared decision making was critical to the success of Master Principals. Mary said that, “Team work is a big part of what I learned from the MPP because we were always doing things in teams and sharing ideas while at MPP.” Effective

communication systems, understanding and supporting collaborative adult learning and working dynamics, developing facilitation skills, and employing agendas focused on the real work of school improvement helped principals create teams capable of taking the lead in their schools. Referring to the use of a combination of collaborative tools, Katie said, “I could put it in their hands. They looked at the desired outcomes, the current reality, the helpers and hindrances, and then the action plan. It wasn’t me saying to the staff you need to change. It was their decision.”

All of the Master Principals’ schools have established multiple teams, some designed to support adult learning and various others that take responsibility for decision-making and implementation of specific initiatives. Brenda provided an example of a target team that gathered information, discussed options, prioritized, and led the school to consensus on the use of grant funds. She said, “In the past, I would have done all that myself.” Based on the foundation of a shared vision, Isabel’s faculty, like in many other Master Principal’s schools, builds the budget using collaborative tools for decision making such as dot voting, a form of weighted voting taught at MPP. Almost all the principals also named All-on-the-Wall, a tool for organized brainstorming. A few mentioned using a criteria matrix to help a group analyze choices or data and make decisions collaboratively. Brenda provided an example of using the Fishbone for collaboratively solving problems, “That made it all come together and possible solutions just kind of jump out at you.” All of these tools were learned during the MPP sessions. Isabel commented that she not only uses the “ALA tools,” she creates her own to suit the specific needs of the situation and she, like the other MPs are always looking to others to learn new methods for group decision-making, planning, and learning.

Shelly shared that the development of a new school master schedule happened through a team effort to find time for the “big rocks” of PLCs (professional learning communities) because

that was the priority, she knew that changing the schedule would be hard for some staff, and she knew, as the Academy's core belief states, "People support what they help create." Vanessa shared an example of her teachers taking the lead in developing a writing initiative after visiting another school. "We developed a writing task force right there. They were on fire. Then we decided we'd come back and have some flexible groups with writing. So by them taking ownership of that, we're looking pretty good with our writing now."

Change

An important facet of leadership is helping others navigate the change process. Master Principals learned to lead the change process for the diverse group of individuals in their school. Almost all principals commented on the research they learned during MPP about how people accept change. Sharing this research in a user-friendly fashion with the use of metaphors, as taught during MPP, helped principals facilitate change in their schools through a common understanding and language. "We don't all need to be speedboats, but we certainly don't want to all be rowboats," was a sentiment offered by Shelly indicating that diversity should be valued. Principals said they knew they had to support the late majority as well as the early adopters of any change initiative. The "implementation dip" was a model many of the Master Principals relied on to help teachers place into context their concerns and efforts about new initiatives. Brenda commented that her teachers would often say, "Well, we're in the dip right now!" or "I'm finally on the upswing of the dip." More than one principal reported that they had hosted a chip and "dip" party for their staff to ease the tension related to the challenges of change. Brenda, like many others, shared that she had learned that, "Change is hard, it's a process, and sometimes you just need to stop where you are and celebrate how far you've come before you take the next step."

Summary of Finding Two

Whether still serving as a principal, leading district initiatives, or supporting others through a role with the Arkansas Leadership Academy, this sentiment from one principal was shared by each principal through a similar phrase, “Pretty much everything I do on my job today comes back to this training. I could not do what I’m doing today without going through the Master Principal Program.”

Finding Three

A strong element in each principal’s story was the culture change within their school toward one of collaborative stakeholder involvement, a commitment to continuous improvement and high expectations, and an increased sense of efficacy and respect.

None of the principals claimed personal credit for the positive culture changes in their school but rather attributed credit to the school’s stakeholders. Parent and community involvement changed from superficial to meaningful and student voice increased as the schools began to live out their shared beliefs and mission. Each described the movement toward a collaborative adult culture of continuous improvement, an increased sense of efficacy, and a school-wide commitment to high expectations for the success of students.

Stakeholder Involvement and Collaboration

Master Principals reported that they ensure that stakeholders of the school are both informed and included in the planning and implementation of the school’s improvement efforts. Focus groups from the community representing all sectors of the community, parent groups, students, classified and certified staff were encouraged to support the success of students and the school through meaningful engagement. That effort began with including all stakeholders in the development of the school’s vision and mission. Looking for and building upon this common

ground created a platform for understanding and the opportunity for wide support to achieve improvement goals. Brenda said she ensured stakeholders know, “This is what we believe about teaching and learning and this is the experience we want you to have at our school,” forms a solid foundation of common expectations.

The first step in the change process mentioned by several principals was the ability to create a compelling need for change with the school’s stakeholders. Secondly, they gave stakeholders the opportunity to build an internal desire to do things differently and then to have input into the design process and the work that would facilitate the change. Isabel explained,

I like to be able to demonstrate a compelling need for change and have the faculty really explore what the current situation is and for us to decide for ourselves that there is a need for change. That we are not changing for change’s sake, but for there to be an internal desire to do things differently and then I like for the faculty as a whole to be able to help us look at, and design that change process.

Brenda stated, “It is in the community’s best interest to have an educated workforce. It is in the parents’ best interest to have children that want to stay in school and can have a degree of success.” The principals reported that involving all stakeholders, not just teachers, in the school’s plan for improvement was a growth area for them during the MPP. Several referred to the “Eight Sectors” of the community diagram shared with them in MPP that helped them look more broadly at who were the school’s stakeholders. Principals developed a multitude of ways to involve parents and the community through a variety of creative partnerships. Mary shared, “We had 90 hours volunteered for each child in our school last year.”

Isabel shared that, “The people who were hired to work here designed what the school would be like from the ground up. We used the five performance areas of the MPP to put our

design together.” Master Principals changed their school’s master schedules to embed at least weekly time for collaboration with role-alike teachers. “The teamwork concept was a big part of our school improvement plan,” said one principal. Katie said that the school did have “little group meetings where they planned field trips and celebrated birthdays” before she became the principal. “Now it’s a focused meeting around a specific topic. It’s our adult learning culture.” Katie, like most of the other principals, say that the collaborative learning culture of the adults is moving well beyond those designated times to include voluntary peer observations. Katie said she helps that along by arranging for substitutes so teachers can more easily observe each other. Brenda commented on the ALA Railroad Model (1992), shown in Appendix M, as an important filter for guiding her work in building collaborative relationships through the real work of the school. “Relationships are so important, as well as the job you have to get done. You have to have both sides of that and people can see it because of that graphic.”

Continuous Improvement

Principals reported that collaboratively examining their data, observing each other and reflecting on teaching practices, and conducting action research within the school created a change in the school’s culture and results. Katie’s comments offer a summary of what all of the Master Principals said of their culture of continuous improvement, “Everybody’s learning and nobody is exempt from it. We all have to be learning all the time.” Mary explained, “I think the teachers at first didn’t know what action research was, so we tried to make it as simple as we could. It was amazing because people would share things with one another that they had tried in their classroom and someone else would try it too. People in the building were sharing and learning.”

Referring to the use of data to guide instruction and interventions, Mary said, “Everyone in the school has an Academic Improvement Plan (AIP), not just the ones that are below grade level.” She continued by saying that they sit down with the parents and explain the student’s goals at the beginning of the year and again at the end of the year. “It’s delightful to be able to see those children grow!” Brenda told the story of how her school learned from the failure of an intervention program by examining the results.

It did not do what we wanted it to, especially for our minority population. So, we revised it and it is now working much better. Last year there were only two of the 36 in the program who had to be referred to Special Education instead of the 85% we had before. Isabel said,

When I first became principal and took over that school, the culture was not good. The thought of learning or needing to learn or seeking learning, was an admission of inadequacy or admission of defeat, and so if you suggested that someone might like to learn something, it was an affront. Whereas now, people are so hungry for it: they are constantly wanting to learn from each other, constantly wanting to grow.

High Expectations and Efficacy

A culture of high expectations for both adult and student learning became the norm in these schools. Creating a safe environment for students and teachers to take risks as learners and leaders was a recurrent theme. Master Principals have high expectations of others, but of themselves first. Holly shared the sentiment of all the principals when she stated, “We’ll never get where we need to be because there is always room for growth.”

Isabel said, “I love it when in a faculty meeting one of my teachers questions something we are doing or when a teacher comes to me and says they have a better way of doing

something.” Principals supported their teachers as learners through targeted professional development, specific feedback on their teaching, established architectures for collaborative inquiry, and opportunities to celebrate successes. Teachers grew in confidence and a sense that what they do really does make a difference for students. Shelly shared, “Once you experience success, it gives you so much confidence. Once they begin to see it, it spreads to the rest of the staff.” Jane said that after her school made a 23 percent gain in the number of students who were successful, “We celebrated and had so much fun. It was like they were all dancing up and down the hallway.”

Some of the principals described the tools used for students to set their own goals for growth such as increasing fluency in reading by a certain number of words per minute. In Sandy’s school parents were also included in the student’s goal setting. These principals shared that as students attained their goals, their sense of efficacy and responsibility for their own learning increased.

Relentlessly Respectful

Along with their high expectations, these leaders recognize and honor diversity of opinions, personality styles, and cultures. One principal adopted the phrase “relentlessly respectful” from Chenoweth (2010) to sum up the new culture of the school. Another said she reminds herself daily to start with a positive pre-supposition: others, whether students, teachers or parents, want to do the right thing and are doing the best they can. She continued, “If it is revealed they are not, or don’t know how to do better, it is my job to support them into it.”

Helping stakeholders understand and respond to change was a common theme as Master Principals discussed the culture of respect. Most of the principals recognized that their internal drive had to be tempered with their knowledge of the scope of changes and the people they were

leading. Referring to change that is driven by an external force, many principals tried to help stakeholders understand how that change was related to the larger context. One principal commented, “If we don’t believe in it or understand it, I will try to protect them from it or slow it down so they can build understanding.” Brenda talked about helping teachers make the transition to the Common Core State Standards by employing strategies to help them understand the value it would bring to their students and learn what they needed to do differently. She said, “You have to help the people who are actually making the change see the need for it.”

Continuous communication and inclusion of divergent ideas was an underlying theme in the respectful cultures described by the Master Principals. Principals shared that a key learning from MPP was that it is not what you say that matters, but rather what others hear. Many of them commented on their improvement in storytelling and crafting their “main messages” through their MPP experience. Each indicated that inclusion of student voice and representatives from all eight sectors of the community was a significant change in their practice for gaining input and creating partnerships. Sandy invites community resource people to participate in the new student reception each year to help families connect with providers. An example of some of the architectures principals created was Rose’s monthly “coffee break” with parents and the principal to increase two-way meaningful communication inclusive of multiple stakeholders. To varying degrees, all use digital resources such as webpages, Facebook, automated calling, and online grade reporting systems to increase informational communication.

Master Principals aligned the resources and efforts of the school to create an environment that focused on high expectations which was also a highly supportive and caring environment. With a rapid increase in enrollment one year, Jane’s school had to quickly change behaviors of the school’s new student body to maintain the culture of respectful behavior they had built. She

said, “The teachers are committed. We developed a behavioral intervention management team. The committee got together, they developed all the rationale, everything for it, developed the tools that we would use, the processes and everything.” Programs such as *The Leader in Me* and the Kiwanis’ *K-Club* were mentioned to help students learn about leadership and respect. Working with local community groups to provide mentoring programs and after school enrichment or tutoring, brokering health resources, and meeting other needs of students created a culture that communicates the value of each individual.

Summary of Finding Three

Culture is generally defined as “the way we do things around here.” Principals reported that significant changes occurred in their schools’ cultures as a result of their participation in the MPP. They built capacity and increased stakeholder involvement to create a culture of shared leadership and common vision and mission. By designing structures to support adult and student learning and accountability for results, they developed a culture of continuous improvement with high expectations for all. Honoring successes and attention to diversity created a culture of efficacy and respect.

Finding Four

Though never satisfied, all principals noted positive changes in student achievement results both during their participation in the MPP and since designation as a Master Principal.

Student achievement results on an end of the year, high-stakes assessment are a lagging indicator of the school’s impact on student learning. Principals attributed increasing student success to their new leadership practices that led to the positive school culture and accountability systems focused on changing results for both adults and students. Blake commented, “I managed the building well but I don’t think you could put me in a category of a leader of adult learning or

student learning until I went through this program.” Though different curricular and instructional practices were employed, differentiation to support adult and student learning and accountability systems were recurring themes. Again borrowing from Chenoweth (2010), a “respectfully relentless” focus on results was described a major factor in increasing student achievement for these principals.

Accountability Systems for Teaching and Learning

Kellie said that one important thing she learned from the MPP was “If you don’t have a way of measuring whether or not it’s being done or being effective it’s not going to happen.” Classroom walk-throughs or focused learning walks were the most frequently mentioned system for monitoring what is actually happening in the school. Principals described a variety of models and protocols their schools had developed over time. Isabel articulated it simply, “Now we have coherent systems for what is expected in the classrooms. Again, a system based on what research says and our staff understands, not just my hunch.” All commented on the shift from observations as an external accountability system for examining classroom practices to a sense of school-wide ownership of such tools as a means of supporting teachers through the change process. One principal said, “I walk through with my teachers. According to our model they do not give feedback to their peers. When we do walkthroughs together as a team, we are looking for evidence of something and then we go back and talk about what we saw and how that could impact their work in the future.”

Hiring the right people, making correct assignments, mentoring and evaluation focused on improvement were critical components of the personnel systems of Master Principals. Shelly admitted, “It took me a while to get the right people in the right seats on the bus.” Holding those people accountable for their work and the results they are achieving while also supporting them

were mentioned as a key learning that the Master Principals work hard to live every day. Rose commented that the district has a structure for yearly personal growth plans. She requires her teachers to provide evidence of implementation and growth. “You can’t just say, oh yes, I did well.” Shelly referred to a binder that her teachers use to collect “evidence to support the goals they have developed for their own professional growth.”

Accountability for students was expressed in several ways. A few schools have moved to mastery learning and a no-zeros policy. Several others have transitioned to standards-based reporting systems that inform students and parents of the specific student learning expectations that have been achieved. In several schools, principals described student-led parent conferences where the students and parents set goals and examine the evidence of student progress toward meeting those goals. Rose described an exhibition of their work with community visitors as one accountability piece for students.

Assessment walls, teachers’ use of data, and other means of keeping student achievement as the focus were employed in each of the Master Principal’s schools. Katie said that was a big shift for her current school. “Going back to 1998 when we were studying released items and gearing up for accountability through the assessments in most schools, these people did none of that.” She reported that before she went to the school less than half the students were proficient in literacy or math, and it was urgent that changes be made. We had to build rapport and trust, establish team meetings, and learn to look at our data and effective teaching practices. For the first time everybody had a chance to have a voice in decisions and share ideas. She told them, “Accountability is real and we’ve got to look at our data, but you’re not in this alone. We’re going to get through it together.” Referring to transparency as a tool for helping keep the focus on accountability for results, Jane explained that her school’s assessment wall was color coded,

“If the student was advanced on the Benchmark they were green, if they were proficient they were orange, yellow and red. So that color shows what they started out with and then they’ve moved this year.”

Master Principals know that learning is the core business of a school. They aligned all systems to that end and focused resources to ensure that effective teaching and grade level learning occurred in the school every day. Sandy admitted that, “I made a whole bunch of people mad for a while when we completely revamped things to make it better for kids and by guarding the literacy block.”

Principals reported that since they have established systems for tracking student progress in literacy and math, they have seen more targeted instruction and better results. Sandy shared that even the first grade students know where they are in their progress toward achieving their goals for specific academic targets. Like the other Master Principals, she said that parent support has increased now that the teachers effectively communicate academic progress and goals.

According to Kellie, “Before MPP, it was pitiful. We had teachers who just taught the way they were taught.” Master Principals each reported that they established and continually develop teams to support teachers as they learned new ways of teaching that would better meet the needs of all students. All Master Principals reported having a schedule for weekly, job-embedded adult learning which most referred to as PLCs (Professional Learning Communities). Some were organized by grade levels while others were content groups of teachers. Principals reported that teachers had both common planning time with colleagues and professional development time lead by a lead teacher, instructional facilitator, or administrator. In addition to role-alike PLCs most also referenced some version of vertical teaming that was structured to ensure that school-wide initiatives were taken to scale. Though a few schools had designated

professional development days and PLCs before the principal participated in the MPP, most did not. Those that did have a system in place prior to MPP shared that the quality of the learning greatly improved as they shifted to deeper use of data and increased skills in collaboration and collective inquiry. As the adult learning environment changed, so too did the change in student learning results.

Through these PLCs, teachers deepened their content knowledge and increased their pedagogical skills. Principals commented on the trust that is essential between teachers for them to have the safety to be able to learn from their mistakes. That trust is built through transparency of expectations and a sense of ownership because teachers have worked collaboratively to determine those expectations. Isabel described,

We have developed a system of common expectations, of non-negotiables, a framework for what should be happening in classrooms. Teachers still have professional freedom to put their own personality into their classroom, but everybody is going to have an established purpose, identified academic language, everybody is going to be incorporating student to student interaction, and be checking for understanding.

Because of this culture of professional collaboration, another principal remarked, “I can go into four different classrooms and see the same objectives being taught because they have planned it together.” Shelly provided the example that they talked about the components of comprehensive literacy and through team time they vetted “what it looked like, sounded like, and felt like” at each grade level. Referring to the use of a collaborative tool learned in the MPP, “We put it All-on-the-Wall and we aligned it from kindergarten to 5th grade.” Moving the initiative toward scale she told teachers, “OK, this is yours and you’ve developed it and we’re going to own it this year.”

All principals built capacity for leadership and increased the sharing of best practices by empowering teachers to take leadership roles in professional development. In such a culture, when a teacher has expertise or success with a strategy, they encourage each other to share. Brenda provided an example of teacher-led professional development, “We used a cruise format and teachers went to ports of call to learn from each other. They always say they learn more from presenting than from sitting and listening.”

Thinking about leading adult learning, Holly admitted that before her MPP experience, “When I started I just didn’t know how big of a deal it was.” She said she learned that, “The leadership team, professional development and all that just drives everything.” These principals also shared that they try to be the “lead learner” in their schools. Shelly commented on the value of attending the yearly MPP Learning Reunion, “I go every year because of studying together and discussing and talking and seeing new things. We just need it to keep growing. You can’t do it the same way forever.”

Changes in the expectations for student learning outcomes and the culture of student learning occurred in the schools of Master Principals. The big shift was changing the focus from the teacher to the student. Principals re-aligned resources to support that transition. Brenda said the greatest benefit to her student learning culture has been that teachers are now, “Savvy and know there is something that can be done for each student.” Scaffolding individual students toward success became a major goal for these principals as they worked to change the learning culture for students. Vanessa said, “It took seeing the need, the teachers had to see the kids in there and the need. The data helped us because then they saw that we couldn’t really move kids the way we had done before.”

Taking it to “scale” was often referred to as the goal for best practices to support student learning. Because understanding scale, as defined by Coburn (2002), was a difficult concept for the principals to grasp during their MPP experience, it was almost always said with a chuckle. Most referred to taking best practices for teaching and learning “to scale” as they offered examples of the changes made in curriculum and instruction. One principal said simply, “If it’s good for kids, we should do it for all kids in all classrooms.”

Appropriating time, money, and people to best meet the needs of students resulted in major changes in these schools. In many cases it required a complete change in the structure of the school day or working to eliminate wasted time. Examining the use of time also involved changing the focus from how many minutes the schedule said was allotted for math, to how much of the time and to what degree were the students actively engaged in learning activities. Money was spent on the resources needed to create collaborative, hands-on learning experiences rather than simply purchasing a text-book. Principals found creative sources for additional funding and resources. People were re-assigned to ensure the best match of adults to student needs. One principal said, “I had to get the right people on the bus and then in the right seats on the bus.” Brenda counsels teachers who are not effective or happy in the profession by telling them, “If you’re in the classroom and don’t love it or the kids, you’re in the wrong place and you’re being detrimental to students.” She followed up by saying that the school now has a reputation for being a great place and people want to work there. “Even at the beginning of the interview process we say this is what we believe and if this is not who you are, then this is not the place you should work.”

Master Principals identified a variety of initiatives intended to impact student learning in their various schools. Without exception, they used a collaborative approach to select and move

new programs, curriculum, and instructional practices toward scale. Almost all of the principals confessed that before their participation in the MPP, they would have been directive, “taken the bull by the horns,” and expected compliance with change initiatives. After MPP, they all said they understood that compliance is insufficient. They wanted what was best for students and their learning to be at scale, indicating that scale requires: a shift of ownership to the people who are closest to the issue, deep knowledge and use, everyone is doing it, and things are in place for sustainability. As Brenda said, “If it’s the best thing for our kids, then it needs to be at scale.”

An example of moving toward scale from Sandy’s school was implementation of the *Daily Five* (Boushey & Moser, 2012), a structure that helps students develop the daily habits of reading, writing, and working independently designed to lead to a lifetime of literacy independence. The practices began with one teacher’s request. After reviewing it herself, Sandy approved and the teacher implemented the strategies. Soon ten others were conducting a voluntary book study on the *Daily Five*. “By Christmas over half the staff was in the book study and we had a whole wing of the building that asked to borrow the videos and books.” She said one teacher told her that it just wouldn’t work with her kids, so Sandy went into her classroom and modeled it for her with her students. After that, the teacher asked to learn the process, “because she saw the effectiveness,” shared Sandy. “You could walk through the room and nobody even looked up because students were so engaged in what they were doing. By the end of that year only a few people weren’t doing the *Daily Five*.”

Small group interventions occur in the context of daily classroom instruction. Jane said, “That was tough because in the past this school had paraprofessionals and the kids were just sent somewhere. We don’t do that anymore.” She, like many of the principals, moved to a system of interventions that they described as “push in” rather than “pull out.”

Results-Orientation

The use of pre and post assessments, interim formative assessments, and assessment walls were common tools mentioned by the principals. As did many others, Shelly shared, “When I came here they told me that they had never really looked at their data. The specialist had disaggregated it and given it to them. Well, there’s no ownership there.” Jane said, “They have a binder and have a place for every child. That’s where they put all their data, but they also have to collect evidence that will support the goals that they developed for their professional growth plan.”

In Master Principal’s schools, individual student achievement data was displayed and studied in a variety of ways, but the theme remained constant as stated by one principal, “We’ve gotten tighter and tighter using data to drive classroom instruction. If a child is struggling, we drill down to the exact problem and provide intervention based on that exact need.”

Isabel said the shift toward a results-orientation was letting students know where they are academically, where they should be, and ensuring they know what steps to take to improve.

We used to shelter kids so we wouldn’t hurt their feelings by telling them they were a year behind in reading; you know we just wanted to love them. Now teachers have open and honest conversations with kids saying, you are a year behind in reading and when you read, these are the things I hear you doing really well and these are the things you can do to increase your fluency. Once you increase fluency, you are going to go from here to here. I want to help you in class and here is what you can do on your own time.

We are going to check your fluency every week to see if you are improving.

Though locally developed, each school used some form of organizational tool to collect and reflect on student achievement. Most reported that teachers have a binder for every child which

is used for progress monitoring, intervention planning, and parent conferencing. Brenda commented that, “Our learning culture for students is so much more refined now that we know the gaps, look for strategies to close those gaps.” Randy shared, “The part that probably impacted the learning culture most is a better use of data; using data, instead of operating on a gut feeling, or perception.”

Employing research-based instructional strategies at scale and conducting their own Action Research to discover what works best in their local context was a major shift for most of the principal’s schools. Before their participation in the MPP, principals reported that they weren’t sure how to systematically impact the results they were getting in student achievement. The Plan Do Check Act (PDCA) cycle was named as foundational knowledge acquired from the MPP. As they implemented Action Research themselves and then supported the practice in classrooms, the culture of the school shifted from teaching whatever came next in the book, to developing systems to collect and analyze the results of instruction to inform their next steps. Sandy’s school explored the effect using brain research-based strategies regarding gender based classrooms with satisfying results that, “knocked the socks off scores.” Sandy shared two examples of the results-focused culture of her school,

We found that our low SES [Socio Economic Status] boys one year had less gain than our ELLs [English Language Learner’s] first year because there was focused attention on that group of students. We had support in place, but our lowest SES boys didn’t have the experiences and the background and they looked like every other kid in the classroom so we identified that sub-population as where we needed to focus. So we restructured how we help those kids. Another thing we do differently now is we track all reading progress and we also look at Math progress. We had always kind of done that, but superficially I

guess, but as far as really targeting instruction based on those gaps we had not done that. I think we're more systematic in our approach to making sure every child is on grade level.

Student Achievement Gains

Principals who have been designated have already demonstrated at least a three-year upward trajectory of improving student achievement. Blake shared that through MPP, "I learned how to be a leader of learning and when we put those tools in place in our school, culture changed, everyone had the same focus, the same vision, we knew how to help our students, we knew adult learning was important and in turn, our test scores got better."

Master Principals measure their schools' progress in improving students' achievement by the state's accountability system, but also by many other measures. Holly said, "We definitely had that upward trajectory when I was going through the Academy." Holly further explained that as a primary school,

We don't have the Benchmark exams. That's what everyone depends on to measure their success. What we do have are the norm reference exams and our scores followed the trajectory of the state up and down with changing tests: the Sat 10, ITBS, Mat 8 and back to the ITBS. It has just been a roller coaster so we've tried to rely more on our Dibbles and we always make huge growth from the beginning of the year to the end of the school year.

Some of the principals experienced changing demographics and a few even changed schools and still showed gains in student achievement scores. Even several years after designation and with more at-risk students than before, Mary said, "We've been real pleased with the growth and, let me say this to you, over the last 5 years at Creek our socioeconomic

level of students has changed. Last year we had 75% of our students on free and reduced lunch. Five years ago we had 50%.” Jane said that the school where she served when she was designated was a good school which needed to become great. “When I went there the scores were like in the 60s and 70s. By the time I left they were in the 90s.” After designation, she accepted a position in a high-needs school. In her second year as the principal of Miller, a consistently low performing school, the number of students proficient had risen by 23 percent on the state’s high-stakes assessment.

The principals all expressed an attitude of moral purpose in regard to ensuring that every child should be supported into success, whatever it takes. Referring to the percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced on the state’s accountability assessment, Katie’s said,

We went from the low 50’s in literacy to 77 this past year, then from 48 in math to 79 this past year. We’re proud of that. We’re not there yet, we’ve still got kids that aren’t at grade level and as long as there is one then we’re not doing our job. So we’ve got to continue to work. It’s never done. I think that it’s evident that they are teaching standards based instruction and that the accountability is there, not just for teachers but for the students as well.

Summary of Finding Four

Isabel shared, “We now have coherent systems for what is expected in the classroom. I feel more empowered to ask courageous questions about teaching and learning and to really drill down to make sure we are really doing the right thing.” Master Principals demonstrated that implementation of best practices at scale with support for both students and teachers along with a focus on results had a positive impact on achievement for all students. As Sandy said, “We’ve seen an increase, we’ve seen gaps close.”

Finding Five

Though all principals expressed a humble attitude about their success and influence, increases in Master Principals' influence beyond the school was found at the local, state, and national levels.

The most commonly named means of having influence beyond their own schools was encouraging others to participate in the MPP. Most participants believe they have influenced others through mentoring and coaching other principals and lead teachers. Many principals cited examples of district and state leadership roles they had performed. Two principals have relocated to wield greater influence on a low performing school and four others indicated they believed their current district level and Academy positions created the opportunity for a wider circle of influence. Each person interviewed said they would welcome more opportunity to spread the “ALA Way” and indicated they would actively seek out those opportunities.

Local Influence

All of the principals acknowledged their increased local influence by citing examples of their assignments to district task forces and committees, critical friend conversations with colleagues, mentoring new administrators, and by encouraging and coaching teachers into leadership roles. Each shared that they felt they had increased credibility and influence with both their peers and their supervisors because of their Master Principal designation and the reputation of success they had achieved. Sandy pointed out that she was intentional about taking the work she had done to help her school as a result of the MPP to share with her superintendent. She wanted him to know that, “It’s an investment of time that grows not only the principal but your school and it can be your whole district.”

Master Principals primarily lead and influence others in their districts by example. After facilitating group activities for the foundational work on the bottom of the ALA Hourglass model (Arkansas Leadership Academy, 1991) for strategic planning, Brenda said other schools in her district and the superintendent drew on her knowledge and experience to help create belief, vision and mission statements. Sandy shared the example of a transitions initiative that is moving toward scale in her district as a result of her work in piloting the activities. Her school began the process by inviting the teachers from schools serving students in a grade level higher than hers to ensure they knew what experiences and performance expectations the students were coming from. Then, she said they invited themselves to do the same thing. It was difficult to initiate and maintain until the superintendent mandated transition activities for all schools.

Stating that as a result of her participation in the MPP, one principal decided to join her community's leadership class because she thought it would expand both her own knowledge of the community and the community's knowledge of her school. Several of the principals are very actively engaged as community leaders and employ the tools and strategies they learned in the MPP within those various organizations. A few indicated that meaningful community engagement is a personal change challenge for them due to the busyness of their lives as principals and it has become an area for growth because they see the relevance to their role as a school leader.

State Influence

Bringing their knowledge and skills from the MPP, most Master Principals have or are serving on the boards of state professional associations, task forces, and in other roles that influence professional development, protocols, and education policy. Referring to her use of the collaborative strategies learned in the MPP in her leadership role for the elementary principals

association, Rose related the story of a secondary principal saying she wanted to lead the secondary principals “like you are doing.” Three Master Principals currently serve the state as employees of the Arkansas Leadership Academy. Through their separate roles, the philosophy and practices of the Master Principal Program are taking hold in hundreds of schools across the state. Speaking of a planning session for a recent state-wide initiative, Dee said, “When we got to a roadblock, I got the “big paper” out and it would move us through it. It made the work public and collaborative where everybody could see what everybody else was thinking.” She commented that was an opportunity to model the tools of collaboration for those various state level leaders.

As proposed in Act 44, one of the Master Principals moved to a high-needs school to lead the turn-around efforts. After years of not meeting standards in student achievement, under her leadership for two years, the 2011 School Report Card showed the school as “meeting standards” in both literacy and math and “exceeding standards” for both gains and status of the percentage of students scoring proficient on the states’ criterion referenced, high-stakes assessment. The principal said that they have visitors “all the time” coming to see what they are doing that has made such a difference. A second Master Principal has taken the helm at another high needs school for 2012-2013. After just three months, she reported leading indicators of improvement in the school’s culture through structural and staffing changes and professional development to identify shared beliefs and a common vision.

National Influence

Fifteen of the Master Principals were participants in this study. All of those are still employed full time in leadership positions in Arkansas. Many of the principals have made presentations and facilitated sessions for educational organizations such as the Association for

Supervision and Curriculum Development Conference, the Annual International Reading Association Convention, the Learning Forward Conference, and the National Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence Conference to share the good things happening in their schools and hopefully spread their learning to others. One principal credits her Master Principal experiences and designation as the reason she was selected to serve on a national committee to examine principal evaluations. “I can’t imagine that I would have been chosen as one of only seven in the nation if I hadn’t had that really, really deep experience of evaluating myself and having others come in and evaluate my work.”

Summary of Finding Five

Whether sharing their experiences and knowledge with others in their school, in their local community, around the state, or for a broader national audience, Master Principals each said that the success of their school and their growing influence beyond their building was not due to their efforts alone. “I get credit for having all that change, and I didn’t do it, they did,” said Kellie as she referred to her staff and students. One of the frequent comments made was that they feel uncomfortable receiving a title such as “Master Principal.” To a person, each one gave credit to the various stakeholders for the positive changes in their school. Commenting with humbleness and yet appreciation of the recognition, the Master Principals all acknowledged and welcomed the yet unknown potential of their influence in improving the education of students beyond their own school.

Chapter Summary

The primary purpose of the study was to examine the changes in the knowledge and skills of Master Principals. The findings of the study revealed the nature of these changes in the areas of leadership practices, school culture, and student achievement.

Leadership Practices

Master Principals referred to the five performance areas of the curriculum as the “real work” of school leadership. As Shelly stated, “It takes all of them to make a difference in a school.” Isabel shared what changed for her by saying,

When I first became a principal, I thought I was the boss of the school. Now I would say I work for my teachers. I work for my kids. They are really the boss because everything we do should be based on their needs. Now, the buck stops here if anything goes wrong, but if anything good happens, it’s because of my teachers. I do things the way I do today because of the Leadership Academy. I wouldn’t even be happy in my job if I was still doing it the way I did before the Academy.

They gained a deeper understanding of instructional leadership and acquired the skills and tools to practice it in their schools. Dee confessed, “I don’t think I could have done what I’ve done had I not had the encouragement and confidence the Academy gave me in my own leadership skills.”

Becoming a systems thinker was one of the “big rocks” of principals’ learning during the MPP. Making connections and building coherence for others grew in importance and value over time. A key learning for many was the understanding of the way one part of the system always impacts and is impacted by other parts of the system. Several principals referred to the “Arrows” model they were introduced to in the MPP which reminds them that everything must be aligned toward the same vision. Jane shared,

To me you can’t really get quality school improvement unless you have a systemic process. I think that’s what makes the Leadership Academy 2,000 times better than all the groups that are putting band-aides on stuff. That’s why it’s been so successful and that’s what makes me want to be a part of it.

Another frame often used by the principals to describe what has changed in their leadership practices since MPP is Coburn's (2002) definition of scale. Sandy summed up her ideas about the changes in her approach to leadership by couching these questions to herself,

If I walked out the door would it still be here in a year or two? Does it have spread throughout the building? How deep is the knowledge and understanding of it? I think there are a whole lot of things in our building that have gone to scale that wouldn't have without this journey that I've been on because I didn't understand it and it goes back to the whole thing of me trying to do it myself and realizing that's never going to go anywhere. Making sure everyone understands that foundation and why we're doing what we're doing. How does this fit within our vision and our mission? How does it fit within current practice and best practices and research and all of that? Having those understandings and then having everyone believe it and own it.

School Cultures

Master Principals described the cultures of their schools in terms related to the five performance areas of the MPP. Each principal indicated that is the way they now think about their work in their school or current position and that those five areas offer them lenses for continuing to move forward.

Living the mission, vision and beliefs.

Brenda summed up her school's culture by stating that, "All the decisions we make are tied to our common vision, our mission, and our beliefs." Holly said the collaboratively developed vision statement is a guiding force every day. As an example she offered, "As we are working with children on a disciplinary matter, we bring them back to that vision and ask if what

they did helps our school become a ‘friendly learning community’ just as we speak in our vision every day.”

Building and maintaining collaborative relationships.

“It’s all about relationships,” said Shelly who continued, “Change is all about starting with relationships, the big rocks.” Principals spent more time discussing how they value and build relationships than any other topic during the data collection process. Everything they discussed was related to how it was impacted by the quality of the relationships of the people involved. One of the ALA models, the Rail Road Track (Appendix M) was frequently mentioned as an instrumental visual to help keep everyone focused on both sides of the model and the tools that connect the relationships to the results, or people to product.

Principals viewed creating and supporting effective teams and personal connections as critical to their success. Holly, along with all the other principals, said that collaborative relationships of teachers learning and working together are now “the norm” for her school. Linking the work of building relationships to leading change, Jane said,

You have to start out with that culture to build support. That’s a big piece. If you don’t do that you’re not going to get anywhere. It’s all about relationships. Then you’ve got to go slowly. I mean you can’t do it all at one time, trust me, you’ve got to start with the big rocks.

Another change in culture was the result of more inclusion of student voice. Sandy shared two examples of how her school includes even primary age children,

We already had student ambassadors to welcome new kids to our school and that kind of thing, but we’ve added responsibility for them. For instance, if we get money to add on to the playground they’re called in and they give their feedback. We’ve actually had people

from companies coming to talk to the kids about how they would spend their money and they ask better questions than the adults. Another thing we try to do mid-year and end-of-year is pull all the ambassadors together. The counselor and I will make posters of different questions we have for them like “what’s the best thing about our school? What does our school need that it doesn’t have? What’s a problem at our school? We get all of their feedback. I take that feedback to the teachers in the fall when we’re planning and we say “how are we going to use this information to make our school better? Do we agree with their assessment of what they’ve said about our school and how can we make this year solve these problems? Or what are the good things we should celebrate and they like to hear student feedback that way. I don’t think teachers feel that way now, but I would have said 5 or 6 years ago they would have thought why we would ask the kids their opinion. So that’s been a real shift.

Principals said building stronger faculty to student relationships and giving students more opportunities to influence decisions and grow their leadership capacity also created opportunities to grow the student’s respect, responsibility and ownership having a greater than expected impact on the school’s culture.

All the principals referred to expanding their community relationships as a big change in school culture. Jane shared an example of community partnerships in her school, “I have home school consultant, I have pathfinders, which is a school based counseling group here, and I used some grant money to get a behavior interventionist. So I have all of that help.” Shelly said that her Community Advisory Group really grew in understanding and contribution to the school because she organized the agendas around them visiting classrooms and hearing what teachers and students wanted to share. As schools broadened the input and involvement of the

community, which principals referred to as the “Eight Sectors,” they reported that their school culture benefited from more support and resources, but also from a greater appreciation for diversity. Brenda said her schools stakeholders are very supportive of her school:

Because they’re in the know, because they’ve been on this journey right along with me and we’ve drug everybody right along with us, parents and community members. It has just become a way of life around Dale. It’s the norm now. We don’t hold a meeting unless we say “we’ve got to have some parents on this committee, we’ve got to have some community members on this committee,” because we need to see it through their eyes and we need to have their input before we make decisions. I think before the MP process I don’t think we gave that a second thought. It was kind of a perfunctory thing, it was kind of like you’ve got to have parents, who can we grab. Who’s got a kid here who will come, but now we really do take their input seriously and want to get their input into what we’re doing and what we’re about.

Leading and managing change.

Leading change required the principals to develop a sense of understanding and urgency for the change as well as honing their skills to help people navigate the process, including building an environment that made risk-taking safe. The relationships that they nurtured and the architects like common planning and PLC times helped create an environment that would support change initiatives. Jane said that teachers, “always knew when I was coming back from the mountain [the location of MPP sessions] that we were going to have some things to do.” Those “things to do” were also incorporated into the schools’ strategic plans which ensured that there was alignment between the schools’ vision and mission, the new initiative, and all the resources necessary to enact the change. Master Principals becoming systems thinkers and

helping all stakeholders put change into context created new cultures of coherence and continuous improvement, a shift from some of the previous cultures of “status quo,” or “this too shall pass.”

Developing deep knowledge of teaching and learning.

Giving teachers more voice in the design of professional development and ensuring they have what they need was a shift from the model most schools had experienced in the past. Sandy said, “We think the learning culture has changed in that I ultimately have to decide what we do, but it is based upon what they tell me that they feel like they need.” Isabel shared that growing teacher knowledge and skills requires trust. “A big thing is trust and honesty and just saying over and over again nobody is perfect, we don’t have all the answers. It is an admirable thing to be looking for answers. You are a better professional if you’re seeking learning, if you are doing action research than, than not.” When discussing problem solving as a staff about how to improve their teaching, Vanessa said, “I don’t think we’ll ever get to the root of it if we’re not honest about what we know and we don’t know.”

Holly shared an example of the results of higher expectations for teaching and learning that is common for all Master Principals. She said, “We really tried to ratchet up what we were expecting. We’ve seen growth on the end of the year reading levels with the DRA; we’re very pleased with that.”

Building and sustaining accountability systems.

Jane shared, “When I came here they told me that they had never really looked at their data. The Specialist had disaggregated and given it to them. Well there’s no ownership there.” When the culture has been developed at scale the accountability becomes much more internally driven than

anything that could be imposed. That sense of internal accountability happened with the passage of time and leadership which nurtured it. Mary said,

What things would be going on around here if I left tomorrow? Many, many of the strategies, programs and the things we do at Creek School I think are here to stay because the people that are here see the value of them. It's wonderful, I almost feel like an advisor. I'm not cracking the whip or running the show or whatever, I'm here and leading what's going on and I sort of vision out there as to what I think is in the future or what I've learned at the Academy. It's wonderful.

Student Achievement

By definition as a Master Principal, each of the research participants has demonstrated an upward trajectory in student achievement for at least three years. When asked if their achievement scores continued to improve after Designation, most said that they just get better and better as all systems within the school evolved and worked together. As the annual yearly targets under NCLB have increased for all sub-groups, these principals, like others in the nation have been challenged with meeting the needs of all students and closing the gaps between sub-populations. Isabel reported, "For the last 4 years, everybody was going up and the achievement gap was closing. In fact, it was really close to being closed last year."

Updating curriculum, refining intervention strategies, using data more effectively, supporting teachers through PLCs, and the many other changes these principals have made enabled them to continue to make progress in increasing student achievement. Brenda commented on a Kindergarten classroom visit in March, "I was amazed at how well they could read. The teacher said, that was my lowest group! Of course I had to go back and hear the top group!" Sustainability is one measure of a school culture that has been established at scale. Jane

is one of the principals who left the school where she was designated to serve a high-needs school. During her tenure in the MPP the school's achievement scores rose from about 70 percent of the students to over 90 percent scoring proficient. After being gone three years, the students are still successful. She said, "They are continuing to do really, really well."

Conclusion

As a baseline, these principals self-identified one major disposition they all share: they are lifelong learners who implement their learning into practice to effect change in their schools. One principal reflected that before MPP there was no specific professional development to develop her leadership knowledge and skills. She said, "I knew that for me to stay excited about my job I had to do more than what I was doing and I needed guidance to do that." After she began the program she admitted that she "was hooked." She said she wanted to stay with these people from whom she could glean so much and so she applied to the next phase and the next. Kellie said, "I think we challenge ourselves through the process." Rose shared, "Some days I think, do I have the energy for this? I know I have to do it the way MPP leads us, because I am not going to be happy in my role if I don't, because I know the difference now. It becomes your being."

Jane says she tells principals that they need to attend the MPP because, "You will become an instructional leader after that; you won't be just a manager. You really need to go!" She said she continues her counsel and encouragement with,

You need to be serious about the work, because that's the way you learn. If you go up there and you don't do anything between sessions, you're not going to learn and it's not going to become part of your practice because you don't internalize it and make it your own.

Rose said, “I tell everybody to do it. It’s the best thing you’ll ever do. It’s how a school should be run.” Brenda expressed the sentiment shared by all of the Master Principals,

I wish every principal had the opportunity to go through the MPP because I think we would see a revolution in education if people could have the experience I had. This process didn’t just help me; it helped my school become a better place.

CHAPTER FIVE – ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS

Introduction to the Chapter

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover what Master Principals perceive the effect to be of the Master Principal Program on their leadership practices, school cultures, and student achievement. The study sought to answer the primary research question: How have the knowledge base and leadership skills of Master Principals changed as a result of their participation in the Master Principal Program? Secondary questions included:

- (a) How have Master Principals reacted to MPP Institutes?
- (b) How has the performance of Master Principals changed?
- (c) How has school culture changed in the Master Principal's schools?
- (d) How have student results changed in the schools of Master Principals?
- (e) How has influence beyond the school changed for Master Principals?

The purpose of this chapter is to communicate the researcher's insights as they have emerged from a study of the data, relevant literature, and the researcher's unique experience and knowledge in relation to the study. To analyze and interpret the thousands of pages of interview data, the researcher must become as Bloomberg and Volpe said, an "informed and insightful commentator" (2008, p. 129). The chapter will begin with a description of the tools and processes used during the analysis of the data. The main body of the chapter will be dedicated to reporting an interpretation of the findings based on participant perceptions. Literature on effective school leadership practices informed the researcher's interpretation of the data collected during the study and will be shared as is relevant to the discussion. The researcher's personal

knowledge of the MPP was a contributing factor for the study's interpretation. The chapter will conclude with a synthesis of the significance of the study in relation to the larger context of developing effective school leadership through the confluence of new knowledge, skills, and implementation.

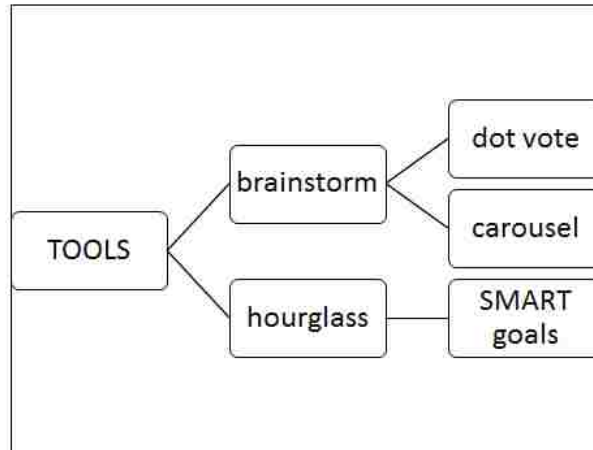
Analysis

Analysis of the coded data was ongoing and reflexive throughout the data collection and coding process. Several tools and analytic processes were employed to help the researcher pull the whole into parts. As the researcher listened and participated in the interviews and focus group, she was actively engaged in analysis to form the next probing question. The act of determining relevant codes for sections of text was an exercise in analysis. In vivo codes were exclusively employed for first cycle coding. Second cycle coding laid over the five performance areas of the MPP and the four dimensions of scale which established frameworks to be used for subsequent analysis. Creating linkages and families of codes using Atlas.ti software further reduced the data to related chunks. Connecting those chunks of data to relevant research questions formed the foundation for the final stages of analysis and the beginning of synthesis. Using Atlas.ti to help connect

Figure 5.1 is an example of an architecture used to explore various families of in vivo codes. As shown in the example, the code family "tools" helped facilitate the examination of specific references to the tools and models learned during the MPP experience that principals found meaningful and useful. In the example, "brainstorm" is a tool that is also related to "carousel" and "dot voting". A "SMART goal" is a tool that helps schools define the work of the "hourglass" model of strategic planning, so the code family "tools" helped place the use of the

tool within the work of the school. A screenshot of the final, and more complex code family map for “tools” generated in Atlas.ti is shown in Appendix N.

Figure 5.1 Sample Code Family

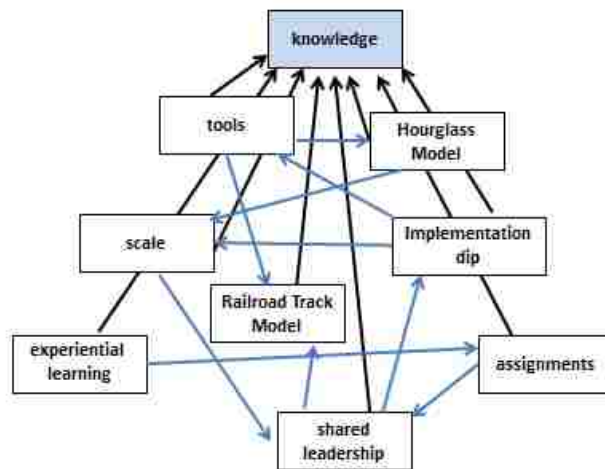


Networks of codes were created to assist with data analysis and synthesis of the findings. The networks helped relate discrete parts to a more holistic version of the phenomenon. An example of a network of codes will illustrate the complexity and interconnectedness of the learning and work described by the principals. Appendix O shows a code network that was created in Atlas.ti to investigate the relationships between the principals’ views of knowledge they built during the MPP and the associated coded texts. In Appendix O, the blue code at the top center of the figure represents the “knowledge” portion of the primary research question. The codes for the MPP five performance areas are shown in various colors and capital letters. All other codes emerged from the in vivo coding of the transcripts or are dimensions of scale. A deeper understanding of these relationships implied that knowledge was built from all the separate inputs as coded, but more significantly from the intersections, overlap, and spiral effect of the curriculum, assignments, implementation, and reflection with peers.

A simplified model of such a network of codes is provided in Figure 5.2. The connecting lines in this simple example illustrate that tools, Hourglass model, scale, implementation dip,

Rail Road Track model, experiential learning, shared leadership, and assignments were all associated with principals' increase in knowledge. More importantly, the intersections of all the discrete content inputs provided the place of most learning. For example, knowledge of the dimension of scale increased principals' knowledge of how and when to share leadership. The lines indicate that they used tools to lead the work of the school on both sides of the Rail Road track, focusing on both process and product. The principals associated their work assignments with their increased knowledge in how to build a culture of shared leadership as shown by the connecting lines.

Figure 5.2 Sample Network of Codes



Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) said that something has significance in qualitative research if, “that something is important, meaningful, or potentially useful given what we are trying to find out” (p. 130). A co-occurrence table was created in Atlas.ti to assist with one measure of significance of the coded text. A portion of this table, which is shown in Figure 5.3, reveals the frequency of co-occurring coded text segments. For example, “ownership”, one of the four dimensions of scale, and “Deep Knowledge of Teaching and Learning” (DKTL), one of the five

performance areas, were both used as codes for the same portion of text in five occurrences. Use of this matrix prompted further investigation into those five specific citations to better understand the intended meaning of the participants and the relevance of the citations to the

	influence b	adult learn	CHANGE	learning of	shared leac	COLL REL	DKTL	ACC SYSTI	timeline fo	tools	capacity bi	experience	ownership
influence beyo	1	2	1	1	3	2	2	2	1	2	2	1	1
adult learning	2	2	2	2	3	6	2	2	2	2	2	2	3
CHANGE	1	2	1	3	5	5	1	1	2	4	2	1	1
learning of MP	1	1	1	1	3	2	2	3	1	1	1	1	1
shared leaders	1	2	3	1	4	2	2	1	1	3	1	1	1
COLL REL	3	3	5	3	4	1	1	1	4	2	2	2	2
DKTL	1	6	5	1	1	1	4	1	1	1	1	5	1
ACC SYSTEMS	1	2	1	2	2	4	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
timeline for M	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
tools	1	2	2	1	1	4	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
capacity build	2	2	4	1	3	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

holistic interpretation of the findings.

Figure 5.3 Co-occurrence Table

Three analytic categories emerged as particularly helpful in the attempt to bring coherence to and create meaning from the thousands of pages of interview text.

Analytic category 1: The relationship between the participants’ narratives and the five performance areas of the MPP which indicated participants’ increase in knowledge and skills (research questions a and b).

Analytic category 2: The relationship between the participants’ narratives and the four dimensions of scale which indicated the quality and scope of implementation of knowledge and skills (research questions c, d, and e).

Analytic category 3: The interconnectedness of changes in principals’ knowledge and skills and changes in school cultures and student achievement which indicated impact and results (primary research question).

Interpretation of the Findings

Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) stated that, “There are no formulas for determining the significance of findings or for interpreting them, and there are no ways of perfectly replicating a researcher’s analytical thinking” (p. 127). Interpretation of the findings will be presented using the five performance areas of the MPP, the first analytical category, as the primary organizational approach. Due to the complexity of school leadership, the second and third analytic categories, scale and the interconnectedness of principal knowledge and skills and subsequent changes in culture and results, will be woven into these five broad categories of leadership. This approach is also advantageous in its alignment with the ALA theory of change described in Chapter One that was foundational to the design of the MPP. Because of the complexity of leadership, interpreting the findings by simply looking discretely at each of the research questions would not be the most appropriate approach. The impact of the changes in leadership knowledge and skills can only be understood by holistically reflecting on how the principals’ growth and implementation in all five performance areas worked in concert. As Leithwood (2005) stated, “Leadership is a highly complex concept. Like health, law, beauty, excellence, and countless other equally complex concepts, efforts to define leadership too narrowly are more likely to trivialize than help bring greater clarity to its meaning”(p.2). Interpretation of the findings was also informed by examining them within the context of recent literature on effective leadership. Selected citations will be provided in support of the researcher’s interpretations of the findings of this study. The researcher’s personal knowledge and experience with the MPP contributed to coherence building for the interpretation of the findings.

Creating and Living the Mission, Vision and Beliefs

Learning culture.

The Wallace Foundation (2011) found, “Although they say it in different ways, researchers who have examined education leadership agree that effective principals are responsible for establishing a school-wide vision of commitment to high standards and the success of all students” (p.5). Each of the Master Principal focused energy developing a clear vision and helping the school’s stakeholders live the vision and mission. They referred to this as the foundation of their work. Whether during their first year in the school or after many years, they all employed some variety of tools learned during their MPP experience to capture and spread a shared set of beliefs, a school-wide vision, and common mission that were the guiding forces in all decisions. As both a participant and facilitator of the MPP, the researcher affirms that most principals seem to know, whether intuitively or as a result of their experience or preparation programs, that this is an important role of a school leader. What was missing for the principals in the study before the MPP was knowledge and skill to accomplish it. “Trust the process” was a frequent sentiment as Master Principals described their initial efforts and the subsequent positive results in nurturing the birth and growth of this shared foundation. In ALA language, this foundation of shared beliefs, vision and mission was referred to as the “bottom of the Hourglass,” upon which everything else was built.

Leadership culture.

All study participants described how they used “ALA tools” to examine the school’s current reality and lead improvement planning to move their school beyond compliance. Leithwood (2005) stated that, “At the core of most definitions of leadership are two functions generally considered indispensable to its meaning: setting directions and exercising influence” (p.1). Force

field, fishbone, and gap analysis tools assisted with determining next steps and building consensus within the schools. Principals described their efforts to shift ownership of accountability for results from external, summative assessments, to a sense of moral purpose and internal accountability for all staff and students.

Collaborative culture.

Wahlstrom, et al (2010) found that, “Principals who see themselves as working collaboratively towards clear, common goals with district personnel, other principals, and teachers are more confident in their leadership” (p.31). As principals created architectures for collaboration and built capacity among teachers to effectively learn together, they noted what Collins (2001) called the “flywheel effect” indicating that the work required a lot of energy in the beginning, but as capacity was built, it took on a life of its own. All the Master Principals commended their staff for their ability and willingness to closely examine their practice with colleagues. They all also acknowledged that the culture of their school didn’t start out as productively collegial. Establishing common time for collaboration, insistence on participation, modeling facilitation, a focus on data, and being the lead learner in their schools were offered as examples of the hard work and determination necessary to build and sustain a culture of collaboration around the real work of school improvement. The most consistently identified elements contributing to a culture of collaboration that these principals shared as key learning from the MPP were ensuring a safe environment for adult learning through transparency of accountability systems, establishing a shared language, co-constructing expectations with teachers, and sustaining respectful norms of behavior. Leithwood (2005) stated, “All transformational approaches to leadership emphasize emotions and values and share in common

the fundamental aim of fostering capacity development and higher levels of personal commitment to organizational goals on the part of leaders' colleagues" (p.10).

Leading and Managing Change

Reeves (2009) stated that, "Culture is reflected in the behavior, attitudes, and beliefs of individuals and groups. The single greatest impediment to meaningful cultural change is the gap between what leaders say that they value and what leaders actually value" (p.37). As Master Principals progressed through the MPP, they were challenged to reflect on their own and their school's vision and the alignment of actions toward accomplishing that vision. As they described their work, these principals indicated that they have focused all systems in their school to create such alignment. An increase in their knowledge of change process was frequently mentioned by principals when they described how their MPP experience helped them lead change in the schools. The model "Implementation Dip" and a deeper understanding of the research on how people accept change had meaningful impact on shared language for their schools and on the appropriate rate of change and supports needed.

The most powerful learning for the principals was the knowledge of scale as defined by Coburn (2003) which helped them focus on change through the dimensions of depth, spread, sustainability, and shift of ownership. As one principal shared, "Now we do a scale activity each quarter to see where we are with our initiatives."

Depth.

Hall and Hord (2011) stated that, "Change is a process through which people and organizations move as they gradually learn, come to understand, and become skilled and competent in the use of new ways" (p.8). Principals reported that they used the concept of alignment to ensure that all the organizations' resources were focused on creating competence and understanding of the

school's instructional initiatives. Examples included hiring instructional facilitators, conducting focused classroom walkthroughs with feedback, and constructivist adult learning activities such as commonly scored formative assessments. The schools' PLCs, professional development, and other professional growth systems were designed to support acquisition and implementation of best instructional practices.

Spread.

The Master Principals each described their efforts at moving successful practices throughout the building.

When 90 percent or more of the faculty was actively engaged in the change initiative student achievement results in reading, science, and math were dramatically higher than when the same initiative was introduced with only 10 percent of the faculty actively engaged. Therefore the variable is not simply the program, the label, the guru, or the conference. The variable is implementation. (Reeves, 2009, p.86)

Sandy offered a specific example of the process of spread, "We did research together, talked about it, and went to the curriculum director. That spread from one class of boys and one class of girls to now we have six gender specific classrooms in our school." Action research, common formative assessments, and peer observations were commonly named tools used in these schools to facilitate spread.

Sustainability.

Reeves (2009) reported that organizational culture will change with leadership actions that employ the right combination of change tools. Anything used to inform the change initiative, including capturing current reality through appropriate data collection and tools to understand the gap between current reality and the vision help the school identify next steps in building

sustainability. An example of a tool used by the Master Principals was a “Force Field” analysis to examine helpers and hindrances to change initiatives. Armed with this information, principals were then able to deploy resources appropriately to create sustainability of a change initiative which usually required the support of time, money and people.

Shift of ownership.

Monitoring implementation of initiatives and celebrating successes contributed to the “flywheel effect” (Collins, 2001) which was a factor in shifting ownership of change to the faculty and stakeholders. Collins (2001) said, “When you do this such a way that people see and feel the buildup of momentum, they will line up with enthusiasm” (p. 175). Principals found that as they concentrated on building depth and spread with supports in place for sustainability, teachers began to claim ownership. As they heard the language of ownership coming from formerly reluctant staff members, more than one principal commented how difficult it was to not say, “I told you so!” These principals understood that everything working in concert builds toward a shift of ownership. “Well-designed mechanisms ensure local ownership, a critical mass of committed stakeholders, processes that overcome barriers to stakeholders effectively working together, and strategies that mobilize and maintain proactive effort so that changes are implemented and there is renewal over time” (Adelman & Taylor, 2007, p.64). Another key factor in shifting ownership to the stakeholders was their appreciation for the deep moral purpose behind the initiative and that of the principal’s commitment to it. “When moral authority transcends bureaucratic leadership in a school, the outcomes in terms of commitment and performance far exceed expectations” (Sergiovanni, 2007, p. 65).

Developing Deep Knowledge about Teaching and Learning

The Wallace Foundation (2011) reported that, “Effective principals work relentlessly to improve achievement by focusing on the quality of instruction” (p.10). Master Principals reported that their participation in the MPP helped them focus their energies on teaching and learning and gave them the knowledge and skills to become effective instructional leaders.

If they [principals] are to be successful in improving learning for their students, they need to know where their efforts will have the biggest payoff. But even this knowledge is not enough. Successful leaders also need a substantial repertoire of practices (or skills) to draw on in order to exercise such influence. (Leithwood, 2005, p.7)

Isabel said, “I feel more empowered to ask courageous questions about teaching and learning and to really drill down to make sure, are we really, you know, doing the right thing. But also, we now have coherent systems for what is expected in the classroom.”

Whether they call it formal evaluation, classroom visits or learning walks, principals intent on promoting growth in both students and adults spend time in classrooms (or ensure that someone who’s qualified does), observing and commenting on what’s working well and what is not. Moreover, they shift the pattern of the annual evaluation cycle to one of ongoing and informal interactions with teachers. (The Wallace Foundation, 2011, p.11)

The use of classroom walkthroughs, formative assessments and data walls, and tightening of curriculum and instructional practices was seen by these principals as key work in improving the effectiveness of teaching and the academic rigor in their schools. Action research, engaging student voice, and developing effective systems to respond to the needs of students were further examples of principals’ actions that grew from their MPP experiences.

Building and Maintaining Collaborative Relationships

One principal stated, “It is all about relationships.” Fullan (2001) stressed that, “The role of the leader is to ensure that the organization develops relationships that help produce desirable results” (p.68). In one way or another, all principals expressed the sentiment that the days of teacher isolationism are over. Wahlstrom, et al (2010) found that, “Leadership effects on student learning occur largely because leadership strengthens professional community; teachers’ engagement in professional community, in turn, fosters the use of instructional practices that are associated with student achievement”(p.10). Creating the architectures for PLCs and honing the collaborative work of adult learners was seen by all principals in the study as critical to their school’s success.

In addition to scaffolding the adults toward effective collegial learning, principals built organizational structures to empower teachers, students, and the community to engage in collaborative leadership. Wahlstrom, Seashore Lousi, Leithwood, and Anderson (2010) found that, “Collective leadership has a stronger influence on student learning than any individual source of leadership. High-performing schools have “fatter” or “thicker” decision-making structures, not simply “flatter” ones, and leadership in these schools is more intense” (p. 8). Master Principals reported that through increased participation in decision making, greater commitment to organizational goals and strategies developed. More than one principal said they often remind themselves that, as ALA core beliefs state, “People support what they help create.” Leithwood (2005) explained,

Neither superintendents nor principals can tackle the leadership task by themselves.

Highly successful leaders develop and count on leadership contributions from many others in their organizations. Distributed leadership also enhances opportunities for the

organization to benefit from the capacities of more of its members, permits members to capitalize on the range of their individual strengths, and develops among organizational members a fuller appreciation of interdependence and how one's behavior effects the organization as a whole (p.18).

Almost all of the research participants in this study indicated that a key learning for them from the MPP was the importance of engaging the entire community, referred to as the "Eight Sectors," a model to expand the notion of a school's "community." Wahlstrom, et al (2010) recommended that:

Because parental involvement is linked to student achievement, we assert that teachers and principals can play a role in increasing student learning by creating a culture of shared leadership and responsibility—not merely among school staff members, but collectively within the wider community (p.9).

Principals described establishing new partnerships and architectures for meaningful engagement that drew on the rich diversity of many stakeholders.

Building and Sustaining Accountability Systems

Schools are ultimately accountable for student achievement. The study's participants were all proven, by virtue of their designation as Master Principals, to be leaders of schools with at least three-year trajectories of increasing student achievement for all sub-groups of students. For those who were designated several years prior to this study, the gains in student achievement have continued. For those who were designated and then moved to another position, the schools they left continued to demonstrate success in student achievement. The principals attributed this result to the impact of taking instructional and leadership practices to scale. The school's culture had assimilated best practices which sustained high quality teaching and learning.

Master Principals reported an increase in their use of data to drive decision-making as a result of their participation in the MPP. This finding is in contrast to that of Wahlstrom, et al (2010) who found that,

Principals in our study confirmed the priority given to data use, usually tying it to state and district mandates. In general, few looked beyond test scores as a data source. Not one principal talked about aggregating information about individual teacher performance from either formal or informal supervision processes for purposes of collective decisions about improvement goals and progress. Principals and teachers collected little formal evidence about the organizational conditions in the school that also might need to change if student performance was to improve. Data-informed decision making about teachers' individual and group professional development plans was similarly limited (p.23).

Master Principals consistently reported their development and use of tools such as data walls and formative assessments and better use of teacher observation tools were instrumental in their progress monitoring systems. Several said before MPP, they used to either receive disaggregated summative data from the district office or do the work themselves and hand it out to teachers. Now, they honor that the process is valuable to teachers and they build the capacity of the faculty to use data wisely to improve instruction. One Master Principal articulated this change in her leadership that was also described by most of the others, "Another thing we do differently now is we track all reading progress and we also look at Math progress. We had always kind of done that, but superficially I guess, but as far as really targeting instruction based on those gaps we had not done that. I think we're more systematic in our approach to making sure every child is on grade level." An insight offered by Wahlstrom, et al (2010) is that, "The potential for data-driven improvement plans to make a difference in teaching and learning depends on aligning

local curriculum, teaching, and assessment practices with the external accountability measures” (p.24). As mentioned in the discussion of change leadership, Master Principals revealed that their increased understanding of systems and the power of alignment had a great impact on their school’s success.

In a recent study Bengtson, et al (2012) shared, “The voices of the participants suggested that Master Principals had developed into more holistic reflective practitioners as they moved from Phase II to Phase III of the MPP” (p.12). Growing their own use and skill of reflection and creating opportunities for others to become stronger reflective practitioners was also cited by many of the principals as key learning that positively impacted these leaders and their schools. “The decision to be a reflective educator is a commitment to your own growth and demonstrates a high level of responsibility and leadership for continuous improvement in educational practice” (York-Barr, Sommers, Ghore, & Montie, 2001, p.56). Each of the principals in the study stated that the networking with other principals across the state during their MPP experience had a profound impact on their belief in collaborative reflection. Principals reported that as a result they developed systems to ensure that teachers had the time and process tools to be individually and collectively reflective as they worked to improve their school.

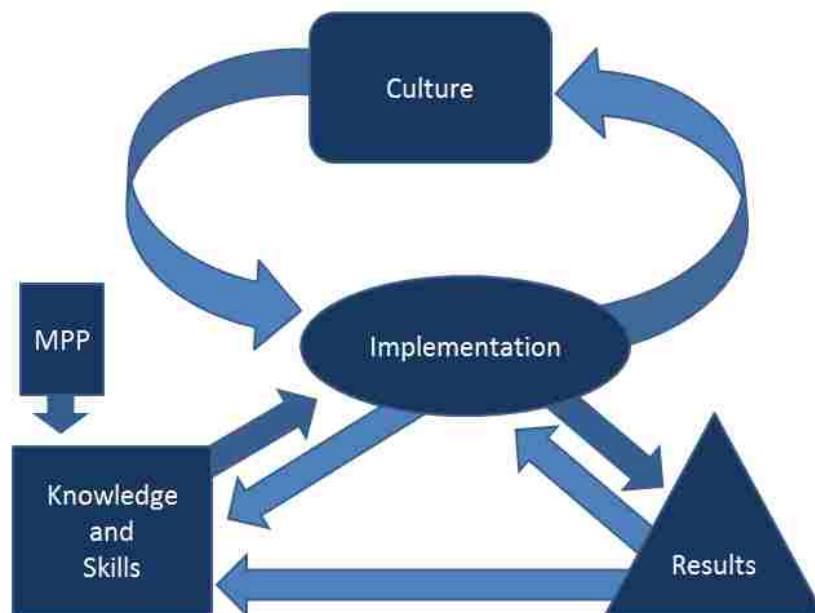
Synthesis of the Findings

Analytic processes for pulling apart and re-connecting data were used to discover meaning and significance in the findings of the study. Synthesis of the findings also included a holistic understanding of the findings within the larger context of professional development to support principals and the best practices of effective school leaders. In addition to the literature referenced in the first two chapters of this document as foundational to the development of the MPP curriculum and the designation process, examples of effective principal practices from

other studies and published literature offered confirmation that the findings of the study were consistent with established research.

It is important to note that as Wahlstrom, et al (2010) found, “Simple formulas for leadership action without clarifying what they mean in practice are ineffective at best and more likely will have null or even negative consequences” (p.16). The study participants expressed confidence that the combination of their newly acquired knowledge and skills through the MPP’s five performance areas and their implementation at scale resulted in positive changes in school leadership and learning cultures and ultimately improved student achievement. Figure 5.4 illustrates this confluence. Each of the principals discussed new knowledge gained from the MPP, such as scale, new skills, such as facilitation and process tools, and also described how they had applied that knowledge and those skills in their unique context. Though the principals described different strategies, each implemented initiatives that were the outcome of their new understandings of instructional leadership as most appropriate to their school.

Figure 5.4 MPP Learning Changing Culture and Results



The results attained were new cultures for both adults and students, and ever increasing student achievement. As cultures changed and impacted results, the results reciprocally impact cultures. Collins (2001) referred to this as the flywheel effect. When new knowledge and skills were implemented, culture and results changed, the cycle of continuous improvement repeated.

What they learned, whether defined as new knowledge or skills, was deemed by the Master Principals as important for all principals to know and be able to do. What mattered most to these leaders was how they would apply what they learned during the MPP. Through reflection and dialog with their peers in the protected environment of the MPP institutes, principals were able to be learners and plan for how to apply their learning in their school.

As an observer, the researcher noted that the study's participants had different personal styles and different backgrounds of preparation programs and experience for the principalship. Though none were high schools, the public schools these Master Principals led represented diversity in several ways. The schools were located in all geographic regions of Arkansas and represented diverse populations and school sizes. Some of the schools were successful before the principal attended MPP and got better. Others were struggling and demonstrated dramatically positive changes in culture and results. It was in the implementation that these Master Principals differentiated their MPP learning to impact their diverse schools, each with its own unique context, and through their own personal leadership style.

Understanding the theory or rationale behind practices of effective schools is important. Without that understanding, principals may not have the underpinning for making sound decisions and helping build coherence with all stakeholders. Having the skill to deliver and lead best practices is essential. Without them, there is a knowing-doing gap that prohibits change from occurring. The third component, the one the Master Principals offered as critical to their

success, was implementation within their own context. Each principal commented on doing the “work” as key. One summed up her MPP experience by saying,

It’s relevant, it’s thought provoking, it causes people to grow and it gives the leaders of the school the means to cause that growth. It gives them the motivation. I mean anybody who could take the materials that have been put together for the MPP and take it back to the school and NOT get school improvement is not working the process.

They’re not in it to improve student learning and adult learning.

When asked what changed as a result of their participation in the MPP, most principals responded with some version of, “everything changed.”

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the analysis and synthesis activities that informed an interpretation of the findings described in a previous chapter. Atlas.ti and three analytic categories provided rich opportunity for reflection on the thousands of pages of transcribed data from fifteen interviews and a focus group session, in addition to a review of ALA-MPP foundational documents and the researcher’s own knowledge and experience. Relevant literature on recent studies of effective principal practices provided a context for the interpretation.

Several key points were made in the chapter. First, the knowledge and skills learned during the MPP were valued and deemed vital to the Master Principals. The second analytic category for interpretation examined change in the schools through the four dimensions of scale. Finally, the confluence of new knowledge and skills acquired in all five performance areas, as applied in context was central to the impact of the MPP experience on school cultures and student results. “Learning in context is developing leadership and improving the organization as you go. Such learning changes the individual and the context simultaneously” (Fullan, 2001, p.126).

The researcher acknowledges that there are multiple ways that data may be interpreted. The intent of this study was to describe the impact of the MPP through the voices of the Master Principals. Through a combination of selected specific examples and generalized summary statements, a holistic understanding of the scope of that impact was offered through this interpretation.

CHAPTER SIX - CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This qualitative study examined the impact of the Arkansas Leadership Academy's Master Principal Program (MPP) through the perspective of those who have completed the entire program and attained designation as a Master Principal. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover what Master Principals perceived the effect to be of the Master Principal Program on their leadership practices, school cultures, and student achievement. This chapter will link the major findings and interpretation of the research to the researcher's conclusions. Recommendations for further research and implications for practice will be shared. The chapter will conclude with the researcher's final thoughts.

Conclusions

Since the purpose of the study was phenomenological in nature, the intent was to understand and report the impact of the program through the participants' various, yet common experience. The five major findings of this study and their interpretation informed the researcher's conclusions about the study. In addition, the conclusions were formed after careful review of recent research on effective principal practices and with the consideration of the researchers' own knowledge of the Master Principal Program. The conclusions will be reported using the five major findings of the study as an organizational approach.

Conclusions from Finding 1. The universal and almost immediate reaction from principals when asked about their reaction to the MPP was, "It was the best professional development I have ever had!"

Two conclusions are suggested by this finding. The finding suggests that the Master Principals believe the MPP is in alignment with best practices in leadership development and

adult learning theory. The researcher's own knowledge of the MPP contributed to the conclusion that the MPP provided a sufficiently safe and respectful learning environment for the study participants to successfully acquire the knowledge and skills they found meaningful.

We have known for a long time that adults learn best in certain conditions. Vella (1994) identified many principles that impact the quality of adult learning including a safe environment with sound relationships between the learner and the facilitator that demonstrate respect for the adult learner and the experience they bring to the new learning. Because the study participants were well aware that the researcher shared their experience as a Master Principal, as well as being the current program leader, the learning environment was only referenced obliquely during the data collection.

Another key element of quality professional development experiences for educators is relevance, or as Vella (1994) called it, the "immediacy" of the learning in relation to the real world of work. Master Principals reported that the learning of the MPP was relevant and immediately applicable which led to strong implementation within their unique school contexts. Vella (1994) further identified engagement and accountability as key factors for adult learners. The principals said they found both of these through the peer networking and reporting elements of the MPP. Master Principals deemed the learning relevant and immediately applicable and experienced support for their work through the accountability activities of sharing their implementation of the work during subsequent sessions of the MPP.

Hannum and Martineau (2008) explained that, "Effective leadership development initiatives often link several different kinds of learning opportunities and occur over time, rather than as a single event" (p.10). The principals in this study had been participants in the MPP for three years and many had additional ALA experiences. Their motivation to continue through the

program and to volunteer their time as coaches and facilitators for MPP since their designation was based on their understanding that their learning developed over time and with the sustained support of the MPP.

Conclusions from Finding 2. Significant changes in the performance of Master Principals' leadership practices occurred as a result of the knowledge and skills they acquired from Institute experiences.

Drawing upon the conclusions associated with the first finding, the second finding suggests that because participants experienced the learning of MPP under positive adult learning conditions they expressed confidence in their own ability to implement their learning and believe they did so with success.

Master Principals all reported that they found the knowledge and skills acquired during the MPP significantly changed how they worked in their diverse schools. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2005) found that “Demographic variables have typically not been strong predictors of the efficacy beliefs of educators. Indeed, demographic variables in this study suggested little or no significance in relation to their efficacy beliefs” (p.18). The Master Principals all reported they were able to differentiate the application of the same learning within the five performance areas of the MPP curriculum in their diverse context achieving similar results. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2005) also reported their findings suggested that, “The perceived quality and utility of formal, professional preparation for school leadership significantly contribute to principal's sense of self-efficacy” (p. 19). It is reasonable to extrapolate from this finding the probability of a similar impact on self-efficacy related to professional development experiences. The Master Principals each expressed their personal belief that they would not be the effective leaders they had become without their MPP experience.

Conclusions from Finding 3. A strong element in each principal’s story was the culture change within their school toward one of collaborative stakeholder involvement, a commitment to continuous improvement and high expectations, and an increased sense of efficacy and respect.

The conclusion suggested by this finding is that these principals led their schools by implementing their MPP learning in their various and unique schools which in their view resulted in positive changes in school cultures.

Wahlstrom, et al (2010) shared that, “Leadership success depends on the skill with which leaders adapt their practices to the circumstances in which they find themselves, their understanding of the underlying causes of the problems they encounter, and how they respond to those problems”(p.25). Armed with new learning and by implementing new practices based on their learning, the Master Principals changed both their own leadership and the context in which they worked. Trends in leadership development for many organizations have shifted from growing individuals as “heroic” leaders to increasing the capacity of leaders to engage in various forms of shared or collaborative leadership. In a recent white paper, Petrie (2011) shared his view that due to the complexity of the new environment,

Adaptive challenges call for collaboration between various stakeholders who each hold a different aspect of the reality and many of whom must themselves adapt and grow if the problem is to be solved. These collectives, who often cross geographies, reporting lines, and organizations, need to collaboratively share information, create plans, influence each other, and make decisions (p.22).

The curriculum of the MPP was designed to help school leaders grow their own capacity while giving them the tools to help others grow as individuals and collaboratively build a new culture

of shared leadership and collective enquiry in the schools. The core beliefs of the ALA (2011) state:

People support what they help create

Diversity is embraced and valued

To change others, change yourself

The greatest leaders are known by the number of leaders they create

The stories shared by Master Principals suggest that they adopted a new vision for their school cultures and worked hard to live and lead according to the same core beliefs held by ALA. It is assumed by their designation as a Master Principal and affirmed by this research that their school cultures represent those beliefs at scale.

Conclusions from Finding 4. Though never satisfied, all principals noted positive changes in student achievement results both during their participation in the MPP and since Designation as a Master Principal.

The conclusion suggested by this finding, in conjunction with the previous findings, is that the Master Principals were convinced that the MPP learning and skills they implemented contributed to the development of new cultures in their school which resulted in achievement gains for students. Further, the implication of the research finding is that, as adaptive learners and practioners, Master Principals understand that school culture and results are not static, but rather dynamic and require constant nurturing and development to ensure ongoing student success.

Wahlstrom, et al (2010) summarized, “Effective leadership depends, we have found, on expectations, efficacy, and engagement. The three concepts do not denote isolated dimensions of leadership. Rather, they imply complementary relationships that sustain effective leadership at

all levels” (p.30). The stories shared by Master Principals affirm that they held high expectations for student and adult learners and built accountability systems to ensure that all resources were aligned toward achievement of those expectations. They celebrated successes along the way and created cultures that fostered efficacy and a results orientation for all stakeholders. Master Principals reported high levels of personal engagement with teacher professional development, classroom observations and feedback, and kept the school focused on the achievement of individual and collective learning. The principals were quick to point out that though they believed they had systems and culture in place to support success, they acknowledged that each year the schools have evolving contexts, new students, and unknown variables that keep them focused on nurturing a collaborative culture of continuous improvement.

Conclusions from Finding 5. Though all principals expressed a humble attitude about their success and influence, increases in Master Principals’ influence beyond the school was found at the local, state, and national levels.

The conclusion implied by this finding is that Master Principals are often challenged to find time to participate in activities that take them away from school and therefore carefully select those opportunities that offer a balance of local impact and broader influence. It also appears they do not usually seek out opportunities to influence the broader context because of their desire to shift recognition away from their own accomplishments preferring to transfer the credit for success to their schools’ stakeholders.

Master Principals each shared that they wish every principal who desires to improve would have the opportunity to attend the MPP. The principals also shared disappointment that everyone is not as motivated to be a learner as they were. Blake said:

I want to continue to see this program grow. I want to continue to see it stay at the rigorous level that it is. I want people to understand that this is not an easy process and it needs to be something that people that are really serious about.

They acknowledged that capacity to serve is an issue for the ALA and said they take every opportunity to express support for the program to the state's stakeholders. Whenever the opportunity arose, the participants took the learning of the MPP to audiences at education conferences and meetings both in Arkansas and across the country. As busy practitioners, most acknowledged that there is still much more they could do to raise awareness of the program and the leadership principles it incorporates. Even though they have been identified as exemplary through the nation's most rigorous assessment process, Master Principals overall have not been aggressive in touting their accomplishments or those of their schools. During the interviews, several seemed to contemplate that they would better serve other schools if they adopted a stronger approach for sharing their beliefs about the effectiveness of the MPP and its impact on their schools.

Implications

There are several implications that may be considered for future studies, practice, and policy from this study. Further studies of the effects of the Master Principal program would provide different perspectives for different purposes. Practice in both professional development and formal leadership education could be informed by examining the findings from the study. Implications may be found for district leadership policies regarding principal tenure.

An implication for further study was drawn from the one dimensional examination of the Master Principal Program based on only the perceptual data within this qualitative study. One future study might examine the impact of the MPP through the lenses of the various

stakeholders. This 360 degree perspective is a vital part of the designation process but the data cannot be shared due to confidentiality issues related to assessment. A qualitative study employing the strategies of a 360 assessment would be helpful in this regard. The findings of this study lead me to wonder if the disposition of being a lifelong learner could be instrumental in the attainment of Master Principal designation. A comparative study of personality and learning styles of Master Principals could be informative.

Since this participant pool was represented by elementary and middle school principals, a study to explore the implementation of MPP learning as it is applied in secondary schools would be valuable in the future. Wahlstrom, et al (2010) reported that,

Elementary schools experience higher levels of the forms of leadership that are associated with student learning. Teachers in middle and high schools are less likely to trust their principal, less likely to report that he or she actively involves parents and teachers in decisions, and report that he or she is less active as an instructional leader in the building.

High schools have a greater “leadership deficit” than middle schools (p.26).

Recently, there have been a few high school principals that have participated in all three years of the MPP. None have yet applied for designation, though several of those have shared with ALA staff their intention to do so in the near future. A case study approach could be revealing to better understand how the MPP curriculum is applied in secondary schools. Since principals must apply for Phases II and III, some level of implementation is assumed. The quality of implementation was suggested in this study as the essential contributing factor for the success of the Master Principals. Another study comparing the implementation of Phase III graduates who have not been designated with those who have could be revealing.

Master Principals and this researcher recommend that policy makers, superintendents, and university preparation programs should become better informed about the Master Principal Program. Wahlstrom, et al (2010) found that,

Although district leaders spoke of leadership development programs, we saw little evidence that most districts have a coherent professional development system for principals. It is equally important to note that principals are not being provided this support by others: The use of outside experts to help with principal development was relatively rare—reflecting perhaps, either district leaders’ confidence in their own capacity to help principals master the desired practices or not knowing where to find those kinds of resources (p.20-21).

In addition to the state’s stakeholders, research and information about the Arkansas Leadership Academy’s many institutes and systems approach to educational change should be more broadly distributed across the country. It is the opinion of this researcher that the leadership development programs sponsored by well-known grant funding organizations do a much better job of sharing the wealth of their learning with a broad audience. The twenty-one years of experience from the uniquely structured ALA, and specifically from the Master Principal Program, have much to contribute to the general knowledge base of leadership development and program sustainability.

This research prompts a final implication for consideration by district leadership. A recent report from the Wallace Foundation (2011) advised that:

Principals – and the people who hire and replace them – need to be aware that school improvement does not happen overnight. A rule of thumb is that a principal should be in place about five to seven years in order to have a beneficial impact on a school (p.13).

In many school districts, principals are moved across town far too frequently for no specific reason. This brevity of tenure in a building prohibits the development of a culture that would sustain positive student achievement. Several of the Master Principals commented on their confidence that the successful practices they had worked hard to instill in the school would continue long after they are gone since they had become “the way we do things around here.” The preponderance of empirical studies suggest that a solid foundation of collaborative relationships built on shared core beliefs, vision and mission are essential to support change and the development of a culture of continuous improvement. Change literature is quite clear that significant organizational change takes three to seven years. If we are to expect leaders to change the culture and results in schools, then it is imperative that districts stop moving principals without a context specific rationale for doing so. Master Principals model exemplary leadership practices. The research findings in this study imply that the significant changes they led in both school culture and results for students took years to accomplish.

Final Thoughts

According to the ideas represented by the collective efforts of program, research and evaluation, communications and editorial staff members of the Wallace Foundation (2011) over the last ten years, there are five key responsibilities effective leaders must do well:

1. Shaping a vision of academic success for all students.
2. Creating a climate hospitable to education.
3. Cultivating leadership in others.
4. Improving instruction.
5. Managing people, data and processes to foster school improvement.

The report concluded:

Each of these five tasks needs to interact with the other four for any part to succeed. It's hard to carry out a vision of student success, for example, if the school climate is characterized by student disengagement, or teachers don't know what instructional methods work best for their students, or test data are clumsily analyzed. When all five tasks are well carried out, however, leadership is at work. (The Wallace Foundation, 2011, p.5)

Acquiring the knowledge and skills of effective leadership in all five performance areas of the MPP, with the support of work assignments to help them implement the learning, and a network for collegial reflection, summarizes the participant described take-away from the Master Principal Program. Synthesis of the findings indicated that it was the principals' implementation of their new knowledge and skills that, over time, changed school culture which subsequently had a positive impact on student learning.

Master Principals orchestrated symphonic changes in their own leadership practices, their schools' culture, and the results achieved. Much like the conductor of a highly regarded orchestra, the Master Principals implemented practices that employed their knowledge and skills to affect change and achieve positive results in themselves and more significantly, in others. The conductor personally produces no sound, yet profoundly impacts the performance of the various people and instruments of the orchestra. A principal does not directly teach students, but research indicates there are no successful schools without effective principals. The Master Principals in this study integrated the five performance areas of the MPP into their work every day. Like the conductor, they led their schools' stakeholders toward a common vision and mission; they guided and developed individual and collective performances; they created systems for smooth operations that supported attainment of their performance goals; they built cultures where each

person was individually successful and yet was more successful because of the collaborative and synergistic efforts of the group; and like the conductor, principals constantly nurtured all stakeholders through change. Neither school principals nor orchestral conductors can achieve the desired goals of their organization alone, yet an orchestra, or a school, is only as effective as its leader.

It was my great privilege to hear the stories of these principals who were enthusiastic about sharing their MPP experience and even more enthusiastic about the impact they have witnessed in their schools. This researcher suggests that the Master Principals provide models of best practice taken to scale that others would do well to emulate. Any school in the world would benefit from studying what these leaders do every day. It is my hope that many more of Arkansas' school leaders will participate fully in the Master Principal Program and that they will be empowered to create the schools our children and our society must have for success in the twenty-first century. For educators and stakeholders alike, a sense of moral purpose and equity should demand that all students deserve to learn in such a place.

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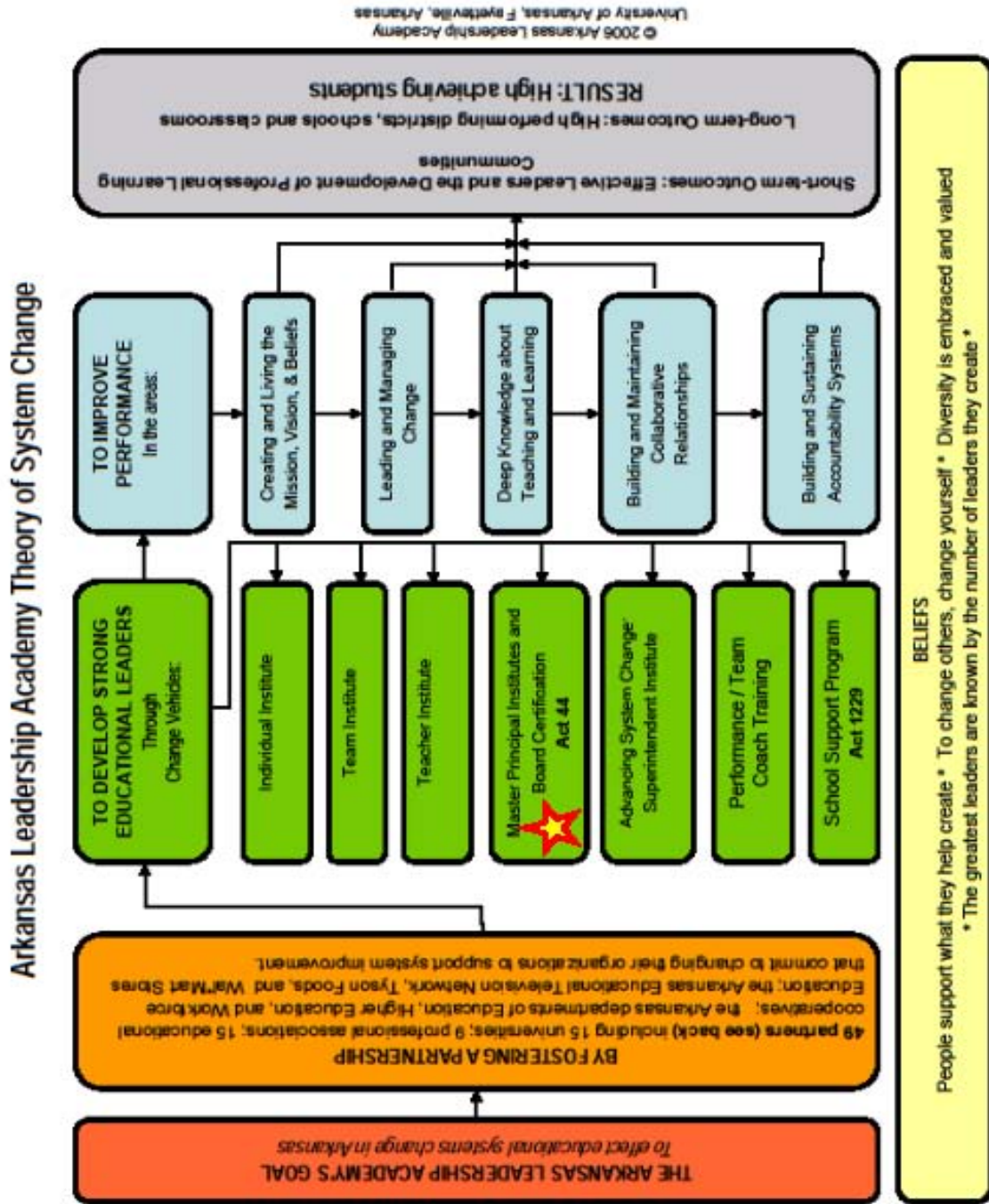
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APPENDICES

Appendix A Arkansas Leadership Academy Theory of System Change



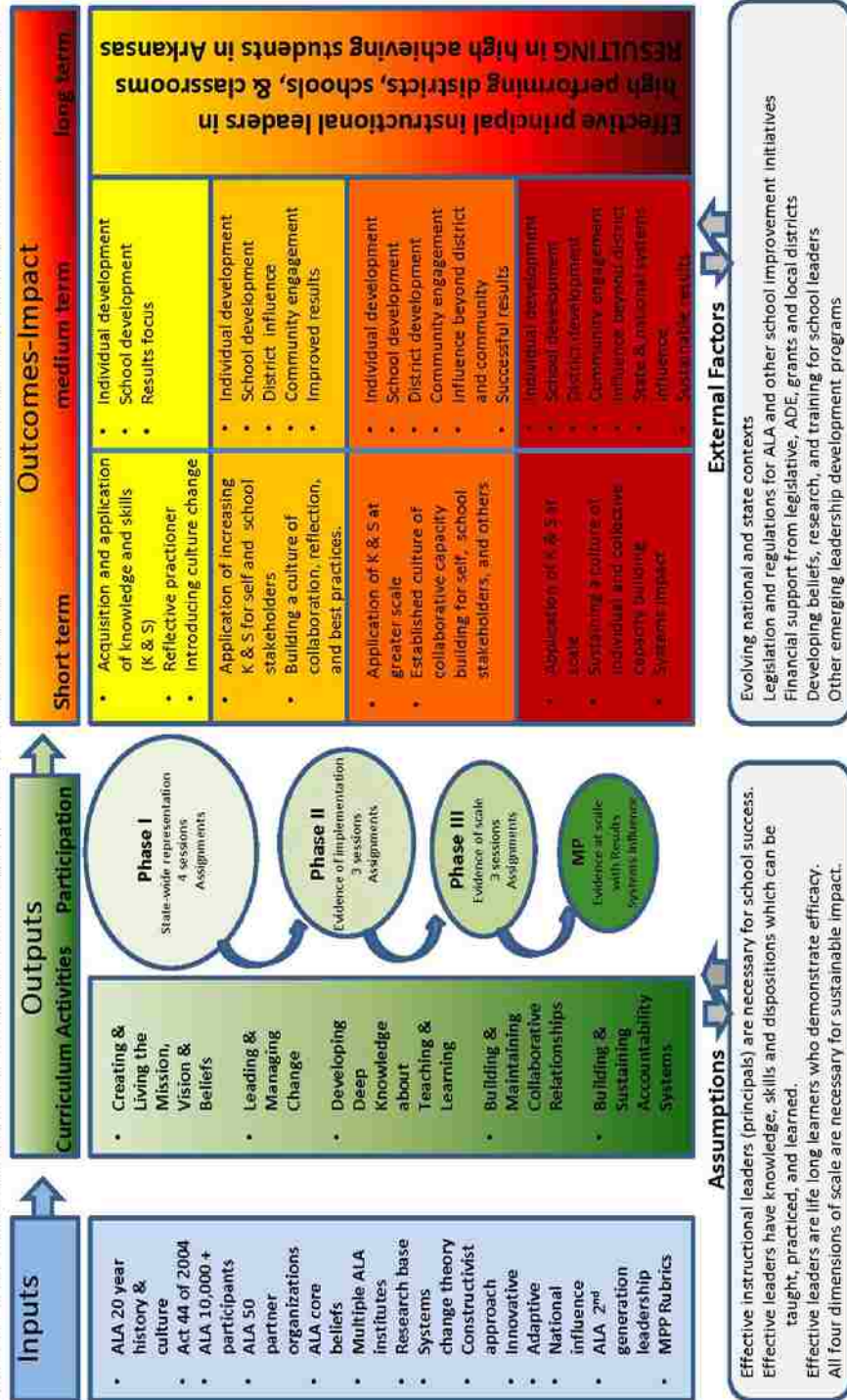
(Arkansas Leadership Academy, 2006)

Appendix B Master Principal Program Logic Model

Arkansas Department of Education Master Principal Program Logic Model

Situation

The Master Principal Program, through the use of research and best practices, delivers innovative approaches which connect principals from across the state into professional learning communities, develop leadership skills, and impact learning for adults and students in Arkansas schools. It is a three phased program built on five areas of leadership which improve school performance through expansion of the influence of effective leadership with each phase. Successful completion of the program and the evidence based evaluation process results in designated Master Principals who demonstrate fully scaled leadership in the performance areas and an upward trajectory in student achievement.



Appendix C Arkansas Leadership Academy Partners

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

- Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators
- Arkansas Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
- Arkansas Education Association
- Arkansas North Central Association
- Arkansas Rural Education Association
- Arkansas School Boards Association
- Arkansas School Public Relations Association
- Arkansas National State Teachers of the Year
- Arkansas Parent Teachers Association

UNIVERSITIES

- Arkansas Baptist College
- Arkansas State University
- Arkansas Tech University
- Harding University
- Henderson State University
- Lyon College
- Ouachita Baptist University
- Southern Arkansas University
- University of Arkansas Clinton School of Public Service
- University of Arkansas, Fayetteville
- University of Arkansas at Fort Smith
- University of Arkansas at Little Rock
- University of Arkansas at Monticello
- University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff
- University of Central Arkansas

SUPERINTENDENT REPRESENTATIVES (3)

EX-OFFICIO

- State Board of Education
- Office of the Governor

EDUCATION SERVICE COOPERATIVES

- Arch Ford Education Service Cooperative
- Arkansas River Education Service Cooperative
- Crowley's Ridge Education Service Cooperative
- Dawson Education Service Cooperative

- DeQueen-Mena Education Service Cooperative
- Great Rivers Education Service Cooperative
- Northcentral Arkansas Education Service Cooperative
- Northeast Arkansas Education Service Cooperative
- Northwest Arkansas Education Service Cooperative
- Ozarks Unlimited Resources Cooperative
- South Central Service Cooperative
- Southeast Arkansas Education Service Cooperative
- Southwest Arkansas Education Service Cooperative
- Western Arkansas Education Service Cooperative
- Wilber D. Mills Education Service Cooperative

GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES

- Arkansas Department of Education
- Arkansas Department of Higher Education
- Arkansas Department of Workforce Education
- Arkansas Educational Television Network

BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY

- Tyson Foods, Inc.
- Wal*Mart Stores, Inc.

(Arkansas Leadership Academy 2012)

Arkansas Leadership Academy Curriculum Framework

1. Performance Area: Creating and Living the Mission, Vision, and Beliefs

- 1.1 **Learning Culture**
 - 1.1a Shared mission, vision, and beliefs
 - 1.1b Learning environment for students
 - 1.1c Learning environment for adults
- 1.2 **Leadership Culture**
 - 1.2a Set strategic directions
 - 1.2b Use data for decisions
 - 1.2c Align policies and procedures
 - 1.2d Accountable for results
 - 1.2e Adhere to code of ethics
- 1.3 **Collaborative Culture**
 - 1.3a Interactive communication and shared language
 - 1.3b Collaborative architectures
 - 1.3c Diverse people, ideas, perspectives, and experiences
 - 1.3d Open access to information

2. Performance Area: Leading and Managing Change

- 2.1 **System Change**
 - 2.1a Strategic results-based framework
 - 2.1b Integrated system for systematic improvement
 - 2.1c Change process and tools
 - 2.1d Political, social, economic, and legal context
 - 2.1e Efforts at scale: depth, spread, sustainability, and ownership
- 2.2 **Capacity Building**
 - 2.2a Leadership philosophy
 - 2.2b Assessment of adult leadership skills
 - 2.2c Developing Leadership Capacity

3. Performance Area: Developing Deep Knowledge about Teaching and Learning

- 3.1 **Effective Teaching and Learning**
 - 3.1a Vision of quality teaching and learning
 - 3.1b Best practices
 - 3.1c Interventions
 - 3.1d Learning tools
- 3.2 **Academic Rigor and Relevance**
 - 3.2a Standards
 - 3.2b Curriculum
 - 3.2c Assessment
 - 3.2d Student relevance

Curriculum Framework (cont.)

4. Performance Area: Building and Maintaining Collaborative Relationships

- 4.1 Collaborative Leadership
 - 4.1a Working relationships among students and adults
 - 4.1b Collaborative architectures supporting learning and work
 - 4.1c Multiple shareholder feedback and interactive communication system
- 4.2 Community Resources and Action to Support Student Learning
 - 4.2a Community leadership
 - 4.2b Community engagement of multiple sectors
 - 4.2c Community economic and political support

5. Performance Area: Building and Sustaining Accountability Systems

- 5.1 Student Performance
 - 5.1a Disaggregated data
 - 5.1b Achievement gap targets and data
 - 5.1c Instructional strategies
 - 5.1d Performance monitoring systems
 - 5.1e Public reporting
- 5.2 Adult Performance
 - 5.2a Alignment of standards, curriculum, professional development, and assessments
 - 5.2b Instructional capacity building determined by student learning data
 - 5.2c Teaching practices result in students achieving standards
 - 5.2d Reflective practice and continuous learning
- 5.3 Distribution and Allocation of Resources
 - 5.3a Alignment of human resources to support student learning needs
 - 5.3b Alignment of financial resources to support student learning needs
 - 5.3c Alignment of time management to support student learning needs

**Appendix E Sample Section from the Leading and Managing Change Master Principal
Program Rubric**

2.1 System Change	1	2	3	4	5
2.1c Change process and tools	The principal and staff do not initiate change process research or tools to inform their choices, decisions, or work.	The principal and some staff periodically use a few change process research findings or tools to inform their choices, decisions, or work.	The principal and many staff regularly use a few change process research findings or tools to inform their planning or monitoring of work progress. Staff explores the change process as it relates to individual and group student and adult learning.	The principal and staff regularly use a variety of change process research findings or tools to inform planning, monitoring of work progress, and engagement of shareholders. They apply their change process knowledge as they lead and manage cooperative or collaborative efforts within and across shareholder groups.	The principal, staff, and shareholders regularly use a variety of change process research findings or tools to do their planning, implementation of strategies, monitoring of work progress, and engagement of other shareholders. The principal and many staff regularly apply their change process knowledge in multiple ways with different types of changes, within and across shareholders groups, and in support of other school and district efforts.

(Arkansas Leadership Academy, 2011)

Appendix F Master Principal Program Conceptual Scoring Framework

Performance Level	1	2	3	4	5
	<p>Minimal effectiveness</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Just Starting</p> <p>Random acts of implementation</p> <p>Focus: Doing a good job based on external expectations</p>	<p>Moderate effectiveness</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Struggling, experimenting</p> <p>Pilot efforts loosely connected to mission and vision</p> <p>Acts on an idea with limited examination of options or trade-offs</p> <p>Focus: Finding a program or person that improves some student or adult knowledge or skill</p>	<p>Above average effectiveness</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Moderately comfortable</p> <p>Operational, some new structures and practices</p> <p>Application of parts (efforts) within a strategic framework</p> <p>Focus: Improving instruction is the primary school focus for decisions and work</p>	<p>Full effectiveness – continuous</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Mastering</p> <p>Fully functional and operational; new structures and practices are aligned</p> <p>Systemic and results-based in thinking and practice</p> <p>Focus: Aligning schoolwide decisions and work to increase student achievement</p>	<p>Exemplary effectiveness – continuous</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Exemplary</p> <p>Fully functional and operational with direct linkages to outside systems such as internal/external collaborative structures, structures; and practices are aligned with the mission and vision</p> <p>Efforts connected systemwide with an established culture for each of the performance areas</p> <p>Focus: Bringing all district/community resources to support equity and results for all students undergirds all decisions and work</p>

Master School Principal Program
Scoring Framework
Revised October 2007.

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(Arkansas Leadership Academy, 2006)

Appendix G Interview Protocol

Name of Interviewee: _____

Date: _____ Time: _____ Location: _____

(start tape)

Preliminary Script: "This is (interviewer's name). Today is (day and date). It's (time), and I'm here in (location) with (interviewee name), the (title) of (institution). We'll be discussing the Master Principal Program."

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview! As a Master Principal graduate, I know storytelling isn't new to you. To get started, I'd like to gather some general information.

1. Tell me about the career path that has led you to this position.
 - a. How long have you been in this position as principal? Previous schools?
 - b. How long have you been in administration?
 - c. How long have you been in education?
 - d. What degrees and certificates do you have? When did you get them? Where?

2. What was the timeframe for your participation in the Master Principal Program?
 - a. Phase I? Phase II? Phase III? Designation Application?
 - b. What kept you coming back to the MPP?
 - b. What factors determined this timeframe?
 - c. What were the benefits and/or challenges of this timeframe?

3. In what ways was your participation in MPP similar or different than other professional learning experiences?
 - a. Where? When? Provider? Cost?
 - b. In what ways were they similar or different? Content? Processes? Structure? Results?

4. Tell me about some of the experiences that stand out in your memory during each of these phases of MPP.

- a. Phase I? Phase II? Phase III? Designation process?
- b. What made these experiences memorable?

5. Describe tools or learning activities from Master Principal Institutes that have been used in your school.

- a. Problem solving or planning tools (i.e. carousel, surveys, fishbone)?
- b. Learning activities (i.e. Carpet, jigsaws, conference calls)?
- c. Content materials (i.e. articles, videos, models)?
- d. How would you describe the frequency of use of tools or materials from MPP?

6. Who facilitates adult learning and meetings? What determines who will lead or facilitate?

7. We've been talking about process and content from the Master Principal Program curriculum. Let's visit more specifically about the performance areas. Describe your leadership before, during and since your participation in MPP in these areas.

- a. Mission and Vision
- b. Leading and Managing Change
- c. Collaborative Relationships
- d. Deep Knowledge of Teaching and Learning
- e. Accountability Systems

8. Tell me about any specific examples of changes in your school's leadership culture in the last few years.

9. Describe any specific examples of changes in your school's learning culture in the last few years.

10. How would you describe student achievement at your school over the last several years?

- a. AYP, subgroups, trends, cohorts?
- b. To what do you attribute these results?

11. As an applicant for Phases II and III of MPP and for designation, your performance was evaluated by a scoring team. Describe your response to this evaluation process.

- a. Agreement with scores?
- b. Use of feedback?
- c. Experience with site visit? personally? school community?
- d. Value as a reflective activity?
- e. Contribution of process to professional growth? To school improvement?
- f. Public recognition? Financial incentives?

12. What do you believe are currently your areas of greatest strength and challenge?

- a. What evidence contributes to that belief?
- b. How do you continue to support your own professional growth?

13. Tell me about any other experiences you've had with the Arkansas Leadership Academy.

- a. Participant? Facilitator? Coach?
- b. How did your MPP experience relate to these other ALA experiences?

c. Have others on your staff participated in ALA Institutes? If so, describe the impact on your school.

14. The term "scale" is frequently used in MPP. What does scale mean in your practice as a leader?

15. Do you tell other people about the MPP?

a. Who do you tell?

b. What do you tell them?

c. What prompts these conversations?

16. As you know, MPP is funded by the legislature for the purpose of improving principal leadership in the state's education system. As a graduate of the program, how do you think you do that?

a. leadership beyond your school and district?

b. influencing the practice of others?

c. influencing others to participate in ALA or other PD?

d. other?

17. Is there anything I haven't yet asked that would help me better understand the impact of your experience in the Master Principal Program?

Appendix H Focus Group Protocol

Names of Participants: _____

Date: _____

Time: _____

Location: _____

Materials:

Norms chart

Research questions chart

flip camera

digital voice recorder

4 colors of 5x7 cardstock

flipcharts and dark markers

10 dots per person

Signed consent forms before beginning.

(start camera and audio recorder)

Preliminary Script:

"This is Diana Peer. Today is (day and date). It's (time), and I'm here in (location) with Master Principals. We'll be discussing the Master Principal Program."

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this focus group! I think you've all met (*names of videographers and process observers*) who will help us record this session. With your approval, I will offer a set of norms common to MPP Institutes for our focus group today (*read from chart and ask for approval or modifications*). The protection from risk or harm through confidentiality is particularly important in research. To keep my commitments to you as research participants, I will depend on your fidelity to the norms you have just agreed to.

Before we get started, I'd like to capture your voice and name to help document the session. It may also be helpful to you as a focus group participant to be sure you all know each other. Please

just look at the camera and state your name and the year you achieved Master Principal designation. (*record names*)

As you know, the purpose of the Master Principal Program is to provide training programs and opportunities to expand the knowledge base and leadership skills of public school principals. The primary research question for this study of the Master Principal Program is: How have the knowledge base and leadership skills of Master Principals changed as a result of participation in the Master Principal Program? Secondary questions include:

- (a) How have Master Principals reacted to MPP Institutes?
- (b) How has the performance of Master Principals changed?
- (c) How has school culture changed in the Master Principal's schools?
- (d) How have student results changed in the schools of Master Principals?
- (e) How has influence beyond the school changed for Master Principals?

To help generate conversation and collect data, I will facilitate your use of several collaborative tools that I know you have experienced before. All documents you create will become part of the data collection for this study. Our timeframe is about 90 minutes for the focus group today. Do you have any questions?"

Process:

Note: Targeted research questions are referenced in parenthesis for each activity.

- 1) Sentence Stems – to stimulate reflection and build community (a)

Participants take turns completing the sentence stems:

“When I think of MPP Institutes, the first thing that comes to mind is....”

“A work assignment I recall as challenging is...”

“During the designation process, I was most proud of”

- 2) Carousel Brainstorming – reflection on the tools and learning from the MPP in the five performance areas that have been influential or useful to your performance (b)

Chart pages will be labeled with the performance areas of the MPP: Mission/Vision, Change, Teaching and Learning, Collaborative Relationships, and Accountability

Systems. The whole group will be divided into two small groups which will rotate to each

chart for approximately 2 minutes. Participants will brainstorm items for each chart based on their own perspective. When completed, each person will “spend” a total of 10 dots on the most meaningful items listed on the charts. The process discussion of lists and dots will include what was identified and why.

3) Fishbone - constructed as a cause and effect analysis of school culture change (c & d)

Participants will be asked to suggest areas of school culture change for consideration with a small group (potential areas may include topics such as adult learning environment, learning expectations, or collaboration with the community). They will self-select one area and several other participants with whom to co-construct a diagram representing the causes for the effect observed. After the diagram is completed on chart paper, the group will discuss their analysis.

4) SWOT Analysis - of the Master Principal Program’s impact on your leadership development and influence (a, b, & e)

Using sticky notes, principals will capture their ideas (one idea per note) and post them on the storyboard under the areas of Strength (S), Weakness (W), Opportunity (O), or Threat (T). Using an All-on-the-Wall technique, I will facilitate discussion about their ideas for each of the four areas of analysis.

5) 3 Words – to provide closure and collect reactions to this focus group experience

Each participant will be asked to jot down three words to capture their reaction to the focus group. This may personal reflection about things like the study itself, the processes used, the discussion generated, or their own learning. After they have written them down, they will have the opportunity to volunteer to share them aloud with the group.

Appendix I Initial E-Mail Contact with Research Participants

Dear Master Principals,

I am excited to share with you that I have received approval to begin conducting research about the impact of the Master Principal Program from your perspective. Many of you are in the same school you were in at the time of designation, some have changed schools, and others have moved out of the principalship and into other roles. For some it has been 5 years since designation and others are freshly minted Master Principals. I think the collection of your stories will tell us a lot about the impact of the program on education in Arkansas. The fact of your designation proves that you are a distinguished leader! I think that we still have a lot to learn from hearing about your work from your own voice.

My hope is that each of you will agree to let me come to your workplace for about an hour sometime this school year to interview you about what difference you think the program has made on your leadership and your school or organization's culture. In addition, you are invited to attend a one-hour focus group session at 4:00 on January 26th at WRI. This will be immediately following Phase II, Session 2 and finish just before dinner and the Learning Reunion begins that evening. I am excited to try using some of the tools we all know and love such as carousel brainstorming to prompt your thinking and generate data to enhance what is collected during our interviews. I also hope you will enjoy reflecting and learning together during this session.

Again, I hope you will agree to participate in this research. The information and findings will be used in my dissertation, but also to inform the ALA's many stakeholders about your success.

Of course, you are under no obligation to participate, but it is my expectation that you will find the project interesting and worth your time. You will find attached a consent form for your review that will provide more detailed information. Please look it over and don't hesitate to let me know if you have any questions. You don't need to complete the form or return it to me as I will bring a hard copy for signatures if you agree to participate. If you would reply to this e-mail to let me know if you are willing to participate in the study (interview and/or focus group) and provide current phone numbers where I can call you, that would be great.

Thank you!

Diana

Appendix J Informed Consent and Risk/Benefits Form for a Qualitative Research Project

Title of study: The Impact of the Arkansas Leadership Academy's Master Principal Program on School Cultures, Student Achievement, and Leadership Practices of Master Principals

Researcher: Diana Peer

Institute: University of Arkansas

Faculty Advisor: Dr. John Pijanowski, jpijanow@uark.edu or (479) 575-7019

Introduction:

I am Diana Peer, a doctoral student, and I am doing research on the impact of the Master Principal Program from the perspective of those who have completed the entire program and received designation as a Master Principal. I want to understand and describe the changes that have occurred in your school and your leadership as a result of your participation in the Master Principal Program. I would like to invite you to join this research study.

Background information:

Many principals have participated in one or more years of the Master Principal Program which was authorized in 2004 by the Arkansas General Assembly. The purpose of the Master Principal Program is to provide training programs and opportunities to expand the knowledge base and leadership skills of public school principals. The program was developed and is delivered by the Arkansas Leadership Academy founded on the Academy's approach to systems change, the core beliefs and constructivist learning strategies of the Academy, and current research on best school leadership practices. The first four Master Principals were named in 2007. The fifth cohort of designates presented to the State Board of Education in 2011, brings the total number of Master Principals to seventeen. The program may be best understood from the perspective of those who have successfully completed the three years of professional development experiences, demonstrated successful implementation of change in their schools, proven an upward trajectory of student achievement over time, and been designated as a Master Principal through the rigorous evaluation process.

Purpose of this research study:

The purpose for this study of the Master Principal Program (MPP) is to answer the primary research question: How have the knowledge base and leadership skills of Master Principals changed as a result of their participation in the Master Principal Program? Secondary questions include:

(a) How have Master Principals reacted to MPP Institutes?

- (b) How has the performance of Master Principals changed?
- (c) How has school culture changed in the Master Principal's schools?
- (d) How have student results changed in the schools of Master Principals?
- (e) How has influence beyond the school changed for Master Principals?

Procedures

In this study both individual interviews and a focus group of Master Principals will be used to collect data.

At the interview, I will ask questions about experiences during and after completion of the Master Principal Program. Participants will also have the opportunity to contribute information which may not have been prompted by a question. This will take about an hour which will be scheduled at a time and location that is mutually convenient. I may take a few field notes during the interview and will audio tape record the interview for later transcription. Follow-up phone calls may be used to clarify intent or seek additional information.

Participants will also be invited to join a focus group discussion. The time and location of the focus group will be determined at a later date, but will not exceed two hours in length. It is probable that this focus group may be held in conjunction with the annual Learning Reunion of Master Principal graduates. The focus group discussion will be facilitated with brainstorming and analysis tools such as SWOT, fishbone, carousel, and other strategies familiar to participants of the Master Principal Program. Documents created during the focus group session will constitute a portion of the data collected during this study. The focus group session will also be video recorded to capture information generated through group discussions.

Possible risks or benefits

There is no risk involved in this study except the infringement on your valuable time. Except as you are publicly known as a Master Principal, your anonymity will be protected in all reporting of this research. There is also no direct benefit to participants. There will be no cost or financial incentive to you for your participation in this study. However, the reflective activity and the opportunity to contribute to a deeper understanding of the Master Principal Program may be personally beneficial.

Right of refusal to participate and withdrawal

You are free to choose to participate in the study. You may refuse to participate without any loss of benefit which you are otherwise entitled to. You may also withdraw at any time from the study without any adverse effect. You may also refuse to answer some or all the questions.

Confidentiality

The information provided by you will remain confidential. Nobody except the researcher and a professional transcriptionist will have any access to it. The transcriptionist will sign a statement of assurance of confidentiality. Your name and identity will also not be disclosed at any time. However, the data may be seen by an ethical review committee and may be published without giving your name or disclosing your identity.

How the results will be used

This research study is to be submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements of the degree of Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership at the University of Arkansas. The findings of this study will be published as a dissertation. As such, it may be available to the public through the library of the University of Arkansas and online research services.

The findings of the study will also be used to inform the Arkansas Leadership Academy's program evaluation efforts and the Academy's many stakeholders of the impact of the Master Principal Program. Summaries and selected material may be disseminated in a variety of formats such as articles, legislative briefings, or promotional materials.

In no case will the identity of any person be revealed. Due to the small number of Master Principals, pseudonyms will be used for the names of persons, schools, and communities.

Available Sources of Information

At the conclusion of the study you will have the right to request feedback about the results. You will receive a copy of this form for your files. If you have further questions, you may contact the Researcher, Diana Peer, Master Principal Leader, Arkansas Leadership Academy, at xxxxxx@uark.edu or (xxx) xxx-xxxx.

You may also contact the University of Arkansas Research Compliance office listed below if you have questions about your rights as a participant, or to discuss any concerns about, or problems with the research.

Ro Windwalker, CIP
Institutional Review Board Coordinator
Research Compliance
University of Arkansas
120 Ozark Hall
Fayetteville, AR 72701-1201
(479) 575-2208
irb@uark.edu

AUTHORIZATION

I have read and understand this consent form, and I volunteer to participate in this research study. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form. I understand that interviews will be audio recorded and focus group sessions will be video recorded. I voluntarily choose to participate, but I understand that my consent does not take away any legal rights in the case of negligence or other legal fault of anyone who is involved in this study. I further understand that nothing in this consent form is intended to replace any applicable federal, state, or local laws.

Participant's Name (Typed): _____

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

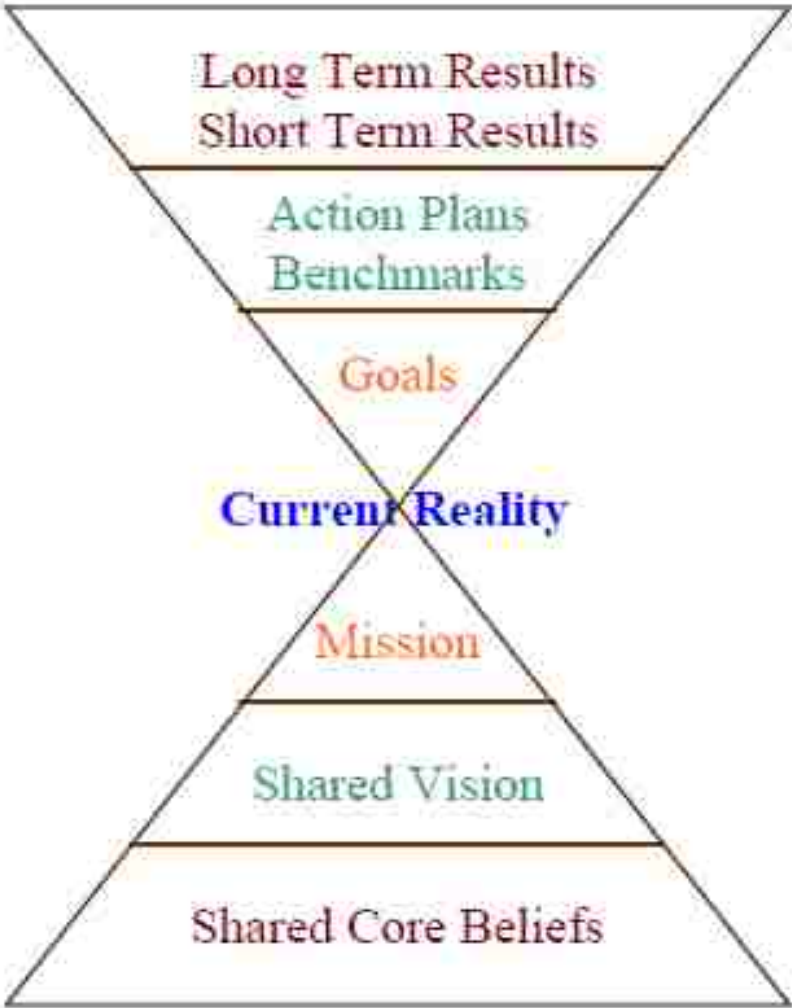
Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix K Demographic Data of Research Participants and their Schools by Pseudonym

Pseudonym	Two Schools as MP	Still a Principal	Gender	Number Years in Education	Number of Years as a Principal	Highest Degree	Pseudonym for School(s)	Number of Students	Grade Levels	Region in Arkansas	% Free or Reduce Meals	% White, Hispanic, African American, Other
Blake	Y	N	M	24	17	MEd	Valley	650	K-5	Central	25	W-95, AA-5
Mary	N	Y	F	42	19	MSE	Beaver Creek	300	K-5	Central	100	W-2, AA-98
Brenda	N	Y	F	31	17	MSE	Dale	400	PK-5	Central	75	W-35, AA-35, H-10
Isabel	Y	Y	F	21	15	EdS	Mission Island	750	PK-1	Eastern	65	W-55, AA-43, O-2
Sandy	N	Y	F					825	P-5	No-West	80	W-40, H-45, P-10, O-5
Dee	N	N	F	31	14	EdD	Brown Mountain			Central		
Shelly	Y	N	F	39	20	MSE	Parker Hill	860	PK-5	No-West	85	W-10, AA-2, H-83, P-5
Freda	N	Y	F	22	15	MSE	Ford	600	K-4	Central	65	W-90
Holly	N	Y	F	28	11	MSE	Primary	400	K-4	Central	50	W-90
Randy	N	N	M	25	15	EdD	Middle	560	K-5	No-West	46	W-60, AA-5, H-29, P-3, O-3
Rose	N	Y	F	38	23	MA+30	Magnet	670	K-2	Eastern	67	W-66, AA-33
Katie	N	Y	F	28	15	MSE	Intermediate	925	6-8	No-West	55	W-60, H-40
Jane	Y	Y	F	36	9	EdS	Jones	360	K-4	So-West	48	W-64, AA-35, H-1
Vanessa	N	Y	F	29	7	MSE+	Shepherd	400	5	Central	67	W-70, AA-10, H-20
Kellie	N	Y	F	32	12	3-MA	Forest	235	PK-5	Central	50	W/O-73, AA-37
							Miller	467	K-5	Central	81	W/O-31, AA-69
							Shepherd	540	K-5	No-West	39	W-90, AA-1, H-10
							Forest	350	PK-1	So-West	69	W-69, AA-33, H-2

Appendix L ALA's Hourglass Model

“HOURGLASS” MODEL OF STRATEGIC PLANNING



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Appendix M ALA's Rail Road Model

"RAILROAD" MODEL OF GROUP DEVELOPMENT

SHARED VISION



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Diana Peer

October 25, 2012

Dr. Debbie Davis
Director, Arkansas Leadership Academy
346 North West Ave.
Fayetteville, AR 72701

Dear Dr. Davis,

I am completing a doctoral dissertation at the University of Arkansas entitled "MASTER PRINCIPALS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPACT OF THE ARKANSAS LEADERSHIP ACADEMY'S MASTER PRINCIPAL PROGRAM ON LEADERSHIP PRACTICES, SCHOOL CULTURES, AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT." I would like your permission to reprint in my dissertation the following:

- Railroad Track Model of Team Development
- Hourglass Model of Strategic Planning
- Arkansas Leadership Academy Theory of System Change
- Arkansas Leadership Academy Curriculum Framework
- One page selection from the Master Principal Rubric
- Master Principal Program Conceptual Scoring Framework

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