The Principalship through the eyes of former Assistant Principals

by

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Abstract

The assistant principalship is meant to be a steppingstone for aspiring principals. The experience in the assistant principalship should prepare them to be effective principals. However, there is little to no research from sitting principals to assert this claim. The purpose of this study was to examine the assistant principalship through the perspective of sitting principals. The study is a multiple cross-case analysis of four former assistant principals that are within their first three years of the principalship. The central question for this study was "what is their perception of their preparation through their former positions as assistant principals? "

I examined each case study using Clandenin and Connelly's (2000) three dimensions of narrative inquiry – continuity, interaction, and situation. According to the researchers, the lived experience of each participant will reveal significant events to the participants. Each of these events shape how the participants perceive their daily lives and their experiences. The results from the study revealed that each sitting principal was prepared for the principalship through their experience in the assistant principalship. Some of the main themes revealed importance of mentoring, experiential learning, relationships, and students. The findings of this study are significant to further principal preparation with implications for sitting principals and current assistant principals.

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CHAPTER I. OVERVIEW OF STUDY

Introduction

The principal of a school is considered the instructional leader, driving curriculum and student motivation. "Principals' responsibilities have increased enormously over the past two decades. They are expected to run a smooth school; manage health, safety, and the building; innovate…connect with students…answer to their district…" (Fullan, 2014, p. 6). He or she is also expected to be a visible and knowledgeable leader. The school principal should have the ability to communicate the vision and goals of the organization. Marzano et al. (2005) noted this in the book entitled *School Leadership that Works*. The research in this text indicates 21 responsibilities of school leadership, including change agent; communication; focus; visibility; and other contributing factors to successful leadership. The text further echoes that the principal is the liaison between the community and school. In fact, many stakeholders base their perception of the school and the learning environment off of interactions and dispositions of the principal. Leone et al. (2009) suggested that a successful principal is a change agent, has outreach ties, and establishes a clear focus. Hence, the success of the educational institution is greatly dependent on the leader's ability to hone these skills and put them to use.

Therefore, the learning experience for aspiring leaders of the 21st century has changed drastically. "New, rapidly emerging change dynamics almost organically favor a different and more powerful role for principals…" (Fullan, 2014, p. 7). The need for principals to operate the school, students, and logistics effectively is still important. However, the need to improve and enhance teaching and learning is a staple of most literature and learning institutions (Connaughton et al., 2003; Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Darwin & Palmer, 2009). Hence, in

many leadership programs, these skills are the focus of the instructional content. Any aspiring leader that matriculates through these programs acquires and develops these skills. What becomes more important is that these skills are put to use.

Statement of the Problem

The path to principalship is different for everyone. Some leaders are former graduate students; some are former central office workers; some former teachers. Yet, most principals that matriculate into the position were former assistant principals (National Center for Education Statistics, 1991; Oliver, 2013). The objective of the assistant principal is to supplement the leadership of the principal. These leaders are often given the responsibilities of managing the discipline, assisting with teacher observations, directing the lunch program, directing maintenance, monitoring attendance, coordinating buses, etc. (Katz et al., 2014; Lynch, 2012; Norton, 2015). Due to the different dynamics of schools (number of students, teachers, and assistant principals), these duties may be smaller or greater. Many assistant principals find that the managerial duties take a bulk of their time, leaving less time for participation in instructional tasks (Katz et al., 2014; Lynch, 2012; Norton, 2015; Weller & Weller, 2002). Some assistant principals even noted that they find it hard to complete instructional rounds or observations. "The managerial duties of the assistant principal have not been instrumental in providing experience in the area of instructional leadership" (Norton, 2015, p. 13).

The managerial tasks seem to have left the assistant principal with minimal time to put those acquired skills to practice. For some, it would appear that what was once a seamless transition is now a nearly impossible change. Because of the recent demands of principals, some assistant principals feel that they are not being properly prepared to take the principal seat.

Review of Literature

The literature is indicative of the problem that persists in leadership development and matriculation. The review identifies strengths, weaknesses, and current trends in leadership development.

As early as 1987, educators were calling for changes in the development of assistant principals. In an article referencing the Calgary Board of Education, LaRose (1987) elaborates on the development of new assistant principals. The author notes that many leaders go from the classroom at the end of the year to leadership at the beginning of the summer. "Most new principals are plucked out of the classroom in June and plunged into the new job soon after" (as cited in LaRose, 1987, p. 49). These leaders enter these roles with limited experience and knowledge of what the job actually entails. The article describes how the Calgary Board attempts to remedy this issue. "The Calgary Board of Education piloted a professional development program that complements on-site apprenticeship training and bridges the gap between the previous and new [leadership] roles" (LaRose, 1987, p. 49). In this program leaders engaged in three areas – in-service, mentoring, and observation. Each leader attended workshops once month on topics such as instruction, management, and traditional leadership content. The leaders were also assigned mentors and asked to observe five practicing leaders. The foundation of this article echoes the need for development in leadership and the transition into the leadership role, specifically the assistant principalship.

Nearly 15 years later, Weller and Weller (2002) published a book about the essentials of the assistant principal. Much of this text is dedicated to not only outlining the duties of the assistant principal but what is necessary to grow these leaders to become building principals. The text explains the necessities to become an effective leader. Some of the text echoes early

suggestions of apprenticeships to develop leadership skills. "Leadership development is supplemented through apprenticeships…Effective leadership indicators vary, but generally include the quality of work life leaders provide; the type of decisions they make and the goals they achieve…" (Weller & Weller, 2002, p. 25). The purpose of the text is not to simply outline the duties of the assistant principal but how to grow into an effective leader. An entire chapter of the text is dedicated to the transition from manager to leader. "Assistant principals must come to grips with issues surrounding the manager-leader paradox…the move from manager to leader requires personal commitment, the allocation of time, and the drafting of a 'personal plan'…" (Weller & Weller, 2002, p. 29). However, many assistant principals find it difficult to make this transition.

Bottoms (2007) wrote a distinctive blog that could be an answer to easing the transition. In this blog, the author and vice president of the Southern Regional Education Board elaborates on developments in Alabama. Higher education programs and the state are mentioned for increasing their principal education efforts. "Alabama is one of only three states in the 16-state SREB region, from Texas to Delaware that requires aspiring principals to learn how to work with teachers to improve classroom instruction" (Bottoms, 2007, par. 3). In reference to Higher education programs, the author mentioned universities that have increased efforts through revised rigorous courses and careful candidate selection, naming three universities in the state – Auburn University, the University of South Alabama, and Samford University (Bottoms, 2007). However, it is also noted that there are still programs that are not properly preparing leaders to work with communities and improve teachers. These leaders are in need of development to meet these needs through more resources and adequate training.

Salazar (2007) conducted a study that identified the professional development needs of a principal. This seven state study detailed what was necessary for rural principals to be successful. The author noted that some leaders find themselves inadequately prepared to deal with the some of the nuances of the principalship. "Many principals are ill-prepared to lead their schools through extensive self-study and school accreditation renewal" (Salazar, 2007, p. 21). The author explained that rural principals are in heavy need of professional development for themselves and their teachers. Due to the lack of a heavy populated or industrialized area, these principals have limited options for highly qualified faculty and staff. Hence, this study focused on their needs and professional development that can improve these leaders and their schools. Through a professional development survey of these 316 administrators from Northwestern states, the author was able to glean a few important needs for aspiring principals. They were:

- Building a Team Commitment
- Creating a Learning Organization
- Sustaining and Motivating for Continuous Improvement
- Setting Instructional Direction – Results Orientation
- Communicating Effectively
- Facilitating the Change Process

Norton (2015) drew from these previous studies and developed a detailed guide of professional development needs for assistant principals. In an attempt to establish a blueprint for leadership development and experience, the book starts by elaborating on the role of the assistant principal. "The primary responsibility of head assistants was to replace the school principal when he was teaching" (Norton, 2015, p. 1). The author referenced the history of assistants in schools in a time where principals may still teach courses. However, the author noted that the role of the

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assistant lacks some meaning in fulfilling instructional responsibilities. The text continues underscoring the need for principal leadership, listing several factors that influence the need for strong leadership. "The work responsibilities of the nation's school principals have increased continuously over the last several decades due to internal and external increases in job requirements, demands for program performance accountability, ongoing changes…" (Norton, 2015, p. 2).

Purpose of Study

Increased demands for principals to be instructional leaders have redefined the leadership position and called for leadership development programs to rethink how they teach aspiring leaders. The assistant principalship is considered a development stage to the principalship (Mitchell, 2015; NASSP, 2015; Oliver, 2005; Superville, 2015; Wallace Foundation, 2016). The purpose of this study is to examine the assistant principalship through the perspective of sitting principals. Definitively, this study seeks to explore new principals', in their first three years, perception of their preparation through their former positions as assistant principals.

Significance

This research is important to the growth of the field of educational leadership. Some studies examine the effectiveness of the role of the assistant principal through leadership programs, professional development of assistant principals, and higher education (LaRose, 1987; Norton, 2015; Weller & Weller, 2002). This study reflects on its effectiveness through research of former assistant principals that have transitioned into the principalship. The research and evidence presented amplifies understanding about the relationship between the assistant principalship and the principalship. The objective is to identify strengths and weaknesses in the assistant principalship through the eyes of acting principals, using data analysis, participants'

feelings, comfort levels, successes, and failures. While the principalship has changed and leadership programs have made the adaptations to teach the proper skills, research suggests adaptations are limited for the assistant principalship (Norton, 2015). The assistant principal is an important component of the leadership dynamic in many schools as their involvement in the management of the daily functions of the school are just as important as their involvement in curriculum and instruction. I present literature that helps identify any apparent gap that exists between the two positions. More importantly, the results of this study reveal unknown data about the transition from assistant principalship to principalship.

Research Questions

This study is concerned with the assumed gap between the assistant principal and principal responsibilities. The research questions presented in this study seek to discover if the assumed gap does exist. The following research questions are addressed:

1. In what ways do new principals describe being prepared for the principalship and what factors play a role?
2. How do sitting, new principals perceive the assistant principalship prepared them well?

Delimitations

Research that is narrowed and focused by a researcher tends to be credible research. The research methods should be driven by the research questions and the problems presented. These choices and/or decisions are researched based choices that researchers call delimitations. The delimitations of a study provide logic for the boundaries of a particular study. This study is focused on qualitative data derived from acting principals in the states of Alabama and Georgia. Additional delimitations include:

1. Data is limited to experiences of participants in this study.

2. Observation data is limited to set time and availability of participants in this study.

Assumptions

The underlying philosophical assumption of this research is one of competing paradigms between postpostivism and critical theory (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Hence, I understand that there are multiple realities; the transcribed conversations of the participants help explore those realities. It is assumed that all transcripts are thorough and correct. Other assumptions of this study include the following:

1. The use of multiple data sources and triangulation of data led to valid inferences and findings.

2. Selected participants in the state of Alabama and Georgia met inclusion criteria for this study.

3. Participants were honest and forthcoming with information – participants were willing to elaborate on experience openly, including to the best of their knowledge/recollection the facts and feelings of their experiences.

4. Participants provided rich information reflecting multiple realities – participants were able to provide in-depth information that reflected past, present, and future perceptions of their experience, revealing what they have experienced, what they currently are experiencing, and how that experience is shaping their leadership goals/objectives.

Definitions

Instructional Leader- is an individual that leads with the instruction of students and growth of educational professionals in mind. This type of leader has a vision for the school and knowledge of the curriculum; he or she is actively engaged in both. "An instructional leader is a resource provider, instructional resource, communicator, and visible presence" (as cited in Marzano et al., p. 18, 2005).

Principalship- is the position of head principal at any educational institution.

Assistant Principalship- is the secondary principal position in any educational institution. This individual is considered a leader in the school and part of administration, given certain administrative tasks and or duties.

Organization of Study

Chapter 1 of this study provides an introduction to the study, the problem, and definitions to terms indicative to this study. Also in this section, the two key research questions are introduced. Chapter 2 of this study provides a comprehensive literature review of educational leadership. Chapter 3 of this study follows with detailed information about the research methods, data collection, and data analysis of this study. Chapter 4 details the results of the study. The final chapter, Chapter 5, discusses implications from this study and for future research.

CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Early preparation for leadership focused on an individual's ability to maintain and manage the daily operations of an organization or institution. "Management emerged around the turn of the 20th century with the advent of our industrialized society" (Northouse, 2010, p. 9). This form of training was effective because it shaped the role of leaders and ensured that someone was responsible for the daily function of an institution – they managed it. As Northouse (2010) stated in his text, it is management that was created to reduce chaos. However, leadership is more than management; it does more than reduce or minimize chaos, especially in schools. After all, leadership in schools today is more difficult than in previous decades (Ofoegbu et al., 2013). Today, the purpose of school leadership is to influence change and to encourage people to move towards a goal. Developmental literature as early as the 90's notes how school leadership curriculum and changes in leadership styles help influence this change. "We have gone through the phases of the principal 'as administrator' and the principal 'as instructional leader' to a broader and more fundamental notion of principal as change agent" (Fullan, 1996, p. 701).

Authors like Fullan (1996), Hallinger and McCary (1990), Bass (1997), McLaughlin (1991), and DuFour (2002) agreed that there has been an unmistakable change in the way that leadership has been defined and taught. According to Hallinger and McCary (1990), training for principals to be instructional leaders would gain more momentum and lead to active change in school leadership. In fact, according to Hallinger (2003), two conceptual models dominated over the next decade - instructional leadership and transformational leadership. Both models leaned towards the notion that principals are expected to be motivational through exchanges that enhance followers' abilities and self-efficacy.

The models also had implications on the asssistant principalship as it is perceived as one step from the principalship. The National Center for Education Statistics (1991) reported that nearly half of assistant principals become principals while recent studies indicate that more than 80% of assistant principals aspire to the principalship (Goldring et al., 2021; Oliver, 2013; NAESP, 2024). Yet, how prepared are they to take on the role? Studies have reported a shortage of qualified applicants for principalship (Doyle & Locke, 2014; Institute of Education Sciences, 2016; Oliver, 2013; Roza, 2003; Whitaker, 2001).The day-to-day operations and proximity to the principalship should ultimately prepare these school leaders (assistant principals) to, one day, run their own schools. However, the question remains how do acting principals feel about this transition. Some researchers argue that there is a gap in this preparation (Katz et al., 2014; Militello et al., 2015; Mitchell, 2015; Norton, 2015). Research insists that tasks assigned to assistant principals are managerial tasks of old (Johnson-Taylor & Martin, 2007; Norton, 2015). Although the managerial tasks of conducting school is important and still must be accomplished, the assistant principal must participate in activities that will prepare them to one day lead their own schools as instructional leaders.

The purpose of this review is to report the empirical evidence related to effective school leaders, their development, and the assistant principalship. This report identifies common themes and trends that represent effective school leadership. In addition, the research reveals gaps between the assistant principalship and the principalship. Definitively, there is little evidence that the assistant principalship provides sufficient preparation to transition into the principalship. This review investigated the characteristics of effective principals, the significance of leadership development, and the relationship between the principal and the assistant principal.

Davis et al. (2005) explained that there are various factors that play a role in leadership development. One of the more important factors is the make-up of the individual school and school community. Leithwood et al. (2004) argued that administrative competencies and characteristics should match the context in which they will be working. Change in schools occurs through leadership development but also through leadership compatibility. According to the research of Davis et al. (2005), context does matter and is important for key functions of schools. Nevertheless, the authors agreed that there are essential questions that must be researched in order to understand how to best develop leaders. Davis et al. (2005) proposed the following four questions, which will help in this understanding:

- What skills do excellent leaders have?
- What experiences can programs provide to support the development of these skills?
- What program structures best support the delivery of these experiences?
- What financing and policy practices are best to launch and support these programs?

In this literature review, sections are introduced on leadership skills, leadership development, and the assistant principalship. Each section revealed answers to the first of these four questions, indicating in what ways the assistant principalship prepares leaders for the principalship by revealing if those skills were honed through experience or practice. Throughout much of the review the words leader or leadership is used synonymously with the words principal or principalship. The words leadership and principalship are defined as the job, position, and/or role of a school leader. The words principal and leader are in reference to the individual or person in charge of a school building – the person in the principalship. All literature presented from this point in this review is in reference to that of school leadership.

Leadership, Skills, Characteristics, and Relationships

This subsequent literature in this section focuses on the skills of excellent leaders and indicators of good leadership, repeating underlying themes of collaboration and change that emerged in the form of shared leadership (Elliott, 1992; Heck & Hallinger, 2010; Waldron & McLeskey, 2010). The studies in this review emphasize the importance of leaders to work with others to accomplish tasks and maximize learning opportunities.

Marzano et al. (2005) conducted a meta-analysis of over 2,000 elementary, junior, and high schools to identify 21 responsibilities of leadership. Through this study, researched based competencies (responsibilities) for effective school leadership were identified. Each responsibility correlated directly with leadership's effect on student achievement. The range of responsibilities included relationships, change agent, situational awareness, knowledge, culture, optimizer, etc. that contributed to school success.

The authors identified these responsibilities as part of first and second-order change. As research shows, first and second-order change complement each other but are fundamentally different (Baker, 1998; Ellis & Fouts, 1994; Fouts, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005). First-order change as explained by Fouts (2003) is the reason schools remain unchanged. First-order change deals with instructional strategies or compliance with policies such as reduced classroom size or block schedules. Essentially, first-order change involves changes to existing policies, programs, or structures. Schools and school leaders implement first-order change in an effort to improve the way things are done. On the other hand, second-order change requires educators to challenge their philosophies and ideas about how students learn and schools operate. This means that second order change includes learning new ideas and developing new systems. Fouts (2003) would contend that sustained change includes both improvement in strategy (first-order change)

and a change in ideas/philosophical understanding (second-order change). Hence, these fundamentals guide how administrators lead and influence change in schools.

Based on Marzano et al. (2005) research each responsibility was considered statistically significant, ranging from correlations of .18 to .33. However, the authors also discovered that while all 21 responsibilities applied to first-order change (day-to-day operations), not all 21 were priority for second-order change. In fact, only 7 were prioritized in second-order change (knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, optimizer, intellectual stimulation, change agent, monitoring and evaluating, flexibility, ideals/beliefs). These findings meant that leaders trying to implement second-order change left to chance to face the challenges of a negative perception of culture and relationships since responsibilities such as relationships and culture were not considered priorities in second-order change. Essentially school leaders may find that a second-order change priority may be competing with a first-order change priority either through time or ideas. Leaders may have to choose professional development over a staff retreat. Leaders may have to make changes in the schedule or teaching assignments that may not be favorable with all staff members.

However, building relationships and establishing culture are just as important attributes of successful leaders. According to Leone et al. (2009), building "a bridge of knowledge and encouragement" as well as being a "navigator" are necessary components of administration. The role of building "a bridge of knowledge and encouragement" requires the principal to communicate with parents and staff, reach students, and motivate his or her staff. "They need to be ready and willing to work hard to meet the challenges faced on a daily basis as well as those that encompass the entire district and community as a whole" (Leone et al., 2009, p. 91). The role of navigating requires the principal to be a change agent and establish outreach ties through

partnerships, parent involvement, and staff development. The principal must steer the school with a vision, providing opportunities for students and teachers to grow. For new principals being a change agent requires a strong base of leadership skills including ability to use those bridges for shared responsibility and to navigate change collectively.

Research findings indicate that those leadership skills helped affect change (Elliott, 1992; Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011). Elliott (1992) focused on leadership's role in this change through a bounded case study in a high school in Western Australia undergoing system wide change. Elliott (1992) collected observation, interview, audio recordings, and document data. The findings of this case study discovered multiple leaders in the school utilizing four leadership models. The analysis compared the Hierarchy of Leadership Forces, a triangular leadership profile championed by Sergiovanni (1984), with the four leadership models. The principal and emerging leaders found that it was not their singular actions or strategies that changed the context or culture of the school. According to Elliott (1992), it was evident that the systematic change that must occur in schools did not come from the principal alone. Elliott's study revealed that the various situations and challenges that emerged during change required various leadership skills.

Likewise, Louis and Wahlstrom (2011) identified three very important aspects that affect change– a culture of excellent instruction, shared norms and values, and a culture of trust (Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011). Leadership allows for the principal to empower his or her teachers as well as diminish the number of tasks assigned to one person. Research from Fullan (2001) as well as Waldron and McLeskey (2010) indicated that the multitude of supervisory and instructional leadership responsibilities assigned to the principal are too large for one person. Therefore,

principals of excellent schools need to share power, encourage the involvement of others, and show cultural leadership (Elliott, 1992).

Heck and Hallinger (2010) searched for evidence indicating collaborative leadership did, in fact, lead to excellent schools. They conducted a study comparing four particular leadership models prevalent in a pool of 198 schools in one state. The research included both teacher survey data (directly related to leadership practices, organizational changes, and leadership empowerment of others) and student achievement data in reading and math. Findings revealed that of the four models (direct effects where leadership drives -M1, mediated effects where leadership drives -M2, mediated effects where school growth drives -M3, and reciprocal effects where school leadership drives -M4), the second and fourth models indicated significant results. The authors' research supported theories that collaborative leadership had an effect on student achievement (Heck & Hallinger, 2009; Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011; Waldron & McLeskey, 2010).

Waldron and McLeskey (2010) elaborated on collaborative school culture and recognized the important role that specific types of leadership played in the school's growth. "Distributed leadership is perhaps the most significant action a principal can take to help develop and support a collaborative culture in a school" (Waldron & McLeskey, 2010, p. 66). The authors' review of literature recognized that it is necessary that the principal's role not only implements change but that it engages staff to implement that change. The principal must understand the importance of working with teachers and parents to affect positive change for the students and the school. "Teachers in schools whose principals consistently sought out the best ideas from teachers and parents, and in which there was shared responsibility for carrying out new plans, were able to stimulate the highest levels of student achievement" (Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011, p. 54). These principals who are identified are typically the individuals that understand professional learning

communities (PLC's) (Graham, 2007; Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011; Thompson et al., 2004). It is the job of the principal to lead and model the foundation of a PLC by trusting his teachers and stakeholders.

Yet, the responsibility for change and to meet standards falls under the purview of leadership (Eilers & D'Amico, 2012; Inandi et al., 2013; Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011). "School leaders have the responsibility of deciding how best to meet these Standards by moving faculty and staff to uncharted territory" (Eilers & D'Amico, 2012, p. 46). In order to complete such a tasks, leaders must not only be equipped with the proper skills, but they must also be knowledgeable about in what situations to use those skills. Eilers and D'Amico (2012) indicated that there were six elements that helped leaders make shared decisions. According to research, establishing a purpose, setting priorities, aligning personnel with curricular needs, practicing professional discourse, encouraging risk taking, and providing feedback are essential to implementing change and the Common Core State Standards (Eilers & D'Amico, 2012; Heck & Hallinger, 2010; Honig & Venkateswaran, 2012; Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011). "These elements are the framework for actions that will enable school leaders to transform schools into learning communities…" (Eilers & D'Amico, 2012, p. 49). This work is, however, just that – a framework. Eilers and D'Amico pulled these elements from reviews of literature and considered these elements to be most critical.

The aforementioned literature implies that leaders must have a sense of collaboration and shared leadership to be effective. In addition, research reveals it is the responsibility of the leader to empower others and communicate a vision for change (Eilers & D'Amico, 2012; Inandi et al., 2013; Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011). However, there is little to no mention to how leaders build and sustain those relationships.

Professional Relationships

Professional relationships come in the form of professional learning communities, social networks, and principal networks as integral parts of school communities. The professional relationships developed in schools are inevitable results of a collaborative school culture. Although these relationships and networks are complex and sometimes are hard to measure, they are evidenced by conversations, student results, shared responsibilities, and many other factors. "Teachers working inside their classrooms are nested within schools. Schools are usually nested within districts" (Resnick & Scherrer, p. 184, 2012). It is the school leader's responsibility not only to understand these relationships but to make them work for the benefit of the students and the community.

Graham (2007); Louis and Wahlstrom (2011); Eilers and D'Amico (2012); Thompson et al. (2004) all elaborated on additional leadership indicators and the characteristics of learning communities. Researchers in this field have defined these learning communities as PLC's or Professional Learning Communities (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022; Graham, 2007; Leithwood & Louis, 1998; Kruse et al., 1994; Stoll & Louis, 2007; Thompson et al., 2004). Although there is not a universal definition for professional learning communities, the network is designed to collectively improve student learning (Grissom et al., 2021; King & Newmann, 2004; Kruse et al., 1994; Leithwood & Louis, 1998). Current literature describes it both as a network of communication and collaboration within the school that expands outside the realm of faculty and staff into an immediate learning community, including students; parents; businesses; and others that hold a stake in the children's education and the operation of schools (Eilers & D'Amico, 2012; Farley-Ripple, 2013; Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011; Resnick & Scherrer, 2012).

Graham (2007) reported results from a mixed methods study of a first year middle

school. "In 2004–05, Central Middle School was a first-year school serving sixth through eighth

grade students in a large, semi-urban district in the Southeast" (Graham, p. 5, 2007). The newly

hired principal was allotted six months prior to school opening to hire the entire staff. This leader

structured hiring practices around building a professional learning community. The questions and

activities focused on collaboration and team building as the leader understood that professional

development activities had to be embedded into daily practice to optimize teacher and student

growth (DuFour, 2004; Graham, 2007). At the conclusion of the school year, a team of 20 out of

24 teachers' results indicated that teachers noticed an improvement in teacher knowledge and

practice. Survey results indicated a perceived improvement based on subject and grade level

planning and collaboration. Moreover, individual interviews with teachers suggested that

leadership practices that encourage a collaborative approach and provide an organizational

structure for collaboration benefited teacher growth.

Thompson et al. (2004) explained that many K-12 schools are networking to become

PLC's with adults committed to working collaboratively. Researchers were able to identify the

growth of the learning community through principals' initiatives to collaborate with staff and

community in the six middle schools included in this study. "Professional collaboration is

evidenced when teachers and administrators work together, share their knowledge, contribute

ideas, and develop plans for the purpose of achieving educational and organizational goals"

(Thompson et al., 2004). Results from the study indicated that principals that displayed

characteristics such as team learning, a shared vision, and personal mastery successfully fostered

a collaborative working environment. The consensus is that principals may not know everything

but the desire to assist is what attracts community members to instructional leaders (Shelden et

al., 2010). More importantly, this demeanor allows instructional leaders or principals to form networks of communication (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022; Farley-Ripple, 2013; Resnick & Scherrer, 2012). As a result, those networks of communication form close relationships that encourage and foster a positive learning environment.

Farley-Ripple (2013) concluded that relationships are "conduits of knowledge;" (p.13) it is necessary for others to understand them in order to build change. Resnick and Scherrer (2012) would argue "it has been difficult to quantify and systematically study the nature of professional relationships in schools and districts" (p. 184). However, Farley-Ripple (2013) based their research not on an expanded PLC but on a particular school. In this school, the coordinator connected the staff by writing their names on the board and drawing lines to those who worked well together. The coordinator then organized the names into small groups. This board served as a map of networks in the school.

Researchers have called it social network analysis (Farley-Ripple, 2013). It identifies the underlying structure of the school and can help leaders identify the best way to move initiatives forward and implement change. Principals can utilize this analysis to understand power structures and teacher leaders that will support, share, and implement pedagogy or change. The results for the school in this research indicated that relationships in schools are successful and can be quantified as this school's student achievement was raised to more than 85% of students meeting state reading and math standards over a period of three years (Farley-Ripple, 2013).

Similarly, social network analysis was associated with success for teachers and principals in another study. Moolenaar et al. (2010) conducted a study where they analyzed a questionnaire on 51 principals' social network position with teachers. The questions from this study sought to discover the number of teachers that identified ties with the principal as well as what direct ties

the principal had with teachers. As this study was conducted in schools with average number of 232 students, the direct and indirect interactions that teachers had with the principal were important factors in the social network analysis. The results from the study indicated that the more the principals were sought-out for professional and personal advice, "the more willing teachers were to invest in change and the creation of new knowledge and practices" (Moolenaar et al., 2010, p.624). The results also indicated a closeness in relationship or a strong bond between the principal and teachers. Teachers indicated that they were comfortable trusting their principals with personal information. Moreover, this study suggested that a stronger innovative climate was fostered from the social network position of the principal.

Later research by Daly et al., (2016) investigated social networks from the perspective of energy ties or an energy exchange relationship. "An energy exchange relationship, or *energy tie,* is a social interaction in which one individual leaves another individual feeling more positive, inspired, and motivated" (Daly et al., 2016, p. 413). This study involved 96 principals and district leaders completing a social network survey, identifying leaders in the district with whom they have positive conversations. This information was used to create a social network map linked with answers from a subsequent leadership survey that collected information about job satisfaction, innovative climate, and leader efficacy. The results from this study found that leaders had energy ties and that those ties had little to do with job satisfaction but more so with innovative climate and leader efficacy. However, the district leaders were more sought after than the principals by teachers and staff for positive conversations. Implications from this study suggest that energy ties and social network analysis is an important aspect of leadership.

Neale and Cone (2013) provided an example of what successful teamwork and communication looks like in schools by emphasizing the importance of principal networks.

Principal networks are social networks of leaders that are connected based on their involvement in a program, district association, or school/professional association. The authors identified principals in New York, DC metro area, San Antonio, Los Angeles, Florida, and Honolulu that collaborated and shared ideas to improve their professional capacity and their school community. Initiated by the "School Leaders Network," the school leaders were able to engage in monthly meetings with one another. These leaders used this network opportunity to adopt new techniques, build confidence, and identify ways to improve student achievement. One principal said in regards to the network, "having the opportunity to talk to colleagues and our leadership is important because I am able to think about the problems at my school from a different perspective" (Neale & Cone, 2013, p. 2). Schools led by School Leaders Network outperformed peer schools (Kishel & Fallon, 2010; Marland, 2010; Neale & Cone, 2013). Many of the participants attributed confidence in their ability to improve school culture and student success to the School Leaders Network, noting how the relationships built with other principals opened opportunities to exchange ideas and get advice.

The literature in this section reveals data that acknowledges the importance of relationships in leadership. Initial literature in this section indicates that it takes the entire community to lead a school and help improve student learning. Literature presented a little further into the section focuses on the principal's role to establish relationships for the improvement of learning within the school. Finally, this section closes with emphasis on the importance of building professional relationships to improve learning and efficacy in the role of the individual principal and/or school leader.

Mentor/Mentee Relationships

Mentoring is another form of a professional relationship. Hence, it is important for principals to approach mentoring not only for themselves and other leaders but for teachers as

well. Great leaders understand that the value is in people (Dana, 2009; Hagstrom, 2004; Whitaker, 2019). In a compelling article by Roberson and Roberson (2009), the authors spoke to the role of the principal in mentoring teachers. The authors indicated that the principal is a critical factor in teacher sustainability and the principal's effort to establish mentoring for teachers can affect their growth. "The mentoring relationship at its core is a mutually enhancing relationship for both mentor and protégé" (Hicks, 2011, p. 72).

The discussion presented by Hicks (2011) identified the benefit of mentoring by indicating that mentoring is an effective method of leadership development if utilized properly. The compatibility and confidentiality of the relationship is what determines the "protégés" success. Researchers have explored the mentor mentee relationship with teachers, students, and other leaders and determined that the developed relationship between both participants is vital to the success of the experience; it is a mutual understanding (Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011; Hicks, 2011; Kram, 1985; Ragins, 1997; Ragins & Cotton, 1999; Russell and Russell, 2011; Sterrett, 2012). However, the nature of that relationship hinges on the shoulders of the administrator, principal, or leader to set the tone and model a reciprocal relationship of giving and receiving information.

The principal is responsible for ensuring that mentor and protégé have time to collaborate and to ensure that the mentor is well-trained. This time, in turn, fosters an opportunity for a strong relationship, which is the basis for mentoring and reciprocal learning (Darwin & Palmer, 2009; Watkins, 2005). Ragins and Cotton (1999) also agreed that the mentoring relationship is a significant career resource; however, Ragins (1997) contended that the relationship between the two individuals is stronger than the factor of being in the same organization. This means that organizational ties are not as important as the structure of the relationship between the mentor

and protégé when determining the success factor (Ragins & Cotton, 1999). The mentoring relationship cannot depend on a relationship established through organizational affiliation; the foundation must be built on clear norms and understanding.

Kilburg (2007) examined multiple mentoring teams and identified the positive and negative impacts of the teams. The initial goal of the study was to identify mentoring teams that were regularly encountering problems, introduce intervention procedures, and assess the effectiveness of those procedures. However, Kilburg's (2007) study identified more information about the regularly encountered problems. Results indicated that time, support, and lack of resources were the challenges or barriers that prevent or hinder mentoring teams. Roberson and Roberson (2009) suggested two strategies that could combat these barriers - regular meetings and meaningful, instructive feedback. Majeski (2023) suggested several strategies to establish a strong relationship including clear communication, collaborative decision-making, and defining roles and responsibilities. An effective principal establishes this relationship by ensuring that organizational factors such as scheduling and teacher load lend to opportunities for dialogue and guidance.

Yet, other researchers (Ehrich, 1994; Gardiner et al., 2000; Pigford & Tonnsen, 1993) suggested that both gender and race were barriers that were unaccounted for in Kilburg's (2007) study. Searby and Tripses (2006) reported a lack of support from women already in leadership positions as well as fears from women to engage in or maintain mentoring relationships. However, Peters (2010) conducted a case study challenging the notion that gender was a barrier. The author researched the unique relationship between a female veteran principal and a female first year principal. The participants engaged in the study revealing through interviews how they worked together and how teachable and meaningful moments helped with growth. "The mentor

relationship created a space for the novice to explore a leadership style and a vision of her own, rather than providing a template for the novice to follow" (Peters, 2010, p. 122). The results of the study indicate the success of the relationship based on mutual growth and collaborative opportunities. Another implication from the study is that mentoring is teaching and helps the growth of others in their capacity in schools.

Essentially, the principal and organizational involvement are key factors in successful mentor and protégée collaboration (Superville, 2015; Watkins, 2005). Without the key components of structure and time any variation of a mentoring relationship is subject to failure. The building of a positive relationship plays a major role in the success of the mentor protégé experience (Ragins, 1997; Ragins & Cotton, 1999).

This section introduced content focused on nurturing relationships that enhanced the skills and characteristics of school leaders (Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011; Hicks, 2011; Ragins & Cotton, 1999; Ragins, 1997). In addition to relationships, there exist at least three emerging themes from this literature. Hicks (2011) delved into the various positive and negative impacts of these types of relationships. Other studies elaborated on administrators' [and mentees'] responsibility and mentors requirements to carve out necessary time for collaboration to take place (Kilburg, 2007; Majeski, 2023; Watkins, 2005). Evidence indicates that this form of relationship involved reciprocal learning (Darwin & Palmer, 2009). Studies account for development and recognition of leaders through the reciprocal relationship of the mentor/mentee dynamic.

Leadership Development

Leadership development is essential to cultivating the skills that make principals successful. The ability of leaders to grow and develop others is an important part of their role.

Leaders and school systems look for the manifestation of this growth through professional development. Some authors (Eilers & D'Amico, 2012; Graham, 2007; Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011; Thompson et al., 2004) emphasized the importance of providing professional development, establishing professional learning communities, and building relationships with staff and students. This section of the literature review will focus on learning systems and opportunities provided to principals and assistant principals. More importantly the reader will gain insight on how professional development, daily duties, and systematic structure(s)/district support applies to principals and assistant principals.

Professional Development

Leaders often use professional development as a form of teaching and building others. These opportunities enable leaders to learn new strategies and practices. The section focuses on professional development of leaders, the culture of schools, and the social/professional aspect of leadership in education. Essentially, explaining how leaders grow, schools grow, and school communities do the same.

Dalakoura (2010), Darling-Hammond et al. (2022) Eller (2010), Kafele (2020), and Marzano (2011) all speak to the importance of professional development. Eller (2010) specifically speaks to the professional development (PD) of principals. In this study the researcher examined the development of 16 novice principals involved in a professional development program offered through "Recently Appointed Principals Program" (p. 956). The author conducted two focus group sessions and reviewed reflective writing over the course of 5 months. Through focus group sessions and reflection, the author gathered positive perspectives about the network opportunities and positive learning environment. Participants credited role playing, guest speakers, and support from the superintendent as important factors in having a

successful PD. In addition, the leaders developed a list of subjects where additional PD would be ideal including informal networking opportunities and use of current technology.

In another study focused on principal development, Zepeda et al., (2015) conducted a three year study in a school system in South Georgia. The researchers observed monthly meetings initiated by the superintendent that were part of a PLC (Principal Learning Community). The principals would meet monthly and engage in active learning to discover how to be better lead learners in their buildings. The researchers described three phases that involved engaging in "small and large group discussions, [defining] the relationship between the non-negotiables and classroom observations, [and] conducting system-wide classroom walk-thoughs" (Zepeda et al., 2015, p. 310). The results of this study revealed that professional development for leaders must be very specific and geared towards their work. "Building monthly professional learning communities for principals signaled the belief, urgency, and expectation for leaders to be lead learners" (Zepeda et al., 2015, p. 309). The specific conversations and observations provided leaders with development directly related to their unique school dynamics. Moreover, the results of this study not only revealed the opportunity for principal development but the responsibility taken by the superintendent to support that development.

Darling-Hammond et al. (2022) completed an overall analysis of multiple studies and programs across the nation. Based on this research study, results revealed that principals found multiple programs and professional development opportunities beneficial to their professional growth. "Principals felt that the program improved their abilities to conceptualize and lead school improvement efforts" (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022). Additional results from this study revealed that many principals notice improvement in student achievement and growth in scores.

The common theme across studies was the effectiveness and alignment of the programs and professional development.

Professional Development for the Assistant Principalship

Principals have that same responsibility to assistant principals. Professional development should be embedded in the workday (Zepeda et al., 2015) and provide practicing administrators with opportunities for growth through a common learning experience (Zepeda, 2013). In a study by Searby et al. (2016), the authors examined the characteristics of assistant principals indicating readiness for instructional leadership (or the principalship). This study involved over 400 assistant principals throughout the state of Alabama. Results indicated that one top indicator of readiness was facilitating professional development for other teachers. In addition, participants with less than 5 years of experience reported that the most effective learning opportunities "came from informal meetings with the principal" (p. 30).

In a similar study by Retelle (2010) about assistant principal promotion, the author highlighted principal preparation. The results of the study indicated that assistant principal workshops, principal participation, and work experience contributed to their development.

Oliver (2005) researched the need for professional development and identified how some leaders perceived professional development differently. The researchers surveyed over 1,000 assistant principals in a longitudinal study conducted over the course of 4 years (2000-2004) in Orange County, CA. Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire describing the professional development provided for assistant principals in their districts. A highlight from the results in the study is the change in how assistant principals ranked professional development needs. "In 2004, respondents indicated student learning, instruction, and curriculum were much more important as areas needing professional development than they did in 2000 and 2002"

(Oliver, 2005, p. 94). These responses were based on these leaders' past district experiences or lack of experience in these areas. The results from this indicated that assistant principals were already shaping their learning and professional development on the needs of their school community.

Oleszewski et al. (2012) conducted a literature review of professional development of assistant principals and found very similar results. The authors further clarified that professional development for assistant principals could be classified into the categories of career advancement and skill development. Respondents engaged in skill development indicated a need for more training on curriculum and budget while respondents engaged in career advancement development experienced a more expedient transition into the principalship. In both categories, leadership development required principal and district support of assistant principal needs. Assistant principal growth is not just a result of professional development; it is a result of on-the-job training.

Experiential Learning

The assistant principal possesses the potential to grow through his or her experience. These expectations are quintessential to what is called experiential learning. Mitchell and Poutiatine (2001) emphasized the importance of experiential learning in a review of literature and assessment of experiential learning opportunities in graduate leadership programs. According to Mitchell and Poutiatine (2001), an increasing number of graduate students in leadership studies are working professionals (teachers, assistant principals, and principals) looking to increase their personal knowledge and abilities. Experiential learning provides this avenue and a change to the traditional structure of leadership training. The adjustment, however, needed in the curriculum must also be replicated in the profession. "Leadership development

embraces the development of a broader and collective framework in which leadership is developed in practice" (as cited in Dalakoura, 2010, p. 433).

In a study conducted by Dodson (2014), the author surveyed practicing principals in Kentucky to determine the usefulness of skills developed through practice. The Kentucky Department of Education mandates that principal preparation programs provide field experiences (Browne-Ferrigno, 2013). The authors of this study surveyed 263 principals who went through preparation programs. More than 90% of these principals participated in field experience programs in the state of Kentucky. However, the pertinent component of this study was the research question of which field experiences were most effective (Dodson, 2014). Although more than 91% of participants deemed field experience important to principal preparation and growth, their answers varied on what aspects of field experience were the most important. These answers included developing a budget, work on instruction and discipline, and student data to School Improvement Planning and committee meetings. Although there were a variety of areas that I identified as important, the results of this study revealed that "the complex demands of leading a school cannot adequately be taught without real-world practice" (Dodson, 2014, p. 48).

DeRue and Wellman (2009) insisted that there are several reasons why we might expect a positive relationship between the developmental challenge of field experience and leadership development. Part of this reason is that experience does, in fact, play a role in the development of leaders. Experience is valued by organizations and are recognized/rewarded in school districts (Booker-Dwyer et al., 2023; NASSP, 2023; Wang & Holton, 2005; Webb & Norton, 2013). DeRue and Wellman (2009) researched specific pros and cons of experiential learning. The authors argued that their study contrasted "existing research [that] has examined only general, on-the-job learning as an outcome of interest" (DeRue & Wellman, 2009, p. 860). Research by

McNair and Phelan (2012) shared the sentiment of DeRue and Wellman and emphasized that learning on the job offers an opportunity to understand what it takes to be successful.

Abdul Wahat et al. (2013) recognized the leader-subordinate relationship experience as essential to growth. Abdul Wahat et al. (2013) conducted semi-structured interviews and confirmed that challenging assignments and competent leaders were the backbone of experiential learning opportunities. Day-to-day operations become a part of the learning experience. Assistants and other aspiring leaders form bonds resulting in informal and formal learning experiences. Zhang and Brundrett (2010) echoed the findings of this research in a study on the learning needs of school leaders, indicating that "leadership learning arose out of a variety of informal routes, such as group work, learning communities, and collaborative work" (p. 156). Hence, this is why the assistant principalship is considered so important for some.

One principal that recognized the importance of on-the-job training talked about involving the assistant in lessons on how to handle the budget, parents, media, as well as the safety alarm system – "These lessons are not learned by observation; they must be learned through experience" (Johnson-Taylor & Martin, 2007, p. 24). Yet, research does reveal that experiential learning does have limits and can vary based on the individual. "The developmental value of a work experience begins to diminish after an optimal amount of developmental challenge is reached" (DeRue & Wellman, 2009, p. 869). Therefore, it is important to have insight to how and to what extent the concept can help as well as hinder leader development. Effective principals should involve aspiring leaders, particularly assistant principals, in school led activities (Booker-Dwyer et al., 2023; Kafele, 2020; NASSP, 2023). Principals who understand the obligation to prepare their assistants to progress offer a multitude of these opportunities. "Although assistant principals are ultimately responsible for their own

professional growth, principals must not underestimate their responsibility to help train aspiring principals" (Johnson-Taylor & Martin, 2007, p. 25).

In addition to defining experiential learning, authors' research explained the significance of learning through professional experience and practical situations (Abdul Wahat et al., 2013; DeRue & Wellman, 2009; Dodson, 2014; McNair & Phelan, 2012). This research replicates what is being done in leader education programs and school districts across the nation. More importantly, this form of training and development has indicated that "on the job" training is beneficial to building leaders (Booker-Dwyer et al., 2023; Dodson, 2014; Johnson-Taylor & Martin, 2007; Zhang & Brundrett, 2010). "The ability to observe and reflect on various events and experiences during their years of leadership development appeared to be highly useful and even transformational" (Abdul Wahat et al., 2013, p. 304). The literature indicates that experience is one of the key strategies for leadership development. According to authors in this section, the capacity to lead must exist, the time to observe/share must be present, and the challenge must fit the leader's level of tolerance.

The Assistant Principalship experience

Yet, the time to observe/share and challenge for the assistant principal is not always easily accessible. The role of the assistant principal, in fact, is much different from that of the principal. In most circumstances, the principal of the school is considered the instructional leader. This has changed the role of the assistant principal, leaving this individual to handle the day-to-day operation of the school. "Assistant principals are often delegated the management tasks that inhibit their likelihood of being involved in a meaningful way" (Katz et al., 2014, par. 1). Whereas the principal's role is expected to maintain student learning, it has evolved from that of a disciplinarian. Many principals do not share the management responsibilities such as buses,

lunch, discipline, etc. (Johnson-Taylor & Martin, 2007; Kafele, 2023; Lynch, 2012; Norton, 2015). While some researchers indicated this shift as a detriment to career advancement for the assistant principals, other researchers viewed it as an opportunity for assistant principals to demonstrate initiative and work beyond these daily and yearly duties ("The Role," 2008; Mitchell, 2015).

Norton (2015) straddled the fence in the text *The Assistant Principal's Guide: New Strategies for New Responsibilities* outlining the role of the assistant principal to be meaningful to the school's goals. Empirical evidence suggests that many schools that have assistant principals have not defined meaningful roles for them to play (Norton, 2015, p. 1). Although the role of the assistant principal frees the principal of managerial tasks, those tasks alone will not prepare the assistant principal to be a school principal. There is a need for the contemporary assistant principal to be involved in instructional responsibilities (Booker-Dwyer et al., 2023; Goldring et al., 2021; The Role, 2008; Marzano et al., 2005; Mitchell, 2015).

The Role (2008) highlighted how the role of the assistant principal surpassed managerial duties. Involvement in school and community activities alongside the principal assists in preparing assistant principals for their lead roles. Even a desire in professional development and growth through collaboration with colleagues helps assistants grow (Johnson-Taylor & Martin, 2007). "Recipients of the [National Assistant Principal of the Year Award] have demonstrated excellence in areas that include collaborative leadership, personalization, curriculum, instruction, and assessment" ("The Role," 2008, p. 9). Mitchell Weiss, the 2008 recipient, spoke about the dynamics of the job, explaining the importance of knowing teachers and instruction while dealing with time constraints. Two of Mitchell's keys to maximizing time are to be visible and keep consistent communication. He believes that with proper preparation, an assistant principal

can move on to a leadership position in or out of a traditional school setting. While the job comes with many complexities there are opportunities for growth and display of exceptional quality.

However, there is an evident difference in research and practice. Militello et al., (2015) identified and understood the dissonance between beliefs and actual practices. The researchers in this study surveyed and interviewed 56 practicing assistant principals from all school levels. However, at varying points during the research, participant response ranged from 45-49 individual interveiws.

The purpose of this study was to use Marzano's "21 Responsibilities of a School Leader" as a reference point to assistant principals perception of school leadership. Results from this research showed that assistant principals were mainly restricted to their managerial assignments. Assistant principals in this Mid-Atlantic region of the U.S were less involved in the responsibilities typical of principals because some assistant principals took less interest ("The Role," 2008; Mitello et al., 2015). While participants agreed that idealized leadership involves knowledge of curriculum and instruction with 32.1% listing it as the leading ideal leadership trait, they did not feel the same about being a change agent and intellectual stimulant (Marzano et al., 2005; Mitello et al., 2015). This could be result of the lack of involvement in tasks that are directly related to culture and/or academic shift (second order change). The research leads to the inference that assistant principals understand the necessity to be involved in curriculum, but there may be a lack of understanding or confidence in the areas of being a change agent and intellectual stimulant since the principal typically operates in this capacity.

The 2007 study by the National Association of Secondary School Principals discussed how principals can help fill the gap between practices of the assistant principalship and principalship. One of those themes is to "involve assistant principals in all aspects of the school"

that lead to student improvement (Johnson-Taylor & Martin, 2007). Other parts of this study explained the assistant principal's lack of initiative to get involved in leading and developing opportunities ("The Role," 2008; Mitello et al., 2015). The conclusion drawn from this study, however, is that a gap exists between the practices/roles of the assistant principalship and the principalship.

Systematic Structures/District Support

Systematic structures are made up of programs and curriculums put in place by the state or district. This literature grapples with both entire educational systems as well as entire frameworks for developing leaders as well as leadership capacities. The foundation of this section identifies how educational programs and professional development models are geared towards supporting the shaping and molding of leaders (Mitchell, 2015; Oliver, 2005; Superville, 2015). The authors of these studies bring to light evidence and themes of the strength and weaknesses of systematic development.

Connaughton et al. (2003) contended that development programs and models have to be comprehensive in order to be successful. "One of the fundamental reasons for programs' inadequacies is their short-term, isolated approach to developing leaders" (Connaughton et al., 2003, p. 46). Systematic development revolves around the theme of collaborative input from organizations. Although self-development is part of growth for leaders, the organization's contribution to that growth is just as important (Abdul Wahat et al., 2013; Dalakoura, 2010; Goldring et al., 2021; Kilburg, 2007; Oliver, 2005; Resnick & Scherrer, 2012). "Organizational activities significantly contribute to developing individuals' potential towards dynamism that can lead to organizational outcomes such as a higher performance culture, better decision-making, attracting and retaining staff, as well as the ability to mobilize resources" (Abdul Wahat et al.,

2013, p. 298). Therefore, it is necessary for districts and educational leadership programs to develop systems to improve its leadership.

In Fullan's (2009) review of literature, the author reported on the success of system embedded learning. The review referenced a study by the Wallace Foundation which involved "180 schools, 43 districts, and 9 states" (Fullan, 2009, p.47). Fullan reported findings that indicated schools, students, and leaders were successful based on the sense of collective efficacy or the ability for everyone to be efficient together within the system. The district provided ongoing support for leaders and schools (Alvoid & Black, 2014; Fullan, 2009; Reeves, 2008). In addition, the systems' 'interactive activity' provided opportunities for everyone to learn from one another. Fullan (2009) compared this success to that of Reeves (2008) school level study that discovered "when 90 percent of teachers implemented the same practice, a high percentage of students scored at the proficient level" (p. 40). Alvoid and Black (2014) built on these ideas through a multiple case study suggesting several additional ways systems can support principals, including principal support systems; redefining roles; central office support; and principal training. Each concept/idea can be applied to support for school leaders work throughout districts and across states.

Systematic structures/District support for the Assistant Principalship

Research shows that aspiring principals and assistant principals have an expectation to learn through their practice (Goldring et al., 2021; Kafele, 2020, 2023; Oliver, 2005). Operating programs in cities across the nation have emphasized the need for assistant principal development. In some programs coined "pipelines," assistant principals have recorded success in experiential development (Lee, 2015; Mitchell, 2015; NASSP, 2023; Oliver, 2005; Superville,

2015). While some research has defined the success of on-the-job learning as an outcome of interest (DeRue & Wellman, 2009, p. 860), Mitchell (2015) highlighted these training pipelines as beneficial experiential learning opportunities for both acting principals and assistant principals. Mitchell (2015) specifically outlined a three year program in Maryland that grooms assistant principals to become building principals through training, mentoring, and action research. The author wrote of one assistant principal stating, "Rochelle Archelus opted to remain in the academy even after leaders in the Baltimore County system appointed her as acting principal…" (Mitchell, 2015, par. 12). Her decision was attributed to the unique design of the training pipelines to provide specific support from colleagues and peers within the same district.

Similar programs implemented activities that involved mock interviews, video reflection, and coaching to provide the aspiring leaders with real-world applications to the principalship (Clark, 2012; Mitchell, 2015). Principals and school systems in Denver, New York City, Charlotte, Gwinnett County (GA), Prince George's County (Md) and others have taken note to this learning and, in some cases, have made changes (Wallace Foundation, 2016).

Districts across the nation have bought into this concept. These districts have decided to develop programs or "Assistant Principal to Principal pipelines" (Clark, 2012; Mitchell, 2015; NASSP, 2023; Superville, 2015). These programs follow a model that embodies collaboration, relevance, and experience. In Denver, for instance, their organizational dynamics created a pipeline for assistant principals to become effective principals. First year assistant principals enter the program under the New Leaders Academy where they have access to coaching and mentoring. In the first year, they have monthly meetings with other assistant principals and work with their mentors to develop leadership skills. During the following year, these assistant principals are engaged in a yearlong project where principal coaches help guide them through

scenarios with parents, students, and budgets amongst other situations applicable to the principalship. By the third year in their tenure as assistants, each assistant principal is ready to participate in a principal residency program where they spend what they call "lead weeks" learning to lead and serve as acting principal at a neighboring school. "At the conclusion of the program, top performers are eligible to apply for principal positions" (Superville, 2015, par. 3).

The common thread between these programs are the growth models for the assistant principalship. "Most of the preparation now focuses on expanding the responsibilities of assistant principals, who traditionally were given a limited range of responsibilities for school discipline and operations, such as buses and food services" (Mitchell, 2015, p. 8). Authors in this field call for programs and professional development geared towards curriculum and instruction (Clark, 2012; Mitchell, 2015; NASSP, 2015; Oliver, 2005; Superville, 2015). Yet, growth will only occur with the appropriate relationship and interaction between leaders and the organization (Abdul Wahat et al., 2013; Connaughton et al., 2003; Zhang & Brundrett, 2010). Systematic development as a whole implicates that "when a district has its act together, the degree of collective efficacy increases" (Fullan, 2009, p. 48). This means that leaders are in a better position to move schools forward and improve student achievement.

Conclusion

The scope of leadership has been examined by many experts and authors in the field. Often this research has been conducted in an attempt to understand and quantify the significance of leaders in educational institutions. However, it has become, as the years pass by, increasingly apparent that leadership is a necessity for the success of students and teachers alike. "In many parts of the world, including both developed and developing countries, there is increasing recognition that schools require effective leaders and managers if they are to provide the best

possible education for their learners" (Bush, 2009, p. 375). This literature review highlights the indicators that makeup efficient school leadership.

More importantly, it introduced literature that suggests that assistant principals are not always being exposed to those indicators. This literature presents evidence that the role of assistant principal must develop and be developed as it does not always prepare a leader for future as a school leader. As Darling-Hammond (2009) contended, "the need to prepare future citizens and workers who can cope with complexity…has stimulated efforts to rethink school goals and redesign school organizations." Although this message from Darling-Hammond (2009) was inclusive of 21st century change as well as a challenge to the bureaucratic, professional, and market approach, it is applicable here. Assistant principals and principals alike should share the qualities and responsibilities mentioned in this literature review. Principals and assistant principals should work closely to complement each other's position, allowing either to step in the place of the other. Yet, the literature has not shown evidence of this being a common occurrence. This research calls for a look into the principalship. Through the lens of acting principals that transitioned from the assistant principalship, this study will indicate if the assistant principalship prepared them to be effective school principals.

CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

Introduction

"School districts, along with regulatory, training, and professional bodies, need to address core issues related to the vice-principalship and the ways in which new school leaders are socialized into administrative roles" (Armstrong, 2010, p. 686). This was the conclusion of a study conducted by Denise Armstrong to understand how assistant principals handled the transition from teaching to administration. Her study utilized a qualitative research approach, documenting the narratives of new assistant principals. Through two semi-structured interviews of eight new assistant principals, Armstrong (2010) identified themes of early socialization and disassociation; assistant principals were separated from teachers' "rites of passage" and often felt inadequate due to lack of training. Hence, the assistant principals were integrated into their administrative roles through exhaustive and/or normative practices that may have hindered their progress. Without an established transition into leadership, the assistant principal is left to find his/her place in the organization possibly making him or her less prepared to assume the role of the principalship adequately.

In a study by Searby et al. (2016), the authors researched the readiness of assistant principals in the state of Alabama. Through a comprehensive mixed methods study of 461 assistant leaders, the authors were able to identify key factors or characteristics of assistant principals ready to be instructional leaders. The research involved surveying assistant principals across the state. The findings from this study revealed that some of the factors that prepared assistant principals to be instructional leaders were informal mentoring, leadership opportunities as teachers, as well as instructional leadership responsibilities in their current role. "If their

current position required them to have more responsibilities in instructional leadership, they feel more ready" (Searby et al., 2016, p. 23). The findings of this study, however, still left to question how ready assistant principals were for the principalship. Searby et al. (2016) excluded some of the qualitative data and had to face the limitation of uncontrolled level of participation despite covering a large a part of the state of Alabama. As a result, principals with 5 or more years of experience dominated the data pool.

According to Armstrong (2010), few studies have focused on administrative rites of passage. The research conducted in this study added to that literature. This study expanded on the research of new principals by examining how they handled the transition from the assistant principalship to the principalship. The information introduced here explained and outlined the method and purpose of analysis, providing a detailed account of the research process, questions, and rationale for research. Furthermore, this chapter provided the reader with clear background information of the participants and dependability of the study to reveal how the assistant principalship prepared leaders. The purpose of this study is to examine principal preparation through the assistant principalship to identify the assistant principalship's ablty to mold building leaders.

Role of the Researcher

My role as assistant principal and novice principal while conducting this research study provided me with a vested interest in the topic of this study. When starting this research, I was an early career administrator in my first few years as an assistant principal. As an assistant principal, I constantly read studies and/or spoke with colleagues that argued that the assistant principalship was not preparation for the principalship. These readings and conversations did not completely align with my experience as I was involved in instructional decisions and had some

hand in finance. I was curious to discover if was I experiencing an anomaly. What did sitting principals have to say about the role, and did the assistant principalship, in fact, prepare leaders for the principalship? Either way, my interest in the field's ability to grow and cultivate other leaders drove my research. As a novice principal, my interest in growing my assistant principal further drove my research. It was important that I considered what strategies and duties sitting principals stated prepared or did not prepare them for the role.

My ontological belief is one of competing paradigms between postpostivism and critical theory (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Whereas I understand that the perception of one is not that of many, I recognize that there are multiple realities, power structures and historical situations that influence outcomes and perceptions. Therefore, the various dynamics of learning institutions have a great influence on how the principalship and the assistant principalship are perceived. Yet, my view of the principalship and assistant principalship is universal. Epistemologically, it is my belief that there is existing knowledge and theories that can influence practice. This includes the influence that a researcher may have on a participant since it is important not only for the researcher to be objective but to build a relationship with the participant. In this study, I focused on the reflections of the participants' experiences. As a narrative inquirer, I understood that narrative inquiry is a relational research methodology (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Methodologically, narrative inquiry aligns with my belief that inquiry requires dialogue and a use of natural settings to gather information. As I am a practicing principal, this study informed how my former role in the assistant principalship prepared me. I believe that through my experience and research I have noticed the affects that environment and mindset can have on a leader's growth. My experience has led me to believe that specific characteristics either make the assistant principalship successful or not. In addition, my experience as an assistant principal and

novice principal allowed me perspective into others experiences and perspectives of both roles. My participation in this study was that of an independent researcher and narrative inquirer. As an independent researcher, my role was to inform participants of the nature of this study, provide confidentiality forms, conduct interviews, analyze and transcribe data, and debrief participants. In order to affirm the story of participants, I chose to engage participants in member checking through narrative accuracy checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

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Design

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How the research is conducted is just as important as the research topic being investigated. Case study researchers have documented their process and because of their success (detail of the studies), they have been duplicated. Novice case study researchers have been able to utilize the foundation of expert researchers (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Eisenhardt, 1989; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003) to further research and duplicate methods in other studies. The hope of this study was to combine some research approaches (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003) to provide a thick and rich description. This study followed the research design of a case study in that it was bound by place and time - within the states of Alabama and Georgia in principals first three years of principalship (Lune & Berg, 2017; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). However, as Stake (1995) suggested, cases are not defined by methods of inquiry. This study encompassed methods of narrative inquiry proposed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000).

Cases

It is important to protect the richness of each case. Eisenhardt (1989) suggested that a number between 4 and 10 cases usually works well. Yin further concluded that a large number of cases would implicate complex research to achieve to determine prevalence or frequency or better yet to generalize to a large population with statistical information. Cases are chosen for

theoretical, not statistical reasons (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Hence, the data collected in this study derived from four practicing administrators, each case represented principals promoted within and promoted externally, in school districts in the states of Alabama and Georgia.

Recruiting

Emails were sent to school districts throughout the state with an online survey to be completed by school principals (Appendix A). I generated surveys using Qualtrics (Appendix B). I reviewed each survey, considering years of experience; former position, years in former position, and school makeup (demographics). This information was used to find candidates with less than three years in the principalship and more than one year as an assistant principal to participate in the study.

Criteria

Yin (2013) suggested that the researcher select participants so that the study may be replications of each other, meaning that each case is a literal or rival replication of the other. Therefore, each case is carefully selected with the anticipation that they will produce similar (literal) or contrasting (rival) results based on identifiable factors such as internal and external promotion. I, therefore, selected candidates through purposive sampling in this study to identify cases that best fit the replication design. I primarily based the criteria for selection on least years of experience in the principalship (3 or less years as a principal); most years of experience in the assistant principalship; promotion within/externally; and diversified school settings. Hence, each participant is a practicing school leader with 3 years or fewer of experience. I sent the selected, qualifying candidates an email detailing the nature of the study and offering the opportunity to volunteer to participate in the study (Appendix C).

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The purpose of the research was to identify similarities or similar results (Yin, 2003) through a multiple case study approach. Yin (2003) describes how multiple case studies can be used to either, "(a) predicts similar results (a literal replication) or (b) predicts contrasting results but for predictable reasons (a theoretical replication)" (p. 47). In this study, each school and principal was bound as an individual case and each case study was documented in the format of a narrative to discover how the assistant principalship prepares leaders for the principalship as well as how the assistant principalship is perceived. The case includes a profile of the principals' former position as assistant principal, providing a background of the years of experience and demographics in each school (if multiple), using 45 min. -1 hour interviews and public archival data (school profile). The case study then leads into the principals' current position and school, including student and teacher demographics as well as the principals' years of experience. The requirements/perspectives as discussed in the literature (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003) are used to guide the case study in investigating how the assistant principalship prepared a leader for principalship and how sitting principals perceived the role as well.

I informed each principal that they are participating on a voluntary basis and can withdraw from any portion or the entire study at any point. Participants (principals) also received consent forms via email (Appendix D). Upon return of these forms, I contacted each principal via email to schedule initial interviews. Interviews took place face-to-face and last for 45 min. – 1 hour.

Interview data provided a window into the lives of the participants through narrative inquiry (NI). Narrative inquiry involves the lived, relived, and retold storytelling. It is a mutual storytelling between researcher and participant. "It is important that the researcher listen first to the practitioner's story, and that it is the practitioner who first tells his or her story" (Connelly &

Clandinin, 1990, p. 3). In narrative inquiry the researcher has the opportunity to retell what he or

she heard and, in turn, possibly shaping how participants or readers view the story. In this study

the process included the essential components of field notes and unstructured interviews. The NI

as an interview technique consists of the story developing out of factual events and self-

generated interest (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). The interview questions that follow this

process are found in Appendix E of this document.

Data Collection

One of the most effective ways to learn about the circumstances of people's lives is to ask

(Lune & Berg, 2017). The interviews conducted revealed the lived stories of the participants.

The process of collecting this data was important to the analysis and transparency of this

research. Laura Krefting (1991) suggested, it is a necessity to detail the methods of gathering and

analyzing qualitative data. Yin (2003) suggested the use of multiple sources of evidence in case

study research allows a researcher to address a broader range of historical and behavioral

issues… "using multiple sources of evidence is the development of *converging lines of inquiry"*

(p.120). Hence, how I collected data (location and instrument) played a role in participant

responses. Furthermore, transparency of the process enables readers and participants to question

or provide feedback on interpretation of lived stories.

Each selected participant from the survey data first scheduled and engaged in one face-to-

face interview. I conducted interviews in the principal's school when possible to observe the

principal in his/her natural setting during the course of this study. According to Creswell and

Poth (2016), conducting research in the natural setting builds a holistic picture and detailed view

of the participants. Each interview lasted for 45 minutes to one hour. I conducted interviews in a

semi-structured format using open-ended questions (Appendix E). Hoepfl (1997) suggested that

open-ended questions provide opportunities for a range of responses from participants. I recorded responses using an audio device. I also took hand notes during the interview to identify telling non-verbal cues or notable comments. The narratives or lived stories of the participants derived from information provided in the individual interviews, using participant language and perceptions. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested that telling the lived stories of participants are not always linear. Individuals do not always tell stories from start to finish; they may highlight important events or leave out events that bring up negative memories. Patton (2002) contended that there are limitations to what people say and observation may be the best method to gather full understanding. Hence, each interview was followed with a 45 minute- 1 hour observation, either the same day or at a later date, of the principal interacting with staff either in transitions or in team meetings. The protocol for these observations can be found in Appendix F.

During the observation, the researcher took notes of observed communications and actions. Observation data provided either confirming or discomfirming evidence to what participants indicated in interviews (i.e. comfortability with job duties, preparation for tasks or meetings, communication skills, and other identifiable findings). I also included excerpts from the raw data (transcripts) from interviews in the findings results section of this research.

I coded participant's names and school information for confidentiality and placed in a secure location. The voice recordings are on a password protected recorder. I replaced participants' names with pseudonyms for the sake of confidentiality. In addition, I took notes on a personal notepad and secured in a lock drawer in the researcher's office space. It is important for the reader to understand that the particular data collection process for this research required corresponding with participants and chairs of this research study. All information not pertaining to the reported study remained between these parties and confidential. School profile data and

archival data I collected came from school and district websites. This information informed the reader and researcher about the participants former experience beyond evidence provided in interviews and observation.

Data Analysis

This is a narrative and multiple case study, using multiple sources – comparing interview data of individual participants to individual observation data; comparing themes across cases and within cases; comparing public documents to participant responses, and interview data. While narrative analysis is not limited to an individual approach, this particular study will focus on Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three dimensions of narrative inquiry – continuity, interaction, and situations. Continuity refers to the constancy of the past, present and future in narratives, interaction is the social and personal interactions that take place in individual's lives, and situations are the places in which these events occur (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Dewey, 1938). I examined each case study for the three-dimensions, identifying continuity (references to the past, present, future, the order of storytelling, use of metaphors in relation to past events, and shared stories); interactions (field notes, collegial interactions - teachers, students, parents, and other administrators); and situations (scene where interview took place, reference to classroom, or office, or educational experiences, references to assistant principalship).

First, I transcribed interview data based on verbatim responses from participants using a method of coding =cutting and sorting. "Cutting and sorting involves identifying quotes or expressions that seem somehow important—these are called exemplars—and then arranging the quotes/expressions into piles of things that go together" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 347). I identified recurring and emerging quotes from the available data set with references to time,

interactions, and situations. While coding involves breaking data into smaller segments, it is important to be thorough in identifying the whole story. Krefting (1991) recommended a second review of transcript data or code-recode procedure to increase dependability. Therefore, I coded transcripts creating families based on emerging and recurring themes within the data set in a recode procedure and placed it in a codebook (Appendix G).

Each phrase theme directly related to the unit of analysis, principals, or related to the research questions about perception of the assistant principalship was highlighted.

Secondly, I used the observation data to gather confirming and disconfirming evidence in comparison to analysis from interview data. According to Connelly and Clandinin (1990), participant observation is considered an important tool used in narrative inquiry. Hence, I used field notes to identify interactions with teachers, students, parents, and/or colleagues (other administrators). In a form of axial coding, I highlighted phrases/quotes/interactions relating to categories in the codebook as disconfirming or confirming evidence. I added any emerging data from the field notes to the codebook as a new category or code.

I used the themes identified in each case to triangulate data between and within cases. "Triangulation of data sources, data types or researchers is a primary strategy that can be used and would support the principle in case study research that the phenomena be viewed and explored from multiple perspectives" (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 556). Lincoln and Guba (1985) described triangulation as a method to evaluate trustworthiness of qualitative research. Denzin (1978) and Patton (1999) identified four types of triangulation – methods, investigator, theory, and data. Of the four, this research used triangulation of data. Choosing a narrative case study allowed for this to occur through cross-case analysis of data as narrative stories are constantly

evolving. The data I collected was in both public and private settings (observation and interview) as well as I used the data to compare different perspectives between cases. The data collected in a narrative study "refers to a family of methods for interpreting texts that have in common a storied form" (p. 11). This research analyzes the stories for interaction, continuity, and situations (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), comparing each case study. Miles and Huberman (1994) described this methodology of comparing and synthesizing multiple research cases as cross-case analysis while Yin (2013) described it as cross-case synthesis. For the purpose of this study, I have chosen to use the terminology of cross-case analysis.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is the demonstration that evidence is accurate. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) put it, why is study worth paying attention to or conducted. According to Patton (2023) validity and reliability are two factors which any qualitative researcher should be concerned about while designing a study. This is not, however, the consensus amongst many qualitative researchers that claim that reliability and validity are not major terms used by qualitative researchers. Outlined criteria such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability determine the trustworthiness of a study. The research in this field must be checked and deemed as quality research by some measures. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that a researcher must have confidence in the findings. This is what qualitative researchers consider credible research. The trustworthiness of the research is a reflection of the confidence in the research and of the researcher, especially since the researcher is deemed the instrument in qualitative research. Therefore, the terms that best fit this research and this particular research study are dependability and credibility

Dependendabilty

Dependability refers to the consistency or non-consistency of the study. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) perceived it as establishing objectivity. The idea is that multiple researchers can reach an intersubjective agreement to the findings or methodology of a study. In this study, I will work largely on my own; therefore, the information presented in this study is meant to be as transparent as possible. According to Shenton (2004), qualitative researchers recognize that the changing phenomena of qualitative research render replication of such studies difficult. However, the understanding that methods rather than results are meant to be replicated is the reason that transparency is necessary. Transparency throughout the process and procedure will allow future researchers to conduct a study along the same methods, lending this study as a model or "prototype". I will detail an audit trail on twitter using the hashtag "#audittrail17" throughout the process in an attempt to capture data collection and analysis. I documented emerging data and themes in a codebook. Furthermore, external audits of the process and procedures were conducted by the co-chairs of my committee.

Credibility

The ability of a study to cross reference data through triangulation or reflexivity or the extent to which results can be applied to other situations or simply recognition of biases are important factors to credibility. "A number of methodological strategies are required to ensure strong credibility" (Krefting, 1991, p. 216). Each methodological strategy was not only required but defined through research practices and instruments used throughout the study.

Content Trustworthiness

The information provided in this study is assumed to be honest and trustworthy. Each transcript is a direct result of interviews of individual participants. Each participant is assumed to

have spoken openly and honestly about his or her experiences. In order to cross reference themes and inferences from collected data, I conducted narrative checks – a form of member checking that served as follow-ups to data recorded in the codebook based on information from the original transcripts. Lincoln and Guba (1985) described this revisiting disconfirming and confirming evidence as triangulation – a method to evaluate trustworthiness of qualitative research. I personally recorded and transcribed all transcripts from any interview to solidify any potential lost results in transfer from audio to hardcopy. Participants were then provided with an excerpt of the transcription as well as a list of themes that were highlighted from the interview. Participants have an opportunity to comment on excerpts and themes.

Construct Trustworthiness

Creswell and Poth (2016) defined case study research as the real-life exploration of a question or participant bounded by time. Kowalski (2012) described this form of research as the general description of a situation that can be deployed for research or teaching. Although this study introduces principals that are working in separate settings, each is working within their first few years of principalship. As former assistant principals, each shares some akin relationship that enables them to relate to one another's situation. The construct of this study is new principals', in their first three years, perception of their preparation through their former positions as assistant principals.

The focus of the research is not on the individual schools but rather it is on the individual leaders' abilities to succeed in their current role. The assumption is that their former experiences influenced their decision-making skills and leadership capabilities. Taylor and Bogdan (1998) insisted that refining concepts and exploring their relationships in an integrated format required

simultaneous analysis. Hence, I analyzed each participant's response through cross-case analysis. The objective was that other researchers could replicate this study in the future.

Assumptions

Selected participants in the state of Alabama and Georgia met inclusion criteria for this study.

Participants were honest and forthcoming with information – participants were willing to elaborate on experience openly, including to the best of their knowledge/recollection the facts and feelings of their experiences.

Participants provided rich information reflecting multiple realities – participants were able to provide in-depth information that reflected past, present, and future perceptions of their experience, revealing what they have experienced, what they currently are experiencing, and how that experience is shaping their leadership goals/objectives.

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Summary

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This study took a qualitative approach to exploring the preparation of principals through the assistant principalship. In a multiple narrative case study, four individual principals that formerly served as assistant principals in the states of Alabama and Georgia engaged in individual interviews and direct observations. The research pulled additional data from public documents, participant narratives, and surveys. I transcribed and analyzed data per case and across cases to identify similar and dissimilar themes. In alignment with the conventions of case study research, the research will focus on a literature-based proposition (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003): The assistant principalship is expected to provide preparation for the principalship (Johnson-Taylor & Martin, 2007; "The Role," 2008; Mitchell, 2015; Norton, 2015).

CHAPTER IV. FINDINGS

Introduction

In Chapter 3, I provided the reader with an outline of the dependability and details of this study where each principal was bound by an individual case documented in the format of a narrative. This study acknowledges that the path to principalship is different for everyone. Yet, most principals that matriculate into the position were former assistant principals (National Center for Education Statistics, 1991, 2017; NAESP, 2016; Oliver, 2013). The objective of the assistant principal is to supplement the leadership of the principal. Due to the different dynamics of schools (number of students, teachers, and assistant principals), the duties and/or responsibilities of the assistant principal may be smaller or greater depending on the school. Many assistant principals find that the managerial duties take the bulk of their time, leaving less time for participation in instructional tasks (Katz et al., 2014; Lynch, 2012; Norton, 2015; Weller & Weller, 2002). This chapter will explore each principal's journey in detail, examining their perspective of their path and current role.

Methodological Approach

This study took a qualitative approach to exploring the preparation of principals through the assistant principalship. In a multiple narrative case study, four individual principals that formerly served as assistant principals in the states of Alabama and Georgia engaged in individual interviews and direct observations. Interview data provided a window into the lives of the participants through narrative inquiry (NI). Narrative inquiry involves lived, relived, and retold storytelling. While narrative analysis is not limited to an individual approach, this study will focus on Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) three dimensions of narrative inquiry –

continuity, interaction, and situations. This approach requires a Deweyan view of experience and

uses this metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin, 2006).

Each case study was examined for the three-dimensions, identifying continuity (stories or

references to the past, present, future, the order of storytelling, use of metaphors in relation to

past events, and shared stories); interactions (field notes, collegial interactions - teachers,

students, parents, and other administrators); and situations (scene where interview took place,

reference to classroom, or office, or educational experiences, references to assistant

principalship). Narrative inquiry is a view into the lived experiences. "People shape their daily

lives by stories of who they and others are..." (Clandinin, 2006, p. 45). The ways in which they

tell these stories highlight what they view as important or choose to remember as meaningful in

their lives (past, present and future events – continuity). In addition, Clandinin and Connnelly

emphasize that people are not individual and cannot be understood as such. This means that

social context (interactions and situations) are ways to understand the lived experience and who

people are. "Experiences grow out of other experiences, and experiences lead to further

experiences...a way of understanding experience" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2).

I pulled additional data from public documents, participant narratives, and surveys. I

transcribed and analyzed data per case and across cases to identify similar and dissimilar themes.

In this study, each school and principal were bound as an individual case and each case study

was documented in the format of a narrative to discover how the assistant principalship prepares

leaders for the principalship as well as how the assistant principalship is perceived. The case

includes a profile of the principals' former position as assistant principal, providing a

background of the years of experience and demographics in each school (if multiple), using 45

min. -1-hour interviews and public archival data (school profile). In alignment with the

conventions of case study research, the research will focus on a literature-based proposition (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003): The assistant principalship is expected to provide preparation for the principalship (Johnson-Taylor & Martin, 2007; "The Role," 2008; Mitchell, 2015; Norton, 2015).

Purpose of Study

Increased demands for principals to be instructional leaders have redefined the leadership position and called for leadership development programs to rethink how they teach aspiring leaders. The assistant principalship is considered a development stage to the principalship (Mitchell, 2015; NASSP, 2023; Oliver, 2005; Superville, 2015; Wallace Foundation, 2016). The purpose of this study was to examine the assistant principalship through the perspective of sitting principals. In this study, I explored new principals,' in their first three years, perception of their preparation through their former positions as assistant principals.

This study is concerned with the researched gap between the assistant principal and principal responsibilities (Armstrong, 2010; Searby et al., 2016), which indicated that assistant principals lack the training or exposure to instructional leadership needed for the principalship. The research questions presented in this study seek to discover if the assumed gap presented in the literature does exist. I use the term "assumed gap" with the understanding that all researched literature considers the qualitative and quantitative data of sitting assistant principals who have not experienced the principalship. This research study aimed to answer research questions from sitting principals who previously served in the assistant principalship. I addressed following research questions:

3. In what ways do new principals describe being prepared for the principalship?
4. How do sitting, new principals perceive the assistant principalship prepared them?

Data Collection

"Narrative and life go together and so the principal attraction of narrative as a method is its capacity to render life experiences, both personal and social, in relevant and meaningful ways" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 10). The interviews conducted here revealed the lived stories of four participants. The process of collecting these data was important to the analysis and transparency of this research. Prior to engagement with participants, I applied to Auburn University's institutional review board for approval. As a part of this process, I developed a consent form approved by the Institutional Review Board. I sent emails to school districts throughout the state with an online survey to be completed by school principals. I reviewed each survey, considering years of experience; former position, years in former position, and school makeup (demographics) and out of 10, six respondents qualified based on the criteria (three years or less in the principalship); most years of experience in the assistant principalship; promotion within/externally; and diversified school settings. These criteria ensured that selected participants best fit the replication design, meaning that each case is a literal or rival replication of the other. Therefore, I carefully selected each case. I anticipated that they would produce similar (literal) or contrasting (rival) results based on identifiable factors such as internal and external promotion (Yin, 2013).

I sent each participant an invitation detailing the purpose of the study, participant engagement details (interviews, observations, and length of time), as well as voluntary nature of participation (participants could withdraw at any time) (Appendix C). The letter also informed participants of risks, benefits, and costs of the study to the participants. I presented participants with this informed consent letter (Appendix D) before I first scheduled and engaged in 45 min. – 1-hour interviews. I conducted interviews in the principal's school, when possible, to observe the

principal in his/her natural setting for at least 4 hours beyond the interview time. The narratives

or lived stories of the participants derived from information provided in the individual

interviews, using participant language and perceptions. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested

that telling the lived stories of participants is not always linear. Individuals do not always tell

stories from start to finish; they may highlight notable events or leave out events that bring up

negative memories. Patton (2002) contended that there are limitations to what people say and

observation may be the best method to gather full understanding. Hence, I followed each

interview with a 4-hour observation, either the same day or at a later date, of the principal

interacting with staff either in transitions or in team meetings.

Context and Case Studies

The four narrative case studies are summarized in the chart below. I used psuedonyms for

each case study to maintain confidentiality. I have also included each participant's professional

background (years of experience) in the assistant principalship and principalship in the chart

below. Participants' school demographics and population vary from rural to urban areas.

Table 1

Participants

Name	Stacy Waters	James Green	Tanya Smoulder	Curtis Aimes
Story Title	*"The Experienced AP"*	*"The Interim Named Principal"*	*"The Well-Rounded Dean"*	*"The Brand-New Principal"*
Location	East AL (rural)	East AL (rural)	Metro Atlanta (urban)	Metro Atlanta (urban)

School Level	Elementary	Elementary	Elementary	Middle School
School Demographics	490 students (18% African American, 66% White, 12% Hispanic, and less than 4% Asian or other)	720 students (18% African American, 78% White, 3% Hispanic, and less than 1% Asian or other)	993 students (64% African American, 28% White, 6% Two or more races, and less than 2% Asian or other)	781 students (98% African American and 2% White or other)
Background/Years of Experience in Assistant Principalship	7 years in Assistant Principalship (Elem./Middle/High)	2.5 years in Assistant Principalship (Elementary School)	3 years in Assistant Principalship (Elementary School)	2 years in Assistant Principalship (Middle School)
Years in Principalship	3	1	3	1

Each case presents a short profile of the principals' former position as assistant principal, providing a background of the years of experience and population in each school (if multiple), using 45 min. -1-hour interviews and public archival data (school profile). The case study then leads into the principals' current position and school, including student and teacher demographics as well as the principals' years of experience. I used the requirements/perspectives discussed in the literature (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003) to guide the case study in investigating how the assistant principalship prepared a leader for principalship and how sitting principals perceived the role. I also included excerpts from the raw data (transcripts) from interviews in the findings section of this research.

I identified recurring and emerging themes from the available data set with references to continuity (references to the past, present, future, the order of storytelling, use of metaphors in relation to past events, and shared stories); interactions (field notes, collegial interactions - teachers, students, parents, and other administrators); and situations (scene where interview took

place, reference to classroom, or office, or educational experiences, references to assistant principalship). I conducted a second review of transcript data or code-recode procedure to increase dependability. I created families based on emerging and recurring themes within the dataset in the recode procedure. Confirming and disconfirming evidence in the data comes from comparison of interview and observation data.

The Experienced AP

Stacy Waters is an experienced educator that spent nearly a decade in the assistant principalship supporting students and a community of learners. In her 16th year of education, Ms. Waters was a teacher at all three levels and an assistant principal at all three school levels (elementary, middle school, and high school). Prior to her experience as an administrator, Ms. Waters had shown little to no interest in administration. However, the influence of a former colleague, her superintendent, sparked that flame for her. "A previous superintendent in a school system that I was at encouraged me and said 'Hey, I think you would do good in administration. You should go back.' She encouraged me to go back and get my administration [degree] while I was in the classroom…right upon completion…she hired me as an assistant principal." Her first assistant principalship was at a rural middle school for students in grades 6th-8th where she was able to serve for a period of 2 years. In this setting Stacy's main tasks were more managerial tasks - organizing buses and handling discipline for 500 students.

After those couple of years, Stacy was offered an assistant principal position at a high school in a slightly larger district where she had previously taught. She was asked to take on some more instructional tasks – professional development, testing and evaluating teachers. The demographics were slightly different as the population increased from 500 to 1400. Yet, Stacy relished the opportunity and flourished even more creating an opportunity that led to the

principalship at her current elementary school with less than 500 K-5th grade students. Here is her story.

Principal Stacy W

Ms. Waters attributes much of her success to past experiences and her foundation as an administrator. She perceives her former role as an assistant principal as a learning experience. Ms. Waters stated in her interview, "I think the biggest thing for me was having the opportunity to work at different levels." In her observation she also alluded to her history as an educator as helpful in molding her assistant principal and providing guidance to her teachers. Her most salient position on the assistant principalship is from her interview data, "...the principal role is just being, being a good mentor to our, you know, assistant principals, I think that their best experiences come from on-the-job experiences."

Ms. Waters tries to be a good mentor and provide "on-the-job experiences" in many ways starting with duties given to her assistant principal. "I definitely try to share the load of the management stuff so that she can get in classrooms more so that she can do that whole instructional leadership part." Ms. Waters remembers doing some of the more managerial tasks. As she puts it, "some [assistant principalship] experiences were not that great [dealing with mostly management stuff]." She learned a lot in the assistant principalship on the instructional side. It was evident that this was the part of the assistant principalship that most prepared her for the role of principal. "The instructional role as an AP was very helpful for me…I try to make sure she gets as much of that as possible." This includes letting her assistant principal lead data meetings, be a part of the scheduling team, participate in and facilitate curriculum nights, among many other tasks.

However, the instructional role in isolation is not how she describes being prepared for the principalship. "I, I enjoyed the AP [assistant principal] position because I got a chance to do a variety of things." She thrived on experiences where she had great relationships and principals brought her in to learn and work on managerial and instructional tasks. Hence, Mrs. Waters perceives that the opportunity to 'do a variety of things' helped prepare her for a multitude of situations as a sitting principal. It also helped prepare her to be a great mentor to her assistant principal. Mrs. Water displays and states how she believes the assistant principalship prepares principals – instructional tasks, understanding of finances, variety of opportunities, and managerial tasks. Yet, she made it clear that there was one hurdle in the assistant principalship – having the final say. She mentioned in her interview that coming into principalship she had to make hard decisions - ones she did not make as assistant principal. Although she has not directly stated how she would make this adjustment for her assistant principal, it is obvious through watching her in action that she plans to be sure that everyone gets the best of her previous experiences.

The Observation

Stacy sits in a small corner office surrounded by memories and data points that direct her goals for this coming school year. Donned in jeans and a T-shirt, her focus today is on having fun and making the kids smile. "They said you gotta get in, so I put on my jeans today." She says with a smile. As we head down the hall pass the signs adorning Barnshill elementary as top 5 school in the district for best teachers and athletics as well as one of the top 10 schools in safety, I noticed the smiles on the mostly all women staff faces. "Hey Mrs. Waters. Are you ready to get wet?" You could hear teachers say as we stepped out onto the activity field. Students gravitated

to her from all angles excited to see her amid their Field Day. A sight Stacy seemed pleased to see.

This was her 3rd year at Barnshill. Best she can remember it "This is year…um 3, 4 – yeah 3." She said laughing. Ms. Waters came to Barnshill from within the district after an inspiration from the superintendent to move into the principalship. "It was the superintendent - having a relationship with my superintendent where I felt that I could speak to him or ask him, you know, you think I'm ready." She never imagined that she would be so comfortable leading a school, especially a school in a very rural Alabama area where transient students were one of the biggest challenges. "You know we have quite a few trailers just down the road...families are coming in and out constantly…it's a challenge for the kids changing schools like that." Ms. Waters leaned heavily on her relationship with children and families along with her experience in the district to grow the school.

Parents consistently participated as volunteers at school events and throughout the day which referenced the bond they had built with the school. "I am really going to miss coming out here with you all. Jeanie is really going to miss you guys too – this has been her best school yet" exclaimed one of the transient parents while we were outside at Field Day. Ms. Waters explained that this was one of the parents that stayed in the nearby trailer park but would soon be moving, placing her child in yet another school district. This sentiment of a bond or relationship was not only expressed by parents but also by staff members. Several spoke of Ms. Waters' willingness to participate in every school activity. As teachers and students summoned Ms. Waters to different activities, the students would jump and holler with excitement. We finally got to an activity where almost everyone would gather – the dunk tank! Not one student or teacher successfully launched the softball into the button that submerged Ms. Waters in a tank full of water. Teachers

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tried, students tried, but no parents. Then came along one young man that Ms. Waters and the staff were sure to give multiple tries to be the first to "dunk" Ms. Waters. The first time he tossed the ball but missed by a long shot. The second time he stepped a little closer for the throw but not close enough; he just missed the button that would plunge Ms. Waters into a tank full of water. The third try brought him success and cheers and he was almost up on the button this time. Ms. Waters, drenched in water, smiled as the entire team cheered with excitement. It was shortly after this that our tour outside ended as we sat to talk about her success and the values she passes to her assistant principal amongst other things. As we walked into her office, she pointed to a nearby shelf - **"s**ee that football – yeah that was from one of my former students at the high school. He went on to play college ball…I was tickled when he brought it to me…" This is one of many stories that Ms. Waters would tell throughout her observation.

Continuity

Mrs. Waters lived story focuses on past events and stories around supervisors and students. The stories are indications of what Mrs. Waters identifies as meaningful to her current role and experience as an administrator. She describes aspects of her experience that she perceives prepared her for the role of principalship. Nostalgia, Familiarity/Relationships, and Experiential (Appendix H) are themes that contribute to her perception of former positions as helpful and how she describes the assistant principalship prepared her well for the principalship. "I try to really equip my assistant principal…so that she's not left out there not knowing and understanding, you know, the finance part of it, when she goes into a principalship." Mrs. Waters alludes to her preparation in the assistant principalship not providing her an in-depth experience of finances. Yet, she describes herself as best prepared for her assistant principal, and this, for her, confirms that she is prepared for the principalship.

This story amongst others aligns as confirming evidence of the experiential and relationship themes that emerged from interview data. "Having a relationship with my superintendent where I felt that I could speak to him or ask him, you know, you think I'm ready…" Through interview, observation, and as listed in these first two quotes, Ms. Waters attributes her principalship or perceived preparedness to go into the principalship on relationships with her superintendent, with her students, colleagues, parents as well as her experience as an assistant principal. In addition, the stories and references to past experiences further confirmed the theme of nostalgia that emerged in the codebook from interview data. Ms. Waters seems to find her foundation in past experiences and many relevant to her preparedness for the principalship. Although she did not express her lived experience in a very linear way, her story is harnessed by events and occurrences from the past. "I've had a chance to be an assistant principal or administration in elementary, middle and high as well," she stated in her interview. Most of those experiences serve as lessons in her current role and inform how she supports her assistant principal.

Interaction

This section aligns Mrs. Waters words with her actions or interactions with staff. It further speaks to what Mrs. Waters values in her role as principal. Her perception of success in the principalship is influenced by her relationships with colleagues, students, and families. Familiarity/Relationships, Student-Centered, and Mentoring (Appendix H) are some themes that contributed to her perception of former positions as pivotal and ways in which she describes the assistant principalship did prepare her well for the principalship.

"I have a very strong group of teachers." Ms. Waters spent much of her time in the interview and throughout the observation acknowledging the people around her. It was evident

when walking the field or touring the hallways that Ms. Waters was invested in the people in her building. She spoke to every staff member and at several times would applaud them for achieving a goal, or meeting a benchmark, or even a family accomplishment. "Mrs. Nancy your kids did a great job on that benchmark, Terina let me know if you want to sit down and go back over that data, Mr. Amally, how your son's birthday party coming along" are just few things you would hear Ms. Waters say as we walked the halls. "They work really hard for the students…" she stated, speaking of the teachers, as we passed down the elementary hallways. Her interactions throughout the observation served as confirming evidence of an emerging theme of relationships. The interactions discussed and observed all involved educators that impacted the direction or course of Ms. Waters' career or current success. Her knowledge of her school and confidence in the work being done with students was built on the foundation of positive relationships with parents, teachers, and former educators. She gives credit to the school environment and the great turnout for Field Day to parent and teacher participation. "We have parents that consistently come each week and participate in school activities." In the same way, she attributed her success to the mentorship and relationship of her former principals and assistant principalship. "I felt that someone saw enough interest in me to feel that she would make a good principal… she hired me as an assistant principal in that school district right after that." The fact that she references this interaction emphasizes her perceived value of importance of the assistant principalship in her journey.

Situation

Mrs. Waters environment highlights her students and school's success through awards, student work, and family atmosphere. Her perception of success in the principalship was evidenced in school achievement and school culture. Familiarity/Relationships, Nostalgia, and

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Student-Centered (Appendix H) are some themes that contributed to her perception of former positions as important and ways in which the assistant principalship did prepare her well for the principalship.

"It was different - people think about it [like] was it a lateral move? And it really wasn't because I left about 500 students and changed to over about 1400, nine through 12." Stacy made this statement with a look of reflection in her eyes during her interview from her office chair as she expounded on her experience as an AP. Her experience in the assistant principalship in different environments prepared her to be successful in a transient environment as a principal. In the office is where this study began (in the interview stage) and where the study ended (in the observation stage). Otherwise, the bulk of the observation was with students, parents, and other faculty members. The entrance was glaring with awards from the district for instructional and programmatic achievement. The hallways were adorned with decorations and student work. These awards and student highlights were Mrs. Waters affirmations of a successful school and successful principalship that extended into her actions with students. The outside, more of a large field with a playground and a few field activities, was overtaken with smiling children and adults. The setting and atmosphere were just as warm as her disposition. Some of the confirming evidence of familiarity and relationships were evident in the pictures of staff and students in the office, excited students on the field, and the school shirts with bold letters "Barnshill Family" adorned by several teachers and Ms. Waters herself.

Summary

Evidenced in the continuity of interview and observation data, her interactions as a principal are grounded in relationships. It is evident that while Ms. Waters believes there are parts of her job that are constantly evolving, she is comfortable and successful in the position.

Her measuring stick is her ability to mentor her AP and build relationships with staff, students, colleagues, and parents.

In several instances in her observation and interview, she references her professional experience in the assistant principalship or her guidance/mentorship to her current assistant principal. She makes comments like, "I've had great experiences and had a principal that you know, brought me in to learn as much as I could. It is as if Ms. Waters was replicating that same influence for her assistant principal. However, her measuring stick was not limited to only her experience with her assistant principal. As she emphasized that her former supervisor "saw enough interest" in her as a potential "good principal."

Mrs. Waters describes and displays being prepared for the principalship through both managerial and instructional tasks. She is constantly visible throughout the building and highly appreciated by staff and students as evidenced in the Interaction section. She spent a lot of time during the observation talking about students and their backgrounds, interacting with families, and engaging with teachers. Although there were references to student relationships in her interview, they were mostly collegial. She spent a lot of time during her interview talking about interactions with teachers, students, and former principals/colleagues. This was the case even when asked questions about her preparedness for the role. Almost all her interactions or discussions of interactions were about/with students and teachers.

Evidence of the research question – In what ways do new principals describe being prepared for the principalship?

Mrs. Waters describes being prepared for the principalship mostly through the lens of interactions and situations. Her daily interactions with staff and parents indicated a sense of

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belonging and collegiality that can be observed and perceived as comfortability with the role. She understands and relates to the dynamics of her transient population and remains engaged with her staff and student community. Furthermore, Mrs. Waters describes being prepared for the principalship through the theme of mentorship. Either how she was mentored into the role and/or how she would mentor her assistant principal.

Evidence of research question – How do sitting, new principals perceive the assistant principalship prepared them?

This is prevalent in continuity data for Mrs. Waters. The emerging themes from observational and interview data indicate Mrs. Waters felt prepared in experience and relationships. Mrs. Waters feels prepared to train her assistant principal and perceives that her experience in the assistant principalship has allowed her to do so. Disconfirming evidence in continuity data does, however, suggest that the lack of experience with finances in the assistant principalship did not prepare her well for the principalship

The Interim Named Principal

James Green is in his 15th year of education and after a few years in the assistant principalship at Gambit Elementary he is now their new principal. Before moving to Gambit, he was a seasoned 12-year teacher with a passion for leading and teaching. He came to Gambit just a little over four years ago as the assistant principal only to be named the interim less than 4 years later. Today, he is the principal, leading a staff of 52 and a student population of more than 700 students. Not familiar with the culture, Mr. Green depended on the mentorship of the current principal, Ms. Carol, to help him become acclimated and lead. He quickly became part of the community where he led in instructional planning, logistics like transportation, and school

assemblies. In this position, James learned the culture of the staff, parents, and school district. He also was introduced to the intricate details of the day-to-day operations of Gambit Elementary. Here is his story.

Principal James G.

Mr. Green attributes his success to the ability to grow with the community and know how to work with staff. He does believe that the role can sometimes be like drinking from a "fire hose spray through a coffee straw." "The transition is more than people think…I think if you were transitioning in the same school, and you have a pretty good rapport than that puts you ahead in the game." Being ahead of the game seems to be the position Mr. Green has found himself in at Gambit Elementary. He is comfortable in the role as well as with his staff, and he believes the transition has gone well overall due to the systemic and experiential aspect of his assistant principalship. He attributes his success to not only knowing the culture and establishing a relationship as the former AP but to having a community school with the "children's best interest at heart."

Mr. Green perceives the assistant principalship at Gambit Elementary most prepared him to lead by knowing culture - the needs of staff, understanding close-knit Gambit community, the needs of children, and establishing relationships. "I think that has been one thing for me that has kept me ahead of the curve...is that I know the culture...I have to work with this person this way [and] this person that way..." The years of experience in the role has allowed him to not only know the culture but become a part of the culture and the community. He understands, however, that being a part of the community has pros and cons. "I do think that there are times that can it be a disadvantage, but from my experience it has been mostly an advantage for me is because we already know, well these are the things in which I'm going to stand on."

Mr. Green described being prepared for the principalship through his ability to stand on what is best for children. Several times throughout his interview and observation he referenced the importance of children's best interest. As he stated early in his interview, "administration was kind of way of being able to make a larger impact on not only the children but the adults that teach children every day." Mr. Green indicated this through observation data encouraging teachers, speaking to specific children's needs, and attending data meetings. He also indicated in his interview data that he is doing just that by ensuring teachers have growth opportunities, and making decisions that are student-centered. "The transition has gone well...I believe in growing adults and if you grow the adults, you'll grow the children. That comes through their professional development - that comes through us doing our [instructional] meetings."

Yet, he acknowledges that there are still some challenges that come with moving into the principalship. "Time has really been the one challenging factor that I'm continuing to work with, and I think it's still better than what I expected in some aspects..."

The Observation

"Hey, can I help you?" This is the first thing you hear walking into the quite secure elementary building at Gambit. Just after getting past the very pleasant lady at the front desk, there is a second set of double doors and another pleasant assistant at the entrance of the next desk. It is clear that the school has a system for clearing visitors – a friendly one at that. Through this fortress of pleasantry appears a man short in stature but large in presence and dressed for business; he wore a brown suit with a matching burnt orange tie and brown dress shoes. Mr. Green although amid running the building seems extremely prepared for any visitors stating to his secretary as he glanced at the clipboard on the desk "Gloria, I'll be on a tour…at 12 when parents arrive, direct them to room 112. I'll be there waiting. Mrs. Claire is ready to receive

anyone else." His office is some ways down the hall and his desk is covered by several monitors. "Let me look at these cameras for a second and I'll be right with you." A task that typically you would see delegated to the assistant principal and you would not see many principals indulged in, "assistant principals are often delegated the management tasks..." (Katz et al., 2014, par. 1). But then Mr. Green quickly added "Deputy Superintendent personally came to ask about this one this morning." Mr. Green sat at the computer intensely for a few more minutes and seemed to have what he needed.

After a couple knocks at the door from several staff members with inquiries, Mr. Green was ready to take me on a tour. As we walked the building, I immediately noticed his intricate detail to how the building operated, which grade levels were on what hallway, how they moved to lunch and PE, when they had opportunities to share their academic progress with peers and parents. "Every Wednesday this grade level introduces their new concepts or projects to visiting parents and their class." Mr. Green had this all down to a science and explained all this as we headed to a team instructional meeting. Mr. Green had previously expressed his interested in growing his teachers and students in his interview stating, "that [professional development (PD) and growth] comes to us during our data meetings that [PD and growth] comes through us having collaborative and common planning that's truly based in planning."

We were graciously welcomed into the meeting which was held in the third-grade teacher's classroom. "Hey, Mr. Green come on in. We're just about to get started here." The meeting started shortly after, and everyone spoke to each other asking about their day. During the meeting Mr. Green listened in, giving his teachers autonomy to analyze and speak to the student data. Where time permitted, he would interject with useful information for comparing the data or trying new strategies with specific students. "Take a look at the Lexile levels for Agee.

Mrs. Glass, can you share the strategy you implemented at the beginning of your lesson with Sarah? I believe a similar approach would help reach Agee." Ms. Glass was happy to share and every teacher in the room seemed to appreciate the information, especially Agee's teacher. The meeting lasted for about 30 minutes and then we recommenced our tour. Mr. Green reiterated something that resonated from his earlier interview as we were leaving the room "that's a great group of teachers and for the most part they are able to manage …you know I go in the meeting, and I'll help wherever I'm needed and provide some guidance."

Continuity

Mr. Green references his lived story as a linear experience. He seems to naturally think of his transition into the principalship as well as his daily impact as cause and effect. His perception of success in the principalship is a result of past experiences and present decisions. Experiential and Student-Centered (Appendix I) are some themes that are evidence of his perception of his preparation through his former position and ways in which the assistant principalship did prepare him well for the principalship.

While the past had an impact on how the school operated and shaped Mr. Green as an administrator, he was very much into the present and how they could grow teachers and students. "My focus is more so on linear - how we grow in children and adults. Over time, I believe in growing children. I believe in growing adults and if you grow the adults, you'll grow the children." This practice was evident in the observation. Mr. Green held data meetings and spent much of our time talking about the instructional model at Gambit Elementary. His focus was on the day and what upcoming events were on the horizon.

It is not uncommon for stories to occur in linear fashion with a beginning, middle, and end (Abbott, 2000; Kramp, 2004). However, this does not always occur. The way a participant tells a story may reveal unknown characteristics or more importantly reveal the significance of events. The story reveals "…time that is bounded by not simply clocks but by humanly relevant actions that occur within its limits" (Bruner, 1996). Mr. Green reveals that the relevant actions that shape his story started with his post in the assistant principalship.

He started by first referencing being the new guy and the multitude of programs, community engagements, and unwritten tasks that come your way in the assistant principalship. "The biggest thing is being able to manage all the different tasks...written and unwritten." Then by referencing managing issues and resolving issues in the assistant principalship. "I pride myself on trying to be a person that can help to resolve conflicts and issues and I think that's another piece of administration..." Then by emphasizing the importance of the experience being in the role. "It comes from experience and the more experience that you have, the more time that you have, the better off, the better you will become"

Although Mr. Green had his own experience as the new guy and understanding of what it meant to be at Gambit Elementary, his references to the past quickly also became linear. He explained that as the new guy [in the assistant principalship] once upon a time, he now understands how to guide his assistant principal and help teachers be mentors to others. Mr. Green said of his experience "[I used to say] remember I'm the new person? And they're like, yeah, yeah…I have to try to remember that same thing for the administrative staff that I have now."

Interaction

The ways in which Mr. Green interacts with his community are evidence of his preparedness for the role or what he perceives a successful principal should do. His perception of success in the principalship is grounded in serving students and the school community. Student-Centered, Familiarity/Relationships, and Systemic (Appendix I) are some themes that contribute to his perception of preparation through his former position and ways in which the assistant principalship did prepare him well for the principalship.

"What do the children need?" This is one of the responses that resonated throughout Mr. Green's interactions with his staff as we walked through the building. Today was grandparents' day. At some point this afternoon, a group of grandparents would be storming the door. Some students would have an opportunity to share their learning experience and spend some time with one of their favorite family members at school. Some staff were preparing for visitors while others were trying to maximize learning experiences. In every conversation, Mr. Green referenced the children – what they needed, where they would be when visitors arrived, comfort with presentations, etc. This sentiment very much aligned with Mr. Green's interview and the emerging theme of student-centered. "There may be a parent is upset, but if it's what's best for children, we're going to go with that."

As with any narrative, "the story comes to be in the act of telling…and intentionality becomes apparent" (Kramp, 2004). Mr. Green harnessed his student-centered approach to build great relationships with his staff and parents which was evident in all these conversations. Upon Mr. Green's own account, he "had the opportunity to build these programs as an AP and folks understand that I operate in the interest of children." The assistant principalship enabled Mr. Green an opportunity to form bonds and interact with staff and stakeholders in a way that made the principalship comfortable. He never seemed flustered or bothered by the questions or subtle

interruptions. As he explained in his interview, that sometimes as a new principal it can be like "trying to drink water spraying from a fire hose through a coffee straw."

There were a lot of initiatives with staff and parents that he had engaged in during his tenure in the assistant principalship. However, those initiatives were not all encompassing of the principalship. "The biggest thing is just being able to manage all of the different tasks…the things that you know that you're supposed to have done that are written down and then all the unwritten things that take most of your time." Mr. Green's description here aligns with his perception of how the assistant principalship prepared him for the tasks that were written down but not so much for the unwritten things.

Situation

This section emphasizes the environment that Mr. Green has created at his school. Where he focuses his energy as an identifier of what is meaningful to him in the principalship. His perception of success in the principalship is dependent on school and student success. Professional Development, Student-Centered, and Familiarity/Relationship (Appendix D) are some themes that contribute to his perception of preparation through his former position and ways in which the assistant principalship did prepare him well for the principalship.

Much of this observation occurred in the hallways, in classrooms, and amongst other staff members. As we ventured the hallways, I could not help but notice the very elaborately decorated shadow boxes next to each teacher's door. Each shadow box was filled with objects and designs that definitively defined the teacher's interest and personality (college, hobbies, etc.). The teachers were not the only ones that were highlighted in the hallways. Each hallway

was filled with bulletin boards of student work. It was clearly very inviting for students, parents, and teachers.

It is in this observation that the setting reveals some indicators of Mr. Green's preparedness to run a school. Mr. Green identifies what you see in the building as characteristics of a thriving school. He feels what makes his experience unique and successful is the ability "to walk into a place and [see] teachers that have the best interest for children…they celebrate their victories…To see where not only the children are growing, but the adults are growing." This is evident as we walked the school. As explained in his interview, the once "new guy" now understood the culture and needs of staff and students. Some confirming evidence of themes of professional development were data walls in the building and in the Assistant Principal's office. In alignment with much of what Mr. Green stated in his interview about building students and teachers through "RTI, planning, and collaborative meetings."

Summary

It is evident through the interview and continuity data that Mr. Green is focused on his present situation. Mr. Green believes it is his job to ensure that students and teachers have the resources and environment to be successful. His measure of success is in his ability to create this environment.

Much of his conversation through observation and interview focused on the current performance of his students and staff. "Mrs. Glass can you share the strategy you implemented at the beginning of your lesson for Sarah? I believe a similar approach would help reach Agee." His frequent references to the past allowed him to expound on how the assistant principalship has guided his leadership and ability to work with his staff. "I had the opportunity to build these

programs as an AP and folks understand that I operate in the interest of children." Mr. Green's focus on growth and learning was always tied to the growth of students. His interactions with staff and children were pleasant and came from a student-centered perspective often asking, "what do the children need?" This data is confirming evidence of the student-centered theme that emerged from interview data.

Mr. Green describes being prepared for the principalship through his interactions with staff. Through observation of data meetings and general interactions, staff appeared well-versed in data usage, accustomed to celebrating students, and overall appreciative of Mr. Green's leadership. In remembering that he was once the new guy, Mr. Green stated in his interview in reference to new teachers "we have to pass that information on…[it] makes me happy to know that their mentor teacher that I've assigned them to is doing their job and they're building their capacity."

Evidence of the research question – In what ways do new principals describe being prepared for the principalship?

Mr. Green describes being prepared for the principalship mostly through the lens of interactions and situations. His interactions with teachers during instructional meetings align with his interview data speaking to addressing the specific needs of children. Mr. Green describes being prepared for the role in how well he supports and prepares his staff. His support for his staff members seemed to extend beyond academics and into their individuality. From data meetings to walking the hallways, it was evident that not only did the school honor students' work but also teachers' creativity and work. Mr. Green demonstrated his comfort and value in opportunities to grow adults and children through data meetings. Furthermore, Mr. Green

described the transition as going well, he is confident and more versed in written and unwritten tasks and describes being prepared for the principalship through the theme of student-centered, familiarity/relationships, and Professional Development.

Evidence of research question – How do sitting, new principals perceive the assistant principalship prepared them?

This is most prevalent in continuity data. The way Mr. Green revealed his story identified the significance of the assistant principalship and how it informed his current role. In a very linear way, he expresses the importance of the assistant principalship and managing tasks, resolving issues/conflicts, and having experience in the role. His experience in the assistant principalship has only heightened his understanding of the school culture. "More than a fourth [of staff] are truly natives of this community…they grew up here, they went to school here and they've come back, and they taught here and so they are truly tied to the community…I think that goes a long way in helping our school grow." Disconfirming evidence in interview data does highlight the difficulties of the transition "sometimes there's a difficult separation between me and the previous principal because the previous principal still works in the county and so and it's not anything that they're doing, but you know, there's still staff members that feel like, hey, I need to go and talk to you [her]."

The Well-Rounded Dean

Tanya Smoulder has served as the Dean of her elementary school for 3 years. In this school system the Dean is the equivalent of an assistant principal. For use of this research, the term dean and assistant principalship will be used interchangeably throughout this story. After some years as an experienced teacher and department head for content areas, she found herself

not only being a parent at her newfound school but a candidate for assistant principalship. Tanya was responsible for staff evaluations, logistics, and curriculum. In a school with changing demographics, there were constant adjustments being that the previous population was less than 500 students and now had blossomed into nearly 1000 students and over 100 staff members. Garvey Academic School had just developed its K-12 model and had garnered quite the interest from parents and community members.

After 3 years in the assistant principalship, Mrs. Smoulder was named the K-5 principal Garvey Academic School. As an outsider to the relatively new school, Tanya knew there were some cultural and social norms that would require some learning and listening. In this position, Tanya learned about the school culture, the parent community, and the students. Here is her story.

Principal Tanya S.

Mrs. Smoulder leaned a lot on her experiences with families, colleagues, and students to efficiently run the school. "I really started to get a better idea of the invisible networks and the kind of importance – like the power of the invisible network." The "invisible network," as Mrs. Smoulder referred to, was the different pockets or friend group of parents and even teachers that could either make change difficult or easy. This would be either by stirring conversation on social media, supporting ideas in parent meetings, or any other means of support or opposition. By understanding the "invisible network," she was able to form relationships and create a school atmosphere where students, staff, and parents felt welcomed. Mrs. Smoulder found that the assistant principalship helped her navigate the principalship. "The benefit of being the dean allowed me to really build better relationships with the staff, you know, that I can now rely on."

Mrs. Smoulder is an active and engaged principal that speaks highly of her learning experiences through the assistant principalship. She has been able to "rely on" the assistant principalship experience at the same school where she became principal. She attributes much of her success in the principalship to the learning experiences in the assistant principalship. For instance, Mrs. Smoulder was able to identify the root of some concern around the new dismissal procedure based on her previous experience. "And so, he piloted it in a kindergarten class…that parent felt that we were going to use the system the app next year." Mrs. Smoulder was able to speak to that parent and other parent groups in her first year as principal, helping everyone get on board as she now had a better understanding of the "invisible networks," as she would call them, in her school community.

The Observation

A digital screen and welcoming staff set the tone as soon as you walk in the building. Just behind a curved welcome center is an office area where Mrs. Smoulder works diligently at her computer. "Heeey, how are you – come on around." We headed through an adjoining door that led down the hallway to her office. "I sometimes work out there and speak to parents, see the kids go by." Mrs. Smoulder had a bubbly personality and was ready to answer any questions. She let me know that we would soon be attending one of the administrative meetings. A few minutes had passed before we were in the middle of a series of impromptu meetings.

A knock at the door came and entered one of Mrs. Smoulder's deans, Mrs. Perry. "Hey T, how are you – everything okay?" They immediately engaged in a conversation about plans for the instructional meeting, which was short-lived and interrupted by another knock on the door. "Mrs. Perry, Mrs. Smoulder" the teacher peeked in the door with a small innocent eyed and pouty faced set of small boys. "Well, what's going on here?" Mrs. Smoulder listened to the

entire story and then began speaking in the nicest tone to the two little boys. Who responded to everything with "Yes ma'am and no ma'am." Upon being dismissed back with their teacher and Mrs. Perry, Mrs. Smoulder began explaining that the students were friends and that sometimes they just needed a little love. She also had quite a bit of background information about their families – surprisingly so with the number of kids in her building.

Continuity

Mrs. Smoulder elaborates on past events through detailed stories of the assistant principalship as well as early moments in the principalship. Her perception of success in the principalship gives credence to the learning experience in the assistant principalship. Experiential Learning, Nostalgia, Familiarity/Relationships (Appendix J) are some of the themes that contribute to her perception of preparation through her former position (Dean) and ways in which the assistant principalship did prepare her well for the principalship.

"So, we had like six little stations…" Mrs. Smoulder leans in as she prepares to detail one of her stories about her first year in the principalship. This particular story was about a new dismissal procedure in which she went into full detail. This was a common characteristic for Mrs. Smoulder. Throughout the entire interview, her references and specific details of the past were impressive. Mrs. Smoulder remembered names, conversations, and even would backtrack to provide more detail to a story. "Um, and then so also my last year at Garvey as a dean, we had a parent who developed an app and it was for, it was like a dismissal app. And so…" she stated reminiscing of how it all unfolded.

Mrs. Smoulder's view of the past was that it shaped and prepared her for the principalship. "People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they

interpret their past in terms of these stories" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Mrs. Smoulder did just that, shaping each moment with stories of her experience and how it made her the principal she is today. Each story or experience spoke to her feelings and understanding of her current role. "That was definitely one where I was like, I don't know if I'm ready, so this is too much." She stated after finishing her story on the new dismissal procedure she implemented in year one of her principalship.

The references to the past were not just feelings and understanding but lessons learned. Her reminiscence of the assistant principalship has a recurring theme of experiential learning. "I think for me working, having worked with Garvey as a dean was very, very helpful…"

Interaction

Mrs. Smoulder utilized her many interactions, explained in interviews, and evidenced in observations, to detail her experience in her role. She perceived those interactions as success in the principalship and believed that the assistant principalship helped build that foundation. Familiarity/Relationships and Student-Centered (Appendix J) are some themes that contributed to her perception of preparation through her former position as Dean and ways in which the assistant principalship prepared her well for the principalship.

"The word I would say is just, I think I won, I have won parents over by my relationships with children." Sitting just outside of her office at the front desk or walking down the hallway, Mrs. Smoulder was consistently interacting with students and/or parents. The observation was confirmation of the relationship Mrs. Smoulder mentioned in her interview. "Mrs. Smoulder," kids would scream with excitement when she walked down the hallway or onto the playground. Teachers did not seem to mind at all. There were many occasions where staff members would

also greet Mrs. Smoulder with a smile and introduction of a project in the hall. "Elijah, would you like to tell Mrs. Smoulder about your project." The kid in each instance would glow with joy and commence to telling the story of the project displayed on the hall (each hallway was adorned with student work from projects).

Mrs. Smoulder explained that the school should also speak to visitors and parents when they walked through it. "When parents come for PBL nights or to volunteer in the classroom, they also get an opportunity to see their child's work displayed and also what they can look forward to working on in other grade levels." This was part of an emerging theme of student-centered that was evident in Mrs. Smoulder's interactions with parents and with teachers during the observation. Each conversation revolved around children, their performance, their siblings, and their well-being. "Hey Mrs. Smith – good to see you. You're here to pick up Jason early, right? You want Julia too or is she going to stay…how's your mom doing…the kids loved her during grandparents' day…" This was one of many similar conversations Mrs. Smoulder would have with a parent as we walked back into the office area.

Situation

Mrs. Smoulder has developed a warm and welcoming environment at her school. She perceived her success in the principalship as partly influenced by learning the culture (and "invisible networks") through the assistant principalship. Experiential, Familiarity/Relationships, and Student-Centered (Appendix J) are themes that contribute to her perception of preparation through her former position as Dean and ways in which the assistant principalship did prepare her well for principalship.

We entered through the single wooden door that was nestled in the far corner behind the curved front desk, down the pristine hall with freshly painted walls adorned with plaques, and just adjacent to Mrs. Smoulder's office a set of double doors lead into a large conference room. We were greeted by two of Mrs. Smoulder's deans, Mrs. Perry and Mrs. Jade who were both pouring a cup of coffee from the spread on the snack table near the entrance of the room. A massive boat shaped, oak conference table in the center of the room was occupied by two other women and one gentleman that I would later discover were the instructional coaches and one of the teacher leads. The large digital screen on the wall at the end of the table displayed the school logo. "Hey guys!" Mrs. Smoulder greeted everyone with a smile.

The room felt warm – not the temperature but the sentiment. They seemed to be genuinely happy to be there, greeting each other with smiles and starting with small talk about family and the school day amongst other things. Mrs. Smoulder, the once "outsider" had established strong relationships with her staff. Through her assistant principalship, she had become a part of the culture. "In the Dean role, I had to build relationships and learn the network." It was now more than a clean school with projects on the walls. Parents were welcomed into the school immediately with displays of school activities, a few comfortable seating areas, and familiar faces at the front desk. Classrooms were filled with student artwork, reading stations, workstations, cleaning stations and plenty of room for play. The teachers' work rooms were filled not just with nice furniture but with laughter.

The meeting commenced after one of the instructional coaches pulled the shades to the large floor to ceiling windows. Shortly after we were right back in the comfort of Mrs. Smoulder's office to wrap up our observation. As I scanned the room seeing family pictures along the bookshelf, student artwork on each end of the large couch, and a center table with a

wicker basket of manipulatives I was reminded of something Mrs. Smoulder stated in her interview. "I do care about the kids and most of them I treat like their mine, you know, good, bad or otherwise."

Summary

Mrs. Smoulder throughout her interview and observation displayed evidence of comfortability in the principalship. She established relationships at Garvey Academic School and in turn created a family atmosphere. In addition to the theme of relationships, the recurring theme of experiential learning seems to be evident in her growth and preparedness for the principalship. "The benefit of being the dean and allow me to really build better relationships with the staff, you know, that I can now rely on."

In her continuity data, Mrs. Smoulder leaned heavily on past references and their impact on present situations. It was evident based on the level of detail that she was able to provide that the assistant principalship provided an indelible experience. She often linked her success and/or her understanding of the principalship to her experiential learning. "I think for me working, having worked with Garvey as a dean was very, very helpful…" In her interview data Mrs. Smoulder stated about the assistant principalship, once I really learned about all of this stuff …all the stuff I didn't know, it made perfect sense... In many instances, her detail to the backstory of any situation is what helped her be successful in implementing change, assisting students, teachers, or parents. "A new principal becomes a student of [school] culture...learning is your first agenda." (Rooney, 2013, par. 14).

Confirming evidence of Mrs. Smoulder's claim to healthy relationships came through interactions and observational data. As she says it best "I have won parents over by my

relationships with children." Walking down the hallways this was clear from the numerous hugs and high fives. Students, staff, and parents were in constant engagement with her about school, family, and fun times. Mrs. Smoulder relied on her relationships and the strength of those relationships were evidence that she was prepared for the principalship

Evidence of the research question – In what ways do new principals describe being prepared for the principalship?

Mrs. Smoulder describes being preapred for the principalship through interview and observation data mainly through the lens of interactions and situations and the theme of familiarity/relationships. She speaks to her familiarity and open network with the school community, which Mrs. Smoulder considers to be important parts to being prepared for the principalship. "If you have a closed network that's not good, it's much harder for you to be successful as a leader. But if you have an open network that's a lot better…"

As Mrs. Smoulder elaborate, she describes an open network as one where communication flows from person to person. Although she would still like her network to be more open, she believes alleviating or at least navigating some of the "invisible networks" have eliminated communication barriers. For example, when she shares a message with leadership or with her staff, she is provided with an opportunity to clarify or able to help everyone speak the same language. In the past, misinterpretation would be discussed amongst the "invisible networks" leaving room for lack of clarity and cohesion.

Evidence of research question – How do sitting, new principals perceive the assistant principalship prepared them?

Interview and observation data reveal that Mrs. Smoulder is not only prepared for the principalship but that she perceives the assistant principalship prepared her for the role. Evidenced in situation and interaction data, Mrs. Smoulder references are familiarity and relationships as a result of her role in the assistant principalship. Mrs. Smoulder identified the assistant principalship as helpful was by providing context through experiential learning for what she called the "invisible networks."

The benefit of the assistant principalship allowed Mrs. Smoulder to learn the true culture of Garvey – see the "invisible networks." She understood how teachers viewed the classroom experience. She studied the teacher's relationships with instructional coaches, students, other colleagues, and the parent community. She identified all the informal relationships that make up the organization. Disconfirming evidence in interview data indicates there are still some challenges. "[For some parents] I think they tolerate me or maybe give me the benefit of a doubt is because of their children…"

The Brand-New Principal

Curtis Aimes is in his 13th year of education and after a few years in the assistant principalship at Coretta Middle School he is now their new principal. Prior to moving to Coretta, Mr. Aimes served as a history teacher for 10 years in the same school district. His experience as a teacher evolved into a leadership role, serving as a team lead. After encouragement from colleagues and district personnel, Mr. Aimes pursued his administrative certification. Almost immediately following completion of his certification, Mr. Aimes was offered the role of assistant principal at Coretta Middle School. Coretta Middle School served just under 800 students in a 6-8 setting. He came to Coretta with a little understanding of their culture as it served a similar population to his previous school with just over 800 students. Coretta had been

marginally successful when he was hired, and Mr. Aimes brought his organizational and curricular knowledge to the school. Mr. Aimes was responsible for transportation, logistics, discipline, and curriculum. In this role, he learned about the school culture and became acclimated with staff, students, and parents. After just two years, his principal moved on to Central Office and he was named the new principal. Here is his story.

Current Role of Curtis A.

Mr. Aimes attributes a lot of his success to his previous leadership roles, including the assistant principalship. "I think [my experience] gave a good foundation for to know what to expect, how to respond to what you expect...also for the unexpected." Mr. Aimes was involved in community partnerships, academics, and a lot of school logistics. According to Mr. Aimes every element of the assistant principalship was instrumental in helping him identify what it was like to be "responsibility outside of teaching" and growing as a leader.

One of his most championed efforts as a principal is building a school community based off teams. As he states in his interview, "even though you are captain of a team, you're still a part of the team." His laser focus on this idea helped him to rebuild and identify what "each team needed." He noticed that some teams were working like small groups and not functioning teams. For instance, one team needed a strong leader which required moving some teachers to different teams. In another instance, Mr. Aimes helped a team identify a class transition plan that involved students. Within a few months, each team was able to make adjustments that fit their team dynamics and student population.

It was not just the small group of teachers that were teams. Mr. Aimes had created one large team within the school. As he explained in his interview, his understanding from the

assistant principalship allowed him "to actually step into a leadership position and not just see it as being a leader but seeing it as being a team player as well." This is likely why he spent so much time in the hallways and in the classrooms. Mr. Aimes wanted his staff to understand that he had not forgotten that he was a part of the team.

The Observation

"I'm going to get you!" One little boy hollered in laughter as he galloped into a sprint just past the fish tank full of tropical fish and behind another little boy. Before they could get into full play, they both came to a screeching halt. Mr. Aimes was standing right at the entrance of the hallway. You could see the silhouette of several teachers lined down the hall greeting the many middle school children entering their classrooms. Both boys looked up and simultaneously said "good morning Mr. Aimes – sorry Mr. Aimes." Mr. Aimes stood towering over both young men just looking before finally saying, "This is what scholars do…save it for gym." Both boys responded, "yes sir" and walked briskly to class.

This was my initial introduction to Mr. Aimes. I stood there next to the smiling receptionist just to the left of the entrance under the large hanging banner "Welcome to Coretta Middle." Mr. Aimes, after looking back at the children with a smile, turned to me and extended a welcoming hand. "You must be here for me." I almost wondered how he knew who I was. As we walked into his office just past the receptionist desk, I noticed an outlined calendar up on a digital screen. Highlighted at the top were the words "interview with Mr. Myers starting now." Mr. Aimes was the new principal of Coretta Middle and ran what many would call a "tight ship."

Most of the teachers at Coretta were returning staff members. According to Mr. Aimes, the average staff member had been at Coretta for 7 years or more. He explained that every person

in the building had to have a connection with the kids and it was his job to ensure that happened. Part of that came from the creation of teams. Mr. Aimes explained that teams were already established when he got to Coretta but not so much organized. The teams were like small clusters where groups of 6th graders, 7th or 8th graders moved together on the same quad to the same core teachers. As we walked the halls you could see each quad had some similar themes (a teacher at each door, one marking on a tablet, one giving greetings (high fives, handshakes, saying affirmations), and always one or two giving directions and making sure the lines are against the wall. Mr. Aimes had established team leads and roles for each quad and, best he could tell, it was quite an improvement for teachers and students. "Everyone knows their role and in turn the students share the team's expectations; it makes learning easier to handle when you eliminate some of the guess work out of the logistical part."

He explained that during his tenure in the assistant principalship many of his duties were managerial. "I understood what we needed in the classroom, but it seemed that I was consumed with buses, cafeteria, and discipline." This he said looking at the empty cafeteria which they had abandoned as a lunch area since it was an open space in the middle of the hallway. "We use this more for assemblies now." We stepped into a science class and Mr. Aimes immediately took the empty seat next to one of the children. He asked a few questions of the student and after listening for about five minutes, he raised his hand. "What fields typically use this information on cell functions?" The teacher responded, "glad you asked" and began to tell the students about lab research, cellular scientist, and cancer research. As we left the room, Mr. Aimes told me a story of a district person that once came to do walkthroughs during his assistant principalship. "She didn't really want to be here, be seen, or be spoken to…she was in the back of the room…students and teachers felt weird…I told myself I wouldn't do that."

Continuity

His perception of success in the principalship is highlighted by the opportunity to be reflective about the assistant principalship. Experiential Learning, Student-Centered, and Familiarity/Relationships (Appendix K) are some of the themes that contribute to his perception of preparation through his former position and ways in which the assistant principalship did prepare him well for the principalship.

Mr. Aimes remained reflective throughout his interview and observation. This was a constant theme. His experience in the assistant principalship as well as his views of his previous administrators shaped how he approached the principalship. "Perhaps the most essential ingredient of storytelling is its capability to structure events in such a way that they demonstrate, first, a connectedness or coherence, and second, a sense of movement or direction through time" (Gergen & Gergen, 1986). The way in which Mr. Aimes told stories or referenced events during his assistant principalship showed evidence that those experiences were guiding his actions in the principalship.

"I saw so many people go into the position just to have it…" Mr. Aimes exclaimed in reference to his interest in administration. Prior to considering any leadership role, Mr. Aimes said that he identified himself as a leader in his classroom first. "It was my peers that saw me as a leader of the grade level…I was just doing what I should." In much of the conversation, Mr. Aimes speaks to a moral obligation. "As principal, part of being productive is having positive interactions with my entire school community." This theme was evident in both interview and observation as he spoke with conviction to staff providing teachers in team meetings with anecdotes of ways in which they helped students or references in his interview to going into leadership to "make a difference."

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Mr. Aimes' references to the past were more than his identification of his moral obligation but also to experiential learning. He seemed clear that the assistant principalship prepared him to think about what he wanted to do in the principalship. His story is a paradox in the sense that the assistant principalship seemed to prepare him without providing the experiences of hiring, curriculum development, scheduling, or some of the other nuance responsibilities. "I learned and understood, you can't effectively do this all by yourself…it can't just be about me."

Interaction

More than the story that is told, the interactions that Mr. Aimes had with his community members and students are evidence of his success in the role. He perceives his response to the community and connection with families as success in the principalship. Familiarity/Relationships and Experiential Learning (Appendix K) are some themes that contribute to his perception of preparation through his former position and ways in which the principalship did prepare him for the principalship

Mr. Aimes took pride in making the community a major part of the school experience. "Last Saturday we held an event at the school for parents…just a few weeks ago, we went into the community and spoke to some of the kids and parents." He spoke of these events throughout our conversation as we headed down the hall. As he spoke, it reminded me of something he stated in his interview "it was an initiative of ours [to] reestablish those relationships." Based on what he was explaining, it appeared they were committing to that initiative.

Mr. Aimes' experience as an assistant principal helped him identify those relationships early and prepared him to build stronger bonds with community partners during his

principalship. "Being familiar with the community and being out and about and going to community centers and pairing with [them] created those relationships." His approach to reaching out to the community was part of his efforts to continuously improve his school and his students. As Mr. Aimes would put it, they want to "partner with the community" and not be seen as an antagonist. This spirit permeated into his everyday work.

This is probably why so many students and teachers gravitated to him. Teachers and students greeted us in the halls and in the classrooms with smiles, a quick celebration, or an update. "Hey Mr. Aimes, look – I got an A on my test," said a little girl scurrying up the hall in excitement. Mr. Aimes smiled and gave the little girl a high five. This was one of many positive interactions he would have with students going through the hall. It was evident that Mr. Aimes had taken time to get to know his students and even their families. "Mr. Aimes, my brother said hey…he is doing good at the high school…Mr. Aimes, my mom said she'll come by the school later to help…" were just a few conversations I captured as we walked the halls or entered classrooms.

Situation

Mr. Aimes spent a lot of time with teachers and with students. His emphasis on creating a learning environment by building teacher, student, and parent capacity was evident throughout interview and observation. His perception of success in the principalship was based on his visibility and effort to build community. Student-Centered, Familiarity/Relationships, and Experiential Learning (Appendix K) are some themes that contribute to his perception of preparation through his former position and ways in which the assistant principalship did prepare him well for the principalship.

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We spent a lot of time in the hallways and in classrooms. It was evident that this was normal. Mr. Aimes had a routine of making his rounds throughout the day. I even heard one teacher say to a student, "see I told you you would see him soon." He knew everyone's name and each team's dynamics. We would walk into a hall, and he would begin to explain, "this is the 7th grade team. Two of the teachers have been with us for 6 years and Mrs. Price is really good with students and knows her content." He was able to do this in every hall and spoke specifically about why the teams were together and how their collaborative efforts improved the school. As research by Irwin (2013) highlighted, personal output doubled when people worked with a partner and tripled when they worked with a team.

Summary

Gunter and Ribbins (2002) espouse that leadership and leadership development are not primarily about skills, techniques and capacities but can only be understood through the gathering of professional experiences from within contextualized settings. Mr. Aimes would say "I think they [the experiences] provided a firm foundation." Embedded in the interview and observation data is theme of experiential learning. Mr. Aimes utilizes his experiences, interactions, and situations in the assistant principalship to build his school and community.

In his continuity data, Mr. Aimes is consistently reflective on his prior experiences and how they shaped the work that he does in the principalship. "[The experience] gave a firm foundation for, for the unexpected, because a lot of, you know, what you've actually learned in your university or in the classroom doesn't necessarily apply from a pragmatic perspective." Specifically, Mr. Aimes learned that it requires a team to get all of the work done. His knowledge of the principalship came from shared stories and a close working relationship as his role as an assistant principal involved a lot of logistical work around running the school. "Having

those, you know, those experiences shared from other individuals who had already been there and done it, um, gives you more well-rounded approach." Mr. Aimes leaned on mentors when he entered leadership to learn about organization, community, team-building, and instructional practices. In each of those instances, he built teams to get the work done from bus arrival and dismissal to solving behavior problems. His takeaway was a clear lesson - "it can't just be about me."

Mr. Aimes took this lesson into the principalship, and this was evident in his interaction data. The theme of relationships emerged from this data emphasized through community building and team building. In his interview, Mr. Aimes emphasized the importance of reaching out to the community and reestablishing relationships. "A lot of those relationships, you know hadn't been maintained over the years; it was an initiative of ours to kind of get in there, reestablish those relationships." In his observation, he revisits the same conversation providing instances where the community came to the school or where the school went out to the community. "The team went to the Belmead community a few weeks ago to deliver care packages and spoke with parents and students."

His words and actions were all confirming evidence of the theme of relationships and his declaration to building relationships. The atmosphere he created at the school nurtured a team-building culture. Teachers worked together on their grade level teams and students felt comfortable talking to Mr. Aimes about grades or personal matters. According to Marzano's et al. (2005) research, Mr. Aimes was clearly demonstrating several of the 21 responsibilities of school leaders. He was building relationships with families and students, communicating with his stakeholders, visible throughout the school and community amongst some other characteristics of an effective school leader.

Evidence of the research question – In what ways do new principals describe being prepared for the principalship?

Mr. Aimes describes being prepared for the principalship through observation and interview data evident mainly through the lens of situation and interaction data. Throughout his interview and observation, his focus is on his teams and relationships with the community. As he voiced about being an effective principal, "I learned and understood, you can't effectively do this all by yourself…it can't just be about me."

Mr. Aimes leans on his relationships and familiarity with his teams as evidence of a successful leader and a successful school. He believes that part of his success comes from redefining the structure of teams at his school. "I remember when I first arrived here, and the teams looked different…I was able to see what each team needed"

Evidence of the research question – How, do sitting, new principals perceive the assistant principalship prepared them?

 If anything, it is evident that Mr. Aimes took his lessons from the assistant principalship and applied them to the principalship. Mr. Aimes made clear his perspective on his comfortability in his role stating in his interview when asked about his training to become principal, "I wouldn't change one thing."

Mr. Aimes credits the assistant principalship with providing him with "a foundation" to be successful. During his tenure, he learned about the community partners, the dynamics of teams, and learned about the programs at the school. As he described himself "a half cup full kind of person," he constantly references his past experiences in continuity data as a building block for his success and/or instrumental in his learning experience.

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Cross-Case Analysis

The previous within-case analysis looked at each of the principals' three dimensions of inquiry. The three dimensions of inquiry provide insight and analysis to how each principal retold their lived story. This focused unit of analysis was principals of public schools that formerly served as assistant principals. Each principal was a single case study. Within each case analysis, I extrapolated themes that tied back to the research questions indicating principals' perceived preparedness and attribution to the assistant principalship. Principals' perceived preparedness was both defined through identified themes and context in which they told their lived stories.

Central Question

Definitively, this study seeks to explore new principals,' in their first three years, -- what is their perception of their preparation through their former positions as assistant principals?

Sub Questions

1. In what ways do new principals describe being prepared for the principalship?

2. How do sitting, new principals perceive the assistant principalship prepared them well?

Initial Themes

I transcribed interview data with the literature review in mind. Utilizing a method of coding called cutting and sorting - "identifying quotes or expressions...exemplars [and] arranging them together" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 347). I listed the recurring themes in the codebook as initial themes identified across case studies. The following themes listed below are researched themes used in initial data analysis. Some themes were prevalent in case studies and instrumental in answering research questions.

Experiential (EXP)

Experiential learning is an opportunity for growth and development through on the job experience (Mitchell & Poutiatine, 2001; DeRue & Wellman, 2009). The assistant principal possesses the potential to grow through their experience. The expectation to grow through on-the-job duties, activities, and experiences is quintessential to what is called experiential learning. This theme was a common recurrence in identifying how principals perceived the assistant principalship prepared them for the principalship. Each principal in this study specifically identified that the experiences of the assistant principalship prepared them for select responsibilities of the principalship.

Professional Development (PD)

Professional Development is specific teaching and learning opportunities geared towards a field of study or work (Zepeda et al., 2015). Leaders often use professional development as a form of teaching and building others. These opportunities enable leaders to learn new strategies and practices. This theme, although mentioned in the initial research, was not commonly discussed by the principals in this study. At least two principals referenced professional development as instrumental in their growth (see Table 2).

Mentoring (M)

Mentoring is a mutually enhancing relationship between leader and a peer or a subordinate (Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011; Hicks, 2011; Kram, 1985; Ragins, 1997). Mentoring is another form of a professional relationship. Hence, it is important for principals to approach mentoring not only for themselves and other leaders but for teachers as well. Great leaders understand that the value is in people (Dana, 2009; Hagstrom, 2004; Whitaker, 2019). This

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theme was prevalent in this study as each principal had mentorship in some capacity. This theme revealed that mentoring was key in how at least two sitting principals described being prepared for the principalship (see Table 2).

Systematic (STM)

Systematic development is made up of comprehensive models in a system that support leaders in their work and growth (Connaughton et al., 2003). Systematic structures are made up of programs and curriculums put in place by the state or district. This theme appeared in the case studies in the form of within school and within district data. One principal in this study ascended to the principalship in the same district. The other three principals ascended to the principalship in the same school. Only one principal explicitly discussed this theme as instrumental in the preparedness for the principalship (see Table 2).

Emerging Themes

Krefting (1991) recommended a second review of transcript data or code-recode procedure to increase dependability. Furthermore, participant observation data (field notes) are important in narrative inquiry. In a form of axial coding, I highlighted phrases/quotes/interactions relating to categories in the codebook. I added any emerging data from transcripts and observations to the codebook. The emerging themes are grounded in data research and part of discovery through analysis of interview and observation data. These are the emerging themes from the recode process.

Student-Centered (SC)

Student-centered is defined by the decisions/actions/practice influenced or determined based on students' needs. This theme emerged from conversations, interactions, or observations

of participants indicating ways in which a student-centered environment was important in their narrative.

Familiarity/Relationships (FAM)

Familiarity or relationships are identified by a bond or familiarity with culture, individuals, or organization. This theme emerged from conversations, interactions, or observations of participants identifying bonds with the organization or individuals as important parts of their narrative.

Nostalgia (NOST)

Nostalgia is the expression of affection or positive memory of the past and past experiences. This theme emerged from conversations, interactions, or observations of participants identifying with the past in ways that surfaced as significant parts of their narrative.

Data Across Studies

Emerging evidence for each case was documented and included in the table below. In some cases, initial and emerging themes were consistent across cases while in other cases they were not as salient. The first column of the table below identifies each principal. The subsequent columns represent the inital and emerging themes in the study Student-Centered (SC), Familiarity/Relationships (FAM.), Nostalgia (NOST), Experiential (EXP), Professional Development (PD), Mentoring (M), Systematic (STM). An 'X' indicates that theme was prevalent in the case study.

Table 2

Researched Cross Case Emerging Themes

Case Study	SC	FAM.	NOST.	EXP	PD	M	STM
Experienced AP	X	X	X	X		X	
Interim Named Principal	X	X		X	X		X
Well-Rounded Dean	X	X	X	X		X	
Brand New Principal	X	X		X	X		

Here is a synopsis of the major themes that were evident across cases. The following paragraphs explain how the most prevalent themes showed up across cases.

Student-Centered

Three of the four principals had a prevalent student-centered theme. While each principal built programs and engaged families for the benefit of students. It was more apparent that each of the elementary principals identified student-centered as a prevailing theme in their schools. Each principal mentioned how students drove the instruction and programming at their school. In many instances, the theme of student-centered was evident through observation. Each principal measured their preparedness for the role by the impact that their leadership had on student learning and student experiences. Mrs. Waters focused on her impact of her current and former students. Mr. Green was adamant that he and his staff work in the best interest of students. Mrs. Smoulder relied on her ability to reach students and build a culture around student needs. Mr. Aimes, while not his most evident theme, acknowledged in his actions and words that his team's investment in students extended beyond the school day.

Evidence of Theme Across Cases Table 3

Stacy Waters	James Green	Tanya Smoulder	Curtis Aimes
O: "I learned from the multiple grade levels that you still have to focus on student needs"	**I:** "I still want to be able to have a larger impact or larger influence on a larger number of children. And so, administration was kind of that way of being able to make a larger impact…"	**O:** "When parents come for PBL nights or to volunteer in the classroom, they also get an opportunity to see their child's work displayed and also what they can look forward to working on in other grade levels."	
O: "See that football – yeah that was from one of my former students at the high school."	**I:** "There may be a parent is upset, but if it's what's best for children, we're going to go with that." **O:** "What do the children need"		
	I: "To walk into a place and know that you have other adults who are teachers that have the best interest for children at heart and they celebrate their victories"		.

Familiarity/Relationships

Each of the four principals identified relationships as indicators of a successful

principalship. They agreed that cultivating relationships with students and family members had a

significant impact on school culture. For each principal relationships were the foundation of their

experience in the assistant principalship and principalship. Mrs. Waters demonstrated her

relationships through bonds formed with families and ties to the neighborhood. Mr. Green was

dependent on the relationships and programs established through his assistant principalship. Mrs. Smoulder recognized her relationships with students as a bridge with parents. Mr. Aimes utilized his relationships to build a team and reach out to the community. Three out of four principals explicitly identified their relationship with their former supervisors as the impetus to taking on the principalship. Mrs. Waters credited her supervisor for telling her she was prepared to enter the role. Mr. Green's relationship with his former supervisor helped him to enter the role as an interim principal before entering the principalship. Mrs. Smoulder credits her supervisor for encouraging her to apply for the role.

Evidence of Theme Across Cases Table 4

Stacy Waters	James Green	Tanya Smoulder	Curtis Aimes
I: "It was the superintendent - having a relationship with my superintendent where I felt that I could speak to him or ask him, you know, you think I'm ready."	**I:** "they grew up here, they went to school here and they've come back, and they taught here and so they are truly tied to the community"	**I:** "[Since the PD trip] I feel like I have a much better rapport and relationship with Amy than I did before we went."	**O:** "I saw so many people go into the position just to have it…" **I:** "It was my peers that saw me as a leader of the grade level…I was just doing what I should." **O:** "I remember when I first arrived here, and the teams looked different…I was able to see what each team needed"
O: "We have parents that consistently come each week and participate in school activities."	**I:** "…you have a pretty good rapport [amongst the community here] that puts you ahead of the game"	**I:** "the benefit of being the dean it allowed me to really build better relationships with the staff, you know, that I can now rely on"	**O:** "Hey Mr. Aimes, look – I got an A on my test," **O:** Mr. Aimes, my mom said she'll come by the school later to help." **O:** "As principal, part of being productive is having positive

			interactions with my entire school community"
O: "You know we have quite a few trailers just down the road...families are coming in and out constantly…it's a challenge for the kids changing schools like that."	**I:** "You don't always get that community feel. A good number of the staff that are here probably I would say maybe a little bit more than a fourth are truly natives of this community."		**O:** Teachers taught in small teams amongst grade levels.

Experiential Learning

All four principals elaborated on their previous experience in the assistant principalship. Each principal credited those experiences as providing them with context for the principalship. The principals shared the common theme that they were able to take lessons from the assistant principalship and use them as a foundation for how they ran their own school. Mrs. Waters utilized her experience working with multiple grade levels to coach her teachers and guide her assistant principal. Mr. Green leaned on his experience in the assistant principalship as a guide to understanding the culture and establishing his identity as a leader. Mrs. Smoulder experiences were valuable in helping her identify the "invisible networks" within her organization. Mr. Aimes utilized his experience to inspire him to enact change.

Evidence of Theme Across Cases Table 5

Stacy Waters	James Green	Tanya Smoulder	Curtis Aimes
I: "I, I enjoyed the AP position because I got a chance to do a variety of things…"	**I:** "Every day that I walk in and I tell people all the time, once you get to a point that you show up at work and it's not something different,	**O:** "Um, and then so also my last year at Garvey as a dean, we had a parent who developed an app and it was for, it was like a dismissal app. And so,	**O:** "I saw so many people go into the position just to have it…" **I:** "I think my experiences gave a good foundation to know what to expect, how

I: "I've had great experiences and had a principal that you know, brought me in to learn as much as I could." **I:** "I think that know their [assistant principals] best experiences come from on-the-job experiences versus you know, being in the classroom and taking those courses."	it's not something that you enjoy. You need to walk away…" **I:** "going from being an AP to being a principal, uh, the, the greatest challenge is…think about somebody with a fire hose and that they're spraying that fire hose full blast, but yet you're trying to drink water through that coffee straw and that's kind of what it was in the beginning"	he piloted it in a kindergarten class…" **I:** "that was definitely one where I was like, I don't know if I'm ready, so this is too much."	to respond to, you know, what you expect."
I: "And I try to really equip my assistant principal when budgets and stuff so that she's not left out there not knowing and understanding, you know, the finance part of it, when she goes into a principalship"	**I:** "the more experience that you have, the more time that you have, the better off, the better you will become."	**I:** "the then principal told me that she was, she was going to be able to hire an assistant principal the next year. And she asked me to if I was interested in applying. So first I was like, man, I don't know.	**I:** "those experiences share from other individuals who had already been there and done that it, um, gives you more well-rounded approach"
I: "I think the biggest thing for me was having the opportunity to work at different levels"	**I:** "one concern that I would have is that whenever you have people that they're trying to go and circumvent and say, well you didn't do with this. We did this way before. We're doing it differently now."		**O:** "I learned a lot from the team members as an assistant principal in this building"

Summary

This chapter provides insight into each case and a report of the findings for this study. Each case revealed varied perceptions of preparation through the assistant principalship. However, each principal described being prepared for the principalship. Principals' perceptions ranged on how the assistant principalship prepared them well from relationship building to experience to learning lessons to moral obligations. Each case provides a rich description of the participants' background and current role in the principalship. The cases answer the sub questions of the study by providing information through the same lens of continuity, interaction, and situation. The cross-case analysis provided at the end of this chapter details which themes are similar across cases. This provides information about how each case is not only similar but different from the other.

While cross-case analysis details themes that each principal shares. It also reveals trepidation in each principal around the principalship. Mrs. Waters and Mr. Aimes found support in district personnel and colleagues to enter the role. Each principal's apprehension came from initial concerns about the role. Mr. Aimes stated that he saw individuals go into the role "just to have it" while Mrs. Waters had little interest in administration. Both Mrs. Smoulder and Mr. Green moved into the role within the same school but found that their apprehensions came from unexpected or "unwritten" duties.

CHAPTER V. OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The assistant principalship is considered a development stage to the principalship (Mitchell, 2015; NASSP, 2015; Oliver, 2005; Superville, 2015; Wallace Foundation, 2016). The purpose of this study was to examine the assistant principalship through the perspective of sitting principals. In this study, I explored new principals,' in their first three years, perception of their preparation through their former positions as assistant principals.

This study is concerned with the researched gap between the assistant principal and principal responsibilities (Armstrong, 2010; Searby et al., 2016), which indicated that assistant principals lack the training or exposure to instructional leadership needed for the principalship.

The research questions presented in this study seek to discover if the assumed gap presented in the literature does exist. I use the term "assumed gap" with the understanding that all researched literature considers the qualitative and quantitative data of sitting assistant principals who have not experienced the principalship. This research aimed to answer research questions from sitting principals who previously served in the assistant principalship.

I utilized the qualitative research approach with the intention of creating a cross-analysis case study. Each case study gave insight to a principal's preparation or perceived preparation for the principalship. I reviewed the details of the findings in Chapter 4. This chapter includes a discussion of those findings juxtaposed with literature on leadership preparation and the assistant principalship. This chapter will also review identified themes within and across case studies, interpretation of findings, limitations, implications and recommendations, overall significance, recommendations for future research, and concluding statements (summary).

Discussion

School leadership is critical to learning outcomes and school culture. The principal is responsible for creating a vision and collaborating with a team to implement that vision. The assistant principal is often part of that team and is considered the next logical leader to take on that role in many schools. Research on this topic indicated that a third or more of principals formerly served as assistant principals (Goldring et al., 2021; NAESP, 2024). The assistant principalship is supposed to prepare a leader to take on the principalship. The findings in this study identified that experiential learning played a vital role in sitting principals feeling prepared for the principalship. Research on this topic emphasized the importance of on-the-job training. "The ability to observe and reflect on various events and experiences during their [assistant principals'] years of leadership development appeared to be highly useful and even transformational" (Abdul Wahat et al., 2013, p. 304). However, this is not always the case. There is a perception that some roles limit the growth of assistant principals by restricting their responsibilities to tasks that do not adequately prepare them to fully lead a school. Kafele (2020) suggests that assistant principals' primary responsibility can be reduced to student discipline limiting them from learning the role of the principalship. The findings in this study do not coincide with limitations to student discipline but indicate that there are aspects of the principalship that were unknown until assuming the role.

There is a complexity to principals' roles in school and understanding that role is an important part of feeling prepared for the principalship. As research indicates, principals must identify how to fill the gap and involve assistant principals in all aspects of the school (NASSP, 2007; Johnson-Taylor & Martin, 2007). It is important that assistant principals work with and through their principals to gain the fundamental skills to be a successful principal. Owens and

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Valesky (2011) state that "because educational leaders work with and through other people to achieve organizational goals, understanding the behavior of people at work is fundamental to the success of their efforts" (p. 80). This is true also for the assistant principalship.

I used a qualitative method to capture the lived experience of each participant. The narratives or lived stories of the participants derived from information provided in the individual interviews, using participant language and perceptions. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested that telling the lived stories of participants is not always linear. Individuals do not always tell stories from start to finish; they may highlight notable events or leave out events that bring up negative memories. Hence, each case study captured a snapshot of each participants' lived experience. These lived experiences furthered the research on the assistant principalship and expanded the conversation about the effectiveness of the role. Each case study informed how the assistant principalship can be a meaningful experience and prepare leaders for the principalship.

Revisiting Case Studies and Themes Within Case

I explored each case through a case study that outlined the participants' lived experience via observation and interview data. This study investigated four leaders in their first three years of the principalship. Through observation and interview data, I reviewed a set of emerging themes and a culture and context within certain boundaries within each case study. The following paragraphs revisit each study and the evidence of the research questions. The subsequent sections will revisit the approach for analysis, the major themes revealed using this approach, and details of the major themes across studies.

The Experienced AP

Stacy Waters has more than a decade worth of experience in the assistant principalship role. Mrs. Waters had the chance to serve as a teacher and assistant principal at all three levels of K12 education (elementary, middle, and high). At one point in the assistant principalship, she was an administrator in the school district where she formerly served as a high school teacher. Mrs. Waters' transition into the principalship was heavily influenced by mentorship and her superintendent's perception of her experiential learning. As Mrs. Waters said in her interview, a former superintendent and mentor encouraged her to go into administration.

This experience very much influenced Mrs. Waters' perception of a successful principalship. As she indicated in her interview "...the principal role is just being, being a good mentor to our, you know, assistant principals, I think that their best experiences come from on-the-job experiences." Each case study evidenced principals' description and perception of preparation through the three-dimensions narrative inquiry space (Clandinin, 2006) and emerging themes.

Evidence of the research question – In what ways do new principals describe being prepared for the principalship?

Mrs. Waters describes being prepared for the principalship mostly through the lens of interactions and situations. Her daily interactions with staff and parents indicate a sense of belonging and collegiality that can be observed and perceived as comfortability with the role. She understands and relates to the dynamics of her transient population and remains engaged with her staff and student community. Furthermore, Mrs. Waters describes being prepared for the principalship through the theme of mentorship. Either how she was mentored into the role and/or how she would mentor her assistant principal.

Evidence of research question – How do sitting, new principals perceive the principalship prepared them?

This is prevalent in continuity data for Mrs. Waters. The emerging themes from observational and interview data indicate Mrs. Waters felt prepared in experience and relationships. Mrs. Waters feels prepared to train her assistant principal and perceives that her experience in the assistant principalship has allowed her to do so. Disconfirming evidence in continuity data does, however, suggest that the lack of experience with finances in the assistant principalship did not prepare her well for the principalship.

The Interim Named Principal

James Green is a long-time educator with over a decade of experience in education. His interest in making an impact beyond the classroom was driven by the desire to make a larger impact on students beyond his classroom by making an impact on teacher's as well. Mr. Green was in the assistant principalship for a little less than 4 years before transitioning into the principalship. Mr. Green had the opportunity of transitioning into the principalship in the same school where he served as the assistant principal. As he stated in his interview, the experience in the assistant principalship and at the same school was instrumental in his current success.

"I know the culture. I kind of know…I got to work with this person this way. I have to kind of work with this person that way, so I think that has been a significant part for me." Each case study evidenced principals' description and perception of preparation through the three-dimensions narrative inquiry space (Clandinin, 2006) and emerging themes.

Evidence of the research question – In what ways do new principals describe being prepared for the principalship?

Mr. Green describes being prepared for the principalship mostly through the lens of interactions and situations. His interactions with teachers during instructional meetings align with his interview data speaking to addressing the specific needs of children. Mr. Green describes being prepared for the role in how well he supports and prepares his staff. His support for his staff members seemed to extend beyond academics and into their individuality. From data meetings to walking the hallways, it was evident that not only did the school honor students' work but also teachers' creativity and work. Mr. Green demonstrated his comfort and value in opportunities to grow adults and children. Furthermore, Mr. Green described the transition as going well, he is confident and more versed in written and unwritten tasks and describes being prepared for the principalship through the themes of student-centered, familiarity/relationships, and Professional Development.

Evidence of research question – How do sitting, new principals perceived the assistant principalship prepared them?

This is most prevalent in continuity data. The way Mr. Green revealed his story identified the significance of the assistant principalship and how it informed his current role. In a very linear way, he expresses the importance of the assistant principalship and managing tasks, resolving issues/conflicts, and having experience in the role. His experience in the assistant principalship has only heightened his understanding of the school culture. "More than a fourth [of staff] are truly natives of this community…they grew up here, they went to school here and they've come back, and they taught here and so they are truly tied to the community…I think that goes a long way in helping our school grow." Disconfirming evidence in interview data does highlight the difficulties of the transition "sometimes there's a difficult separation between me and the previous principal because the previous principal still works in the county and so and it's

not anything that they're doing, but you know, there's still staff members that feel like, hey, I need to go and talk to you [her]."

The Well-Rounded Dean

Tanya Smoulder is an educator with years of experience in the classroom and in many teacher leadership roles. She initially was introduced to her school community as a parent. The form principal encouraged and inspired her to go into the assistant principalship. After 3 years of serving in the role, she was selected to become the principal at the same school. As stated in her interview and her observation, she attributes a lot of her success with the students, teachers, and community to the years she spent in the assistant principalship.

In this position, Tanya learned about the school culture, the parent community, and the students. "The benefit of being the dean allowed me to really build better relationships with the staff, you know, that I can now rely on." Each case study evidenced principals' description and perception of preparation through the three-dimensions narrative inquiry space (Clandinin, 2006) and emerging themes.

Evidence of the research question – In what ways do new principals describe being prepared for the principalship?

Mrs. Smoulder describes being preapred for the principalship through interview and observation data through the lens of interactions and situations and the theme of familiarity/relationships. She speaks to her familiarity and open network with the school community, which Mrs. Smoulder considers to be important parts to being prepared for the principalship. "If you have a closed network that's not good, it's much harder for you to be successful as a leader. But if you have an open network that's a lot better…"

As Mrs. Smoulder elaborates, she describes an open network as one where communication flows from person to person. Although she would still like her network to be more open, she believes alleviating or at least navigating some of the "invisible networks" has eliminated communication barriers. For example, when she shares a message with leadership or with her staff, she is provided with an opportunity to clarify or able to help everyone speak the same language. In the past, misinterpretation would be discussed amongst the "invisible networks" leaving room for lack of clarity and cohesion.

Evidence of research question – How do sitting, new principals perceive the assistant principalship prepared them?

Interview and observation data reveal that Mrs. Smoulder is not only prepared for the principalship but that she perceives the assistant principalship prepared her for the role. Evidenced in situation and interaction data, Mrs. Smoulder references are familiarity and relationships as a result of her role in the assistant principalship. Mrs. Smoulder identified the assistant principalship as helpful was by providing context through experiential learning for what she called the "invisible networks."

The Brand-New Principal

Curtis Aimes is an educator with few years of administrative experience. As a career educator, he has opportunities to lead departments and assume leadership responsibilities. After encouragement from district personnel and colleagues, Mr. Aimes stepped into the assistant principalship. In this role, he saw much success and assisted in making improvements. After two years of learning and working with staff at Coretta, he was selected as the principal in the same

school. Mr. Aimes states clearly in the interview data that his role in the assistant principalship was vital to his success as a building principal.

His experience in the role gave him a lot of insight on teacher interaction, community engagement, and some of the instructional expectations. "I think [my experience] gave a good foundation for to know what to expect, how to respond to what you expect...also for the unexpected." Each case study evidenced principals' description and perception of preparation through the three-dimensions narrative inquiry space (Clandinin, 2006) and emerging themes.

Evidence of the research question – In what ways do new principals describe being prepared for the principalship?

Mr. Aimes describes being prepared for the principalship through observation and interview data evident mainly through the lens of situation and interaction data. Throughout his interview and observation, his focus is on his teams and relationships with the community. As he voiced about being an effective principal, "I learned and understood, you can't effectively do this all by yourself…it can't just be about me."

Mr. Aimes leans on his relationships and familiarity with his teams as evidence of a successful leader and a successful school. He believes that part of his success comes from redefining the structure of teams at his school. "I remember when I first arrived here, and the teams looked different…I was able to see what each team needed"

Evidence of the research question – How, do sitting, new principals perceive the assistant principalship prepared them?

If anything, it is evident that Mr. Aimes took his lessons from the assistant principalship and applied them to the principalship. Mr. Aimes made clear his perspective on his

comfortability in his role stating in his interview when asked about his training to become principal, "I wouldn't change one thing."

Mr. Aimes credits the assistant principalship with providing him with "a foundation" to be successful. During his tenure, he learned about the community partners, the dynamics of teams, and learned about the programs at the school. As he described himself "a half cup full kind of person," he constantly references his past experiences in continuity data as a building block for his success and/or instrumental in his learning experience.

Revisiting Three Dimensions of Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is research into the lived and retold experiences of participants. The approach to each case study was examined through three dimensions continuity (past, present and future), interactions (personal and social), situations (place). This approach acknowledges that narrative inquiry seeks to discover answers through told stories and lived experience of the participants. "Narrative inquirers, working within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, can begin their inquiries either with engaging with participants through telling stories or through coming alongside participants in the living out of stories" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Each dimension revealed confirming and/or disconfirming evidence to the research questions. Furthermore, the dimensions provided insight to the larger contexts identifying themes repeated in multiple dimensions.

Continuity

Continuity refers to the constancy of the past, present, and future in narratives (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998, 2000; Dewey, 1938). Identifying continuity means that the researcher is paying attention to references to the past, present, future, the order of storytelling, use of

metaphors in relation to past events, and shared stories. Continuity is the part of research that focuses on the told experience of the participant. "People shape their daily lives and experiences through their stories" (Clandinin, 2006, p. 45).

Interaction

Interaction refers to the social and personal interactions that take place in individual's lives (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998, 2000; Dewey, 1938). Research in this dimension may involve field notes, collegial interactions - teachers, students, parents, and other administrators. This dimension focuses on participants larger social context and lived experience. "Experiences grow out of other experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences...a way of understanding experience" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2).

Situation

Situation refers to the places in which these events occur (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998, 2000; Dewey, 1938). Research in this dimension may reference scene where interview took place, reference to classroom, or office, or educational experiences, references to assistant principalship. "The researcher looks for specific locations in the storyteller's landscape that give meaning to the narrative, such as the storyteller's physical location and how the activities occurring in that place affected his/her experiences" (Wang & Geale, 2015).

Findings

Yin (2003) describes how multiple case studies can be used to either, "(a) predicts similar results (a literal replication) or (b) predicts contrasting results but for predictable reasons (a theoretical replication)" (p. 47). This section's purpose is to identify the central question and the findings aligned with the two research questions in this study.

Central Question

Definitively, this study seeks to explore new principals, in their first three years, -- what is their

perception of their preparation through their former positions as assistant principals?

Sub Questions

1. In what ways do new principals describe being prepared for the principalship?
2. How do sitting, new principals perceive the assistant principalship prepared them well?

The most prevalent themes in answering the first sub-question "ways new principals

describe being prepared…" were mentorship, student-centered, and familiarity/relationships.

Data revealed that current sitting principals heavily relied on relationships with community,

students, teachers, and former supervisors. Of the four principals, two mostly identified

relationships with students and two mostly identified relationships with staff and community as a

key factor in how they describe being prepared for the principalship. As mentioned in chapter 2,

relationships and networks are complex and sometimes are hard to measure, they are evidenced

by conversations, student results, shared responsibilities, and many other factors. The lived story

of the participants revealed confirming evidence in situation data through student work,

decorated halls, and school accomplishments. Three out of four participants observation data

presented school settings that really highlighted student and school achievement through student

work, banners, or data in the halls. The findings for this sub-question state that all four principals

describe being prepared for the principalship through the lens of interaction and situation.

The most prevalent themes in answering the second sub-question "new principals

perceive the assistant principalship prepared them…" were experiential learning and

familiarity/relationships. Data revealed that current, sitting principals perceived experiences with

former supervisors and/or in specific environments greatly impacted their preparedness for the

role. Of the four principals, three out of four expressed some apprehension about the role of principal. The determining factors varied for each principal. Two of the principals spoke to apprehension entering the role. One principal spoke to initial apprehension based on an experience in the principalship. Either way, the constant is that each principal experienced some trepidation about the role. The told and lived story of the participants revealed confirming evidence in continuity and interaction data. All participants spoke definitively about the benefits of the assistant principalship and experiential learning. As researched in chapter 2, McNair and Phelan (2012) emphasized that learning on the job offers an opportunity to understand what it takes to be successful. Three of four principals established relationships with the community, learned programs, and/or developed systems within the same school. One principal moved into the principalship within the district and was prepared through the various experiences in the roles having a multitude of duties over time. The findings for this sub-question state that all four principals perceive the assistant principalship prepared them well.

Revisiting Cross-Case Analysis

Cross Case analysis is a method that enables a researcher to compare cases across multiple settings. The analysis provides a more wholistic answer to the research question providing the researcher with opportunities to explore possibilities and identify similar or dissimilar results. "Cross-case analysis enables case study researchers to delineate the combination of factors that may have contributed to the outcomes of the case, seek or construct an explanation…make sense of puzzling or unique findings" (Khan & VanWynsberghe, 2008).

In this study there were several initial themes researched and presented in the literature review. Some of those themes presented themselves across multiple cases. Emerging and initial themes nostalgia, professional development, and mentoring were prevalent across two of the

same case studies. Professional Development was prevalent across two different case studies.

Three themes presented themselves across all four cases. See table below (red abbreviated

themes are initial themes; white abbreviated themes are emerging themes in this study).

Table 2.

Case Study	SC	FAM.	NOST.	EXP	PD	M	STM
Experienced AP (S. Waters)	X	X	X	X		X	
Interim Named Principal (J. Green)	X	X		X	X		X
Well-Rounded Dean (T. Smoulder)	X	X	X	X		X	
Brand New Principal (C. Aimes)	X	X		X	X		

The following sections explain how the three themes showed up across the multiple case studies.

Two of the three themes were emerging themes.

Student-Centered

This theme was prevalent in answering the central question and sub questions. Each

principal mentioned how students drove the instruction and programming at their school. Many

school leaders are advocates of student-centered learning where students take ownership of their

learning (Cuccolo & DeBruler, 2023; Green et al., 2023). In many instances, the theme of

student-centered was evident through observation. Each principal measured their preparedness

for the role by the impact that their leadership had on student learning and student experiences.

As Robinson (2011) stated on student-centered leadership, most school leaders are motivated by

the difference they make in students' lives.

Mrs. Waters focused on her impact on her current and former students. She spoke of nostalgic moments but more of the experiences she had with students and knew how to prepare them for the next level. "Those experiences [the assistant principalship] gave me an opportunity to be able to prepare these students for middle school." Mrs. Waters also admitted that all her assistant principalship experiences did not prepare her for every aspect; it was the combination of experiences.

In an interview statement, Mrs. Waters stated that "a particular principal" did not give her many opportunities to work with instruction. Her description of being prepared for the role of principalship was combining her various experiences and levels of leadership to define what the principalship should look like for her.

Mr. Green was adamant that he and his staff work in the best interest of students. His measure for success and doing what was right was based on what was in the students' best interest. He described the role of the principalship as someone that establishes a place where you "know that you have other adults who are teachers that have the best interest for children at heart and they celebrate their victories."

His role in the assistant principalship helped him establish that reputation. In one instance, Mr. Green credited the assistant principalship as a place that helped him establish that he was an educator working in the best interest of students.

Mrs. Smoulder relied on her ability to reach students and build a culture around student needs. As Mrs. Smoulder would say "she treats them like her own." Mrs. Smoulder's conversations around a student-centered environment coupled a lot with her conversations

around building positive relationships. She stated about her role in the principalship that parents have developed a relationship because their students have too.

Her observation data revealed that most of what she presented in the building and to staff were about students. The students' work on the walls, the constant student interactions, or the references staff would make indicating her student interest. "You know Mrs. Smoulder wants to see how you're doing."

Mr. Aimes, while not his most evident theme, acknowledged in his actions and words that his team's investment in students extended beyond the school day. He speaks to his experience in the principalship going outside of the school, speaking with students, and building community relationships in the interest of students.

In the assistant principalship, Mr. Aimes stated that he witnessed either some district leaders coming into the building with little interest in student learning or not asking about it. He made an effort in the assistant principalship to identify what students needed and made the changes as principal.

Three of the four principals had a prevalent student-centered theme. While each principal built programs and engaged families for the benefit of students. It was more apparent that each of the elementary principals identified student-centered as a prevailing theme in their schools.

Familiarity/Relationships

This theme was foundational in answering the central question and sub questions. For each principal relationships were the primary experience in their perceived preparation in the assistant principalship and how they described being prepared for the principalship. Several research studies focus on the importance of relationships in the principalship and in principal

preparation (Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011; Grissom et al., 2021; NASSP, 2015; Rieg & Marcoline, 2008; Whitaker, 2019). Whitaker (2019) contends that effective principals focus on people not programs. This sentiment is echoed throughout the research emphasizing that effective relationships with mentors, community members, teachers, and students are signs of an effective principal. "Positive relationships are associated with improved student achievement" (Grissom et al., 2021).

Mrs. Waters demonstrated her relationships through bonds formed with families and ties to the neighborhood. "You know we have quite a few trailers just down the road...families are coming in and out constantly…it's a challenge for the kids changing schools like that." Mrs. Waters felt connected to her families and communities and that connection is how she described being prepared for the principalship. She met with families weekly, held community events, and knew about her transient population.

In addition, Mrs. Waters credited her relationships in the assistant principalship for her current role as principal. "It was the superintendent - having a relationship with my superintendent where I felt that I could speak to him or ask him, you know, you think I'm ready." The support of colleagues and supervisors not only gave her confidence to pursue the principalship but helped prepare her during her tenure in the assistant principalship.

Mr. Green was dependent on the relationships and programs established through his assistant principalship. He was keen that being in the same building and working with some of the same staff helped. According to Mr. Green, "hav[ing] a pretty good rapport puts you ahead in the game." He understood that a lot of staff and students grew up, went to school, and/or taught in the community – "they were truly tied."

This familiarity not only prepared him for the principalship, but it prepared him to focus on the unknown. As he explained, he established and lead a lot of the programs in the assistant principalship. However, there were unwritten rules and programs that he was not as familiar with. As he would describe it, the role could sometimes feel like drinking "fire hose spray through a coffee straw." His familiarity with the school, the staff, the community, and the programs allowed him the room to grow in the areas of the unknown. In addition, his established relationships earned him a sense of trust and space to grow.

Mrs. Smoulder recognized her relationships with students as a bridge with parents. She understood the importance of establishing relationships and learning about communication trends. **"**The benefit of being the dean (assistant principal) it allowed me to really build better relationships with the staff, you know, that I can now rely on." Mrs. Smoulder credits the assistant principalship for being able to establish a lot of those relationships. Furthermore, the role helped her understand what she described as the "invisible networks" that potentially prevented some growth and open communication.

She describes being prepared for the principalship as understanding and breaking down those "invisible networks." She admits, however, that "as a principal it can be really hard to build genuine relationships with the staff." She experienced some of it with new staff or with staff she had not quite formed a bond with in the assistant principalship. At one point, she recalls building a "better rapport" with a staff member after attending a PD. There are other points where she partners with and/or built relationships with parents. As described by Mrs. Smoulder, the network is more open now.

Mr. Aimes utilized his relationships to build a team and reach out to the community. He emphasized the importance of relationships and familiarity as important components of being a successful leader and a successful school. In his words, "relationships also create not only a strong sense of community but a strong sense of partnership." Mr. Aimes had developed that same sense within the school. His role in the assistant principalship afforded him the chance to become familiar with teams and the school structure. In his interview he stated, "being familiar with, you know, the stakeholders or community at large prepared me for the role."

Mr. Aimes defined the principalship as being "a part of the team." His focus on familiarity and relationship developed through his career as a characteristic of a functioning school and school leader. Mr. Aimes believes that a leader must understand their teams, develop relationships with their teachers, students, and community. Throughout his interview and observation that continued to be a focal point.

In addition to community and students, it was evident that three out of four principals explicitly identified their relationship with their former supervisors as the impetus to taking on the principalship. Mrs. Waters credited her supervisor for telling her she was prepared to enter the role. Mrs. Smoulder credits her supervisor for encouraging her to apply for the role. Mr. Green's relationship with his former supervisor helped him to enter the role as an interim principal before entering the principalship.

Experiential Learning

This theme was a prevalent in answering the central question and sub questions, especially sub question 2 on "how sitting, new principals perceive the assistant principalship prepared them well." As noted in chapter 2, the assistant principalship served as great on-the-job

training. As Zhang and Brundrett (2010) stated on the assistant principalship, "leadership learning arose out of a variety of informal routes, such as group work, learning communities, and collaborative work." Each principal elaborated on experiential learning in the assistant principalship as being pivotal in their current roles. For varied reasons, each principal credited the experience.

Mrs. Waters utilized her experience working with multiple grade levels to coach her teachers and guide her assistant principal. "I've had great experiences and had a principal that you know, brought me in to learn as much as I could." Mrs. Waters describes the assistant principalship as an opportunity to do a "variety of things." Those experiences and the guidance from her principal were instrumental in her growth and preparedness to navigate the principalship.

In turn, this experience influenced how Mrs. Waters guides her current assistant principal. She is cognizant of areas where she was able to grow in that role. Hence, Mrs. Waters is considerate of the opportunities she presents, the guidance she provides, and the duties she assigns to her current assistant principal. Mrs. Waters stated in one conversation, "the instructional role as an AP was very helpful for me…I try to make sure she gets as much of that as possible."

Mr. Green leaned on his experience in the assistant principalship as a guide to understanding the culture and establishing his identity as a leader. His perspective on the assistant principalship was that "it has been mostly an advantage for me because we already know, well these are the things in which I'm going to stand on." Mr. Green believes that his

experience in the assistant principalship informed staff, students, and the community of his expectations.

In turn, Mr. Green believes that his experience provided a solid foundation for him to be prepared for the principalship. He elaborates on building programs, being a part of the culture, and learning the daily operations of the school. It is because of his experience in the assistant principalship that he transitioned into the role.

Mrs. Smoulder experiences were valuable in helping her identify the "invisible networks" within her organization. "I really started to get a better idea of the end of the invisible networks and the kind of important, like the power of the invisible network." This was instrumental in helping her establish relationships and build trust within the community. Mrs. Smoulder values the experience of the assistant principalship as a learning opportunity.

As she said, the principalship can be challenging to form bonds with staff. In her description of a successful principal, relationships are important. Hence, the experience that allowed her to form those relationships definitely prepared her for the role of principal.

Mr. Aimes utilized his experience to inspire him to enact change. He described being in the school and either seeing how teams operated or noticing what they needed prepared him to make the necessary changes as principal. In addition, he was able to be guided in the assistant principalship by colleagues, supervisors, and other leaders. Mr. Aimes exclaimed that "having those experiences shared from other individuals who had already been there and done it" gave him a "well-rounded approach" in the principalship.

Mr. Aimes further explained that his experience in the assistant principalship "gave a good foundation for what to expect, how to respond to what you expect and also for the

unexpected." The assistant principalship was perceived by Mr. Aimes as instrumental in his transition and a foundational component of his leadership.

All four principals elaborated on their previous experience in the assistant principalship. Each principal credited those experiences as providing them with context for the principalship. The principals shared the common theme that they were able to take lessons from the assistant principalship and use them as a foundation for how they ran their own school.

Interpretations of Findings

I began this study with thorough research and analysis of the assistant principalship. Through literary research, the findings on most studies referenced the assistant principalship. The findings in this study were revealed by examining the lived experience of sitting principals. The confirming evidence and disconfirming evidence were not only juxtaposed against the individual participants but across studies. My interpretation of the findings is from the lens of confirming and disconfirming evidence. Confirming evidence of sub question 1 in this study comes from multiple interactions and observations of each principal. The themes are examined through the three dimensions, understanding where themes intersect and defining their importance in the participants' lived experience. My understanding of the importance of these themes is dependent on the recurrence across dimensions and across case studies.

For instance, the lived story of each participant spoke to the importance of relationships, mentoring and being student-centered across multiple dimensions when answering sub-question one. The common thread amongst the four principals was the theme of Familiarity/Relationships showing up in the interaction and situation lens through observation and interview data. Each principal's attention to building aesthetics and structure was highlighted. Three of the four

principal's highlighted student recognition in priority locations throughout the building (front entrances, lobbies, or hallways). My interpretation of this data implies that the sitting principals in this study correlate their display of student success with the school's success. Mr. Aimes, on the other hand, based on interaction data highlights student success through individual interactions. It is through his interaction with students that will determine his success in the role. In fact, each principal's interactions were focused on relationships with staff, students, and community. Each principal made a point in the interview data to elaborate on the established relationships and areas of growth since their transition. As researchers have indicated, relationships are indicators of successful schools, school principals, and student achievement (Grissom et al., 2021; Rieg & Marcoline, 2008; Whitaker, 2019). Confirming evidence of this literature appears in the findings as each principal displayed evidence of this theme with three out of four principals displaying evidence of this theme in all three dimensions (continuity, interaction, and situation). Further confirming evidence reveals that this theme was dominant in two of the three dimensions for the fourth principal.

Confirming evidence around the theme of student-centered was dominant in the dimensions of interaction and situation in three out of four principals. Student-Centered theme was dominant across at least two of three dimensions in each case study with one principal displaying evidence of this theme in all three dimensions. My interpretation of this evidence indicates that each principal in this study describes and measures being prepared for the principalship through their relationships with their learning community and impact on students. Each principal speaks to the importance and success of either "open networks," "being a part of a tem," or "focus[ing] on student needs."

Confirming evidence of sub question 2 in this study comes from consistency of the Experiential theme throughout each case study and its recurrence in each dimension. Each principal in this study emphasizes experiential learning in continuity data. As researchers Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and Connelly and Clandinin (2006) indicated, stories highlight notable events in people's lives and shape who they and others are. The principals in this study made several references to the past with all four principals consistently referencing back to the assistant principalship throughout interview and observation data when indicating important job duties (building programs, establishing relationships, being student centered, etc.). My interpretation of this evidence indicates the value that each principal in this study places on the assistant principalship. Principals described the experience as preparing them well by encouraging them to go into the role, establishing who they were in the community, understanding the community, and/or understanding the staff.

Disconfirming evidence substantiates some claims in the literature review that the assistant principalship can have limitations that do not prepare assistant principals well for the transition. In one instance Mrs. Waters indicates that she understands "to really equip [her] assistant principal…so that she's not left out the finance part of it when she goes into a principalship." In fact, each principal expresses some form of trepidation either based on communication or fear of preparedness. Two of four principals explicitly mentioned buses and logistics as a barrier to learning some aspects of the principalship.

Yet, my interpretation is that each principal perceives their former position as assistant principals prepared them for the principalship. There is more confirming evidence that the experiential learning prepared them to build relationships and be student-centered. The fact that three themes pertinent to successful schools and successful leaders were prevalent across the

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case studies is evidence that successful principals must establish relationships with students, staff, and community as well as focus on the needs of students. The prevalence of experiential learning is evidence that the assistant principalship prepares leaders for the principalship.

Limitations

Careful consideration and scholarly research were all contributions to this study. However, there were limitations to be considered. First, the research was limited to the participants in this study practicing in the Southeast geographical location particularly in two states reaching four schools. Second, the demographics in each school were not explored and analyzed as influencing factors. Although the participants were from different schools and/or schools with similar class sizes, demographic makeups, and/or levels (elementary, middle, high), the study did not lean into analysis of those differences. This study did, however, focus on the individual experiences of each principal of those schools.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

The purpose of this study was to examine the "assumed gap" and get an understanding of the perspective of sitting principals. Prior to this research study, there was little to no research indicating the principal's perspective of the assistant principalship. Much of the research on this topic was from the lens of the assistant principalship. The goal of this research is to provide context and shape how the assistant principalship is experienced. This research informs how principals can better prepare their assistant principals to assume the principalship as well as how assistant principals should practice in preparation for the role.

Implications for Current Principals

Principals must fill the gap to ensure that assistant principals have experience in varied areas. More importantly, principals must be intentional about practices and development of

assistant principals based on their aspirations. Recent research studies indicate that principal preparation is strategic and necessary to develop effective school principals (Comola, 2023; NASSP, 2023; Wallace Foundation, 2023). It is the principal's job to ensure that they are providing their assistant principals with meaningful experiences. The findings in this study identify indicate that principals should ensure that assistant principals have opportunities to focus on student-centered learning and build relationships with all stakeholders.

In addition, principals must serve as quality mentors to their assistant principals. Providing consistent, quality feedback and exposing assistant principals to shadowing experiences. As Darling-Hammond et al. (2022) indicated, principals bring with them their lived experiences and close relationships they have forged. Helping assistant principals understand and navigate those relationships, conversations will develop their skills to problem solve and contribute to the school culture. Essentially, research and the findings of this study indicate that principals should:

- Provide meaningful experiences that align with principal standards (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022)
- Cultivate Relationship Building Opportunities
- Provide meaningful professional development
- Scaffold duties and responsibilities over the course of years
- Encourage assistant principals to focus on student-centered learning

As a current principal, this research has informed how I guide and lead my assistant principals. For example, my assistant principals are actively engaged in building relationships with students, staff, and families to bolster our positive engagement initiatives. They are a part of providing meaningful professional development (culture building, use of rubrics, informed

grading practices, etc.). In addition, I have found it helpful to do something as simple as be

available to assist with a discipline matter so that my assistant principals can have time to focus

on student-centered learning or at least ease the burden Lastly but most importantly, set

conditions for your assistant principal to be successful and scaffold duties – pair them with the

former testing coordinator, let them start an initiative year two or in the Spring, provide them

with professional development, etc.

Implications for Current Assistant Principals

The assistant principal plays a critical role in the function and operation of the school.

The job duties are vast but should not limit the experience in a way where the assistant principal

cannot grow. Recent research around assistant principalship outlines how assistant principals can

better prepare for the principalship (Booker-Dwyer et al., 2023; Kafele, 2020, 2023; NASSP,

2023). The common theme in research and the findings of this study indicate that assistant

principals must maximize their on-the-job experience. Assistant principals that are aspiring

principals must not only assist their principal and perform their assigned duties, but they must

also aspire to professional learning experiences. Walker and Kwan (2009) examined the assistant

principals' interest in becoming principals and concluded that those assistant principals who

were more interested in professional development, were more likely to pursue the principalship.

The findings in this study outline the importance of having meaningful relationships with

the school principal as well as students and staff. The assistant principal must share their goals

and ideas. In addition, they must identify areas where they can grow and/or make a positive

impact on student learning. For instance, Clayton and Goodwin (2015) recounted how two

assistant principals used their positions as enforcers of student discipline to spend time

understanding each student as an individual, bridging home and school settings, with the overall goal of improving the teaching and learning.

Research findings in this study and the literature indicate that assistant principals must take ownership of their experience by focusing on the following key areas:

- Shadowing principal and/or learning through observation and conversation

- Seeking professional development opportunities

- Aligning practices and duties that are essential to the principalship

- Cultivating relationships

As a former assistant principal, I would strongly suggest that assistant principals find ways to engage in relation building activities (incentive programs, mentor programs, professional development for parents/staff, etc.). In my former role as assistant principal, it was my job to identify a gap that needed to be filled and align my duties with the vision of the school principal. Not only did this help me be innovative in my thinking about my role, but it also allowed an opportunity to supplement the principal's vision and move beyond logistics and managerial tasks.

Overall Significance

The overall significance of this study gives insight to the actual experience of sitting principals. Most knowledge about the assistant principalship is in research and text around sitting assistant principals explaining their experiences. While there was a vast amount of research on assistant principals, there was little to no evidence that a study had been conducted once those assistant principals transitioned into the principalship.

This study fills that void and provides context from assistant principals that have transitioned into the principalship. As summarized in the findings section, all four principals describe being prepared for the principalship and credit the assistant principalship for their preparedness. It can be concluded through this study that the assistant principalship when carefully executed can be instrumental to preparing a successful principal. It furthermore indicates that there is value in the assistant principalship contrary to some research.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research into this topic should explore several aspects of the assistant principalship. For instance, a study on how the length of time in the assistant principalship impacts your probability of transitioning into the principalship. This kind of study will focus on the average years of transition and/or how effective long sitting assistant principals are in comparison to short sitting assistant principals. Another deep dive into this topic should explore how assistant principals transitioning within district or the same school are effective. This study would consider the themes presented here and explore whether these same themes are prevalent in contributing to described preparedness in the principalship. A final potential future study could be more qualitative and explore academic data of former assistant principals. This data could be comparative across studies or a single study that compared data from assistant principalship to the principalship. The data would reveal improvement, consistency, or decline from school to school (same school to different school) or from role to role (assistant principalship to principalship). The future study could also explore how initiatives, staffing, or other factors impacted the revealed results.

Summary

The assistant principalship plays an important role in aspiring principal's career. "The number of principals with previous experience as an assistant principal has increased" (Booker-Dwyer et al., 2023). With the increasing need for effective principals, it is imperative that the experience in the assistant principalship is meaningful. Each of the four principals in this study described their varied experiences as meaningful to their transition into the role.

The findings of this study indicated that three common themes define a meaningful experience in the assistant principalship. The theme of student-centered indicates that assistant principals should foster a culture with high expectations that fosters engaging instruction. The theme of experiential learning encourages assistant principals and principals to be intentional about the duties of the assistant principal. Providing professional development, engaging in hands-on learning experience, and receiving quality feedback are a few ways assistant principals can benefit from their role. Most importantly, the theme of relationships is weaved through each case study indicating that it is important for assistant principals and principals to collaborate and prioritize relationship building.

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Appendix A

Greetings colleagues

You are invited to participate in a research study to investigate *The Principalship through the eyes of former Assistant Principals.* My name is Kendrick Myers. I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership, Foundations, and Technology Department seeking a Ph.D. in Educational Administration, under the direction of Dr. Lisa Kensler and Dr. Carey Andrzejewski, professors at Auburn University. My research interest is in the area of Instructional Leadership. You, as either a current principal or former assistant principal in the state of Alabama or Georgia can be of tremendous help in this endeavor.

I am requesting your voluntary participation in a 5 minute survey process. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Please be assured that your responses will be kept completely confidential. However, if you feel uncomfortable answering any questions, you have the right to withdraw from the survey at any time, for any reason, and without prejudice by closing your browser window. Your decision about whether or not to participate will not jeopardize your future relations with the Department of EFLT and/or Auburn University or the Department of Education.

There will be no costs to participants or compensation. Information collected through your participation may be used for publication or professional presentation.

Results from this survey will be used to identify principals that are qualified to participate in an interview and observation study. If you are selected to participate in the research study, the total time commitment will be approximately 5 – 9 hours. Participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw your participation at any point.

Please consider participating in this research by clicking on the link below. If you have any additional questions or concerns, please contact Kendrick L. Myers at klm0030@auburn.edu or Dr. Carey Andrzejewski at cea0011@auburn.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Auburn University Office of Human Subjects Research or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334) 844-5966 or e-mail at hsubjec@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu

Appendix B

Have you ever served in the capacity of Assistant Principal/Vice Principal/Dean of Students?

How long did you serve in the role of Assistant Principal/Vice Principal/Dean of Students?

At what level did you serve in the role of Assistant Principal/Vice Principal/Dean of Students (High, Middle, Elementary School or other)?

What is your current role in your educational institution?

How long have you served in the role of Principal/Head of Schools?

What level of students are you currently an administrator over (High, Middle, Elementary School or other)?

Was your previous role as Assistant Principal/Vice Principal/Dean of Students in the same district?

Was your previous role as Assistant Principal/Vice Principal/Dean of Students in the same school?

Appendix C

Greetings colleague

Congratulations, you have been selected as participant in a research study to investigate *The Principalship through the eyes of former Assistant Principals.* My name is Kendrick Myers. I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership, Foundations, and Technology Department seeking a Ph.D. in Educational Administration, under the direction of Dr. Lisa Kensler and Dr. Carey Andrzejewski, professors at Auburn University. My research interest is in the area of Instructional Leadership. You, as either a current principal or former assistant principal in the state of Alabama or Georgia can be of tremendous help in this endeavor.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. The total time commitment will be approximately 5 - 9 hours (this includes a 4 – 8 hour observation by the Principal Investigator and a 45 min. – 1 hour interview). Participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw your participation at any point, for any reason, without prejudice. In order to minimize the risks of breach of confidentiality your name will be coded with a pseudonym so that your identity remains confidential. There will be no costs to participants or compensation. Information collected through your participation may be used for publication or professional presentation.

Your decision about whether or not to participate will not jeopardize your future relations with the Department of EFLT and/or Auburn University or the Department of Education.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please click on the link to schedule an interview time and return the attached consent form via email. The consent form for participation contains details about the study.

If you have any additional questions or concerns, please contact Kendrick L. Myers at klm0030@auburn.edu or Dr. Carey Andrzejewski at cea0011@auburn.edu . If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Auburn University Office of Human Subjects Research or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334) 844-5966 or e-mail at hsubjec@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu

Appendix D

Informed Consent

For a research study entitled

The Principalship through the eyes of former Assistant Principals

You are invited to participate in a research study to explore the perceived preparation of principals that formerly served as assistant principals. This study is being conducted by Kendrick L. Myers, a PhD candidate in Educational Leadership, Foundations and Technology. Research participants must be current building principals within their first three years of the principalship and have previously served as assistant principals. You were selected for the study because of your status as a current principal and former assistant principal in a school system.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview and an observation. The total commitment will be approximately 5-9 hours. The interview will be recorded via digital voice recorder for the sole purpose of transcription and some notes may be taken. Transcripts and recordings will be stored in a secured room and cabinet throughout duration of this study. Once this study is complete, recordings will be deleted. Your identity will not be revealed in the presentation or publication of the study findings. No information will be included in publications, presentations, or reports that could be used to personally identify you.

Minimal risks or discomforts are anticipated with participation in this study. There will be no compensation for participating. Additionally, there is no cost for your participation in the study.

If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your participation at any time without penalty. Your decision whether or not to participate will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University

No personal information about you will be disclosed at any time. The notes and transcripts will be stored in a secure location and will not be linked to specific participants. The findings of the study will be used to complete a dissertation and may be used for publication in a professional journal and/or presented at a professional meeting.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact Kendrick L. Myers at klm0030@auburn.edu or 419-320-7072 or contact Dr. Carey Andrzejewski at cea0011@auburn.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Auburn University Office of Research Compliance or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334)-844-5966 or e-mail at IRBadmin@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT YOU WISH TO PARTCIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY. YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES YOUR WILLINGNESS TO PARTCIPATE.

_____ _____   _____   _____

Participant Signature   Date   Researcher Obtaining Consent   Date

_____   _____

Printed Name   Printed Name

Appendix E

<u>Initiation Question</u>

This interview is recorded for research purposes – do I have your permission to record?

<u>Main Narrative Question</u>

I've outlined 45 min – 1hour for this interview. I will likely take a couple of notes and ask you questions about those notes later. Take the time that you need to answer questions as I will listen and will not interrupt. Tell me about your background and career in education?

Probing Questions

Is this all you want to tell me? Is there anything you would like to add that you would consider important or a part of your experience?

<u>Questioning Options</u>

Tell me about what sparked your interest in becoming an administrator…(temporality)?

Describe your hopes or feelings when…(temporality, sociality)?

Talk about who or what factors were involved when you mentioned/entered/determined… (sociality)?

Please tell me more about the environment/location of…(place)?

How would you explain your experience as an assistant principal?

Who or what was most helpful in your transition?

Tell me about experience that help you realize that you were or weren't prepared for the principalship.

What would describe as most unique about your experience?

Tell me about what you would change about your experience if you could?

Appendix F

Observed Interactions	Description/Quotes/Phrases	Setting

Reflections on Field Notes (Purpose of Interactions; Nature of Interactions; Etc.):

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix G

Code	Abbrev.	Definition	Example	Disconfirming Evidence
Continuity	CN	References to the past, present and future (Connelly, 2000)		
Interaction	IN	Personal and social exchanges (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000; Dewey, 1938)		
Situation	S	Setting, scene, or place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Dewey, 1938)		
Experiential	EXP	An opportunity for growth and development through on the job experience Mitchell & Poutiatine, 2001; DeRue & Wellman, 1999)		
Professional Development	PD	Specific teaching and learning opportunities geared towards a field of study or work (Zepeda et al., 2015)		
Mentoring	M	A mutually enhancing relationship between leader and a peer or a subordinate (Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011; Hicks, 2011; Kram, 1985; Ragins, 1997)		
Systematic	STM	Comprehensive models in a system that support leaders in their work and growth (Connaughton et al., 2003)		

Appendix H

Table 6

Experienced AP's three dimensions of Narrative Inquiry

Code	Abbrev.	Definition	Example (O=Observed; I=Interview)	Disconfirming Evidence (O=observed; I=Interview)
Continuity	CN	References to the past, present and future (Connelly, 2000)	**I:** "I've had a chance to be an assistant principal or administration in elementary. Middle and High as well" **O: "**See that football – yeah that was from one of my former students at the high school. He went on to play college ball…I was tickled when he brought it to me…" **I:** "Having a relationship with my superintendent where I felt that I could speak to him or ask him, you know, you	**I:** I didn't have an interest in administration,

			think I'm ready…"	
			O: "The instructional role as an AP was very helpful for me…I try to make sure she gets as much of that as possible."	
Interaction	IN	Personal and social exchanges (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000; Dewey, 1938)	**I:** "I felt that someone saw enough interest in me to feel that she would make a good principal… she hired me as an assistant principal in that school district right after that."	
			O: "Mrs. Waters, this has been my kids best experience…"	
			I: "I had a desire to help with teachers and kind of help with the training process of teacher…So the spark was	

			basically to be able to help with the training of teachers and professional development."	
Situation	S	Setting, scene, or place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Dewey, 1938)	**O:** Hallways decorated and adorned with awards **O:** Field day with activities for students and parents **I:** Office and desk with portraits	
Familiarity/Relationship	FAM	Bond or familiarity with culture, individuals, or organization	**I:** "It was the superintendent - having a relationship with my superintendent where I felt that I could speak to him or ask him, you know, you think I'm ready." O: "We have parents that consistently come each week and participate in	

			school activities."	
			O: "You know we have quite a few trailers just down the road...families are coming in and out constantly…it's a challenge for the kids changing schools like that."	
Nostalgia	NOST	Affection or positive memory of the past and past experiences	**I:** "I felt that someone saw enough interest in me to feel that she would make a good principal… she hired me as an assistant principal in that school district right after that."	
			O: "See that football – yeah that was from one of my former students at the high school. He went on to play college ball…I was tickled	

			when he brought it to me…" **I:** "I think the biggest thing for me was having the opportunity to work at different levels."	
Experiential	EXP	Experiential learning is an opportunity for growth and development through on the job experience (Mitchell & Poutiatine, 2001; DeRue & Wellman, 1999).	**I:** "I, I enjoyed the AP position because I got a chance to do a variety of things…" **I:** "I've had great experiences and had a principal that you know, brought me in to learn as much as I could."	**I:** "Some of my experiences were not that great…I was working with buses and you know the whole what the assistant principal…management stuff" **I:** "So I had to make a lot of decisions, hard decisions that just didn't have to do as an assistant [principal]"
Student Centered	SC	Decisions/actions/practice influenced or determined based on students' needs	**I:** "Being in administration kind of gave me the opportunity to still continue to do [work with teachers] as well as have a	

			hand working with students as well because I wanted to continue that process as well." I: "those experiences gave me an opportunity to be able to share with my staff, hey, this is what is expected, you know, we've got to prepare these students for middle school"	
Mentoring	M	Mentoring is a mutually enhancing relationship between leader and a peer or a subordinate (Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011; Hicks, 2011; Kram, 1985; Ragins, 1997).		

Appendix I

Table 7

Interim Named Principal's three dimensions of narrative inquiry

Code	Abbrev.	Definition	Example (O=Observed; I=Interview)	Disconfirming Evidence (O=observed; I=Interview)
Continuity	CN	References to the past, present and future (Connelly, 2000)	**I:** "My focus is more so on linear - how we grow in children and adults. **I:** "[I used to say] remember I'm the new person? And they're like, yeah, yeah…I have to try to remember that same thing for the administrative staff that I have now."	
Interaction	IN	Personal and social exchanges (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000; Dewey, 1938)	**O:** "What do the children need?" **I:** "hey, here you go here, here's what you need. If you've got issues or problems, let me know and I'll help you with them." **O:** "Thanks for the feedback in the data meeting –	

			it's always really helpful"	
Situation	S	Setting, scene, or place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Dewey, 1938)	**I:** "they celebrate their victories, that they celebrate children being able to read that they celebrate children being able to manage themselves emotionally" **I:** "they have the best interest of children at heart" **O:** Personal signage and teacher individualized décor next to classrooms in every hall	
Familiarity/Relationship	FAM	Bond or familiarity with culture, indiviorganizon	**I:** "they grew up here, they went to school here and they've come back, and they taught here and so they are truly tied to the community" **O:** "…you know I go in the meeting and I'll help wherever I'm needed and	I: "sometimes there's a difficult separation between me and the previous principal because the previous principal still works in the county and so and it's not anything that they're doing, but you know, there's still staff members that

			provide some guidance." I: "…you have a pretty good rapport that that puts you ahead in the game"	feel like, hey, I need to go and talk to you."
Student-Centered	SC	Decisions/actions/practice influenced or determined based on students' needs	I: "There may be a parent is upset, but if it's what's best for children, we're going to go with that." O: "What do the children need" I: "To walk into a place and know that you have other adults who are teachers that have the best interest for children at heart and they celebrate their victories" O: "Take a look at the Lexile levels for Agee…"	
Experiential	EXP	Experiential learning is an opportunity for growth and development through on the job experience (Mitchell & Poutiatine, 2001; DeRue & Wellman, 1999).	I: "from my experience it has been mostly an advantage for me is because we already know, well these are the	I: "I definitely will say that the transition is more than people think."

			things in which I'm going to stand on."	
Professional Development	PD	Professional Development is specific teaching and learning opportunities geared towards a field of study or work (Zepeda et al., 2015). Leaders often use professional development as a form of teaching and building others. These opportunities enable leaders to learn new strategies and practices.	**O:** "Take a look at the Lexile levels for Agee. Mrs. Glass can you share the strategy you implemented at the beginning of your lesson for Sarah? I believe a similar approach would help reach Agee."	
Systemic	STM	Systematic development is made up of comprehensive models in a system that support leaders in their work and growth (Connaughton et al., 2003). Systematic structures are made up of programs and curriculums put in place by the state or district.	**I:** "I had the opportunity to build these programs as an AP and folks understand that I operate in the interest of children."	

Table 8

Well-Rounded Dean's three dimensions of inquiry

Code	Abbrev.	Definition	Example (O=Observed; I=Interview)	Disconfirming Evidence (O=observed; I=Interview)
Continuity	CN	References to the past, present and future (Connelly, 2000)	**I:** "the then principal told me that she was, she was going to be able to hire an assistant principal the next year. And she asked me to if I was interested in applying. So first I was like, man, I don't know. **I:** "he would be like, well, actually, you know, when I first came, this is how things were and you'd go, oh my gosh, that's crazy. You know? So that helped as well."	**I:** [Going into the principalship] I was probably scared the most, only because [Garvey] is a really high performing school. **I:** "that was definitely one where I was like, I don't know if I'm ready, so this is too much. You know, the amount of communication and planning and more communication"
Interaction	IN	Personal and social exchanges (Connelly &	**O:** "Mrs. Smoulder, we built a	

		Clandinin, 2000; Dewey, 1938)	rollercoaster, you wanna see!"	
			O: "how's your mom doing…the kids loved her during grandparents' day…"	
			O: "Hey, Mrs. Smoulder we love you – thanks again"	
Situation	S	Setting, scene, or place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Dewey, 1938)	**O:** Classrooms were filled with student artwork, reading stations, workstations, cleaning stations and plenty room for play.	
Familiarity/Relationship	FAM	Bond or familiarity with culture, individuals, or organization	**I:** "Um, you know, and by that, I mean I treat them [the students] the same way I treat my own [children]" **I:** "the benefit of being the dean it allowed me to really build better relationships with the staff, you know, that I can now rely on" **I:** "[Since the PD trip] I feel like I have a much better rapport and relationship with	**I:** [For some parents] I don't know if I would say respect is the word, but I think they tolerate me or maybe give me the benefit of a doubt is because of their children…" **I:** "I think as a principal it can be really hard to build genuine relationships with the staff"

			Amy than I did before we went."	
Experiential	EXP	Experiential learning is an opportunity for growth and development through on the job experience (Mitchell & Poutiatine, 2001; DeRue & Wellman, 1999).	**I:** I really started to get a better idea of the end of the invisible networks and the kind of important, like the power of the invisible network,	
Student-Centered	SC	Decisions/actions/practice influenced or determined based on students' needs	**I:** "I do care about the kids and most of them I treat like their mine, you know, good, bad or otherwise." **O:** "The word I would say is just, I think I won, I have won parents over by my relationships with children."	

Appendix K

Table 9

The Brand-New Principal's three dimensions of narrative inquiry

Code	Abbrev.	Definition	Example (O=Observed; I=Interview)	Disconfirming Evidence (O=observed; I=Interview)
Continuity	CN	References to the past, present and future (Connelly, 2000)	**I:** "I kind of see everything as actual learning opportunity, kinda like a half cup full kind of person. **O:** "I remember when I first arrived here, and the teams looked different…I was able to see what each team needed" **I:** "It was my peers that saw me as a leader of the grade level…I was just doing what I should."	**O:** "I saw so many people go into the position just to have it…"
Interaction	IN	Personal and social exchanges (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000; Dewey, 1938)	**O:** "Hey Mr. Aimes, look – I got an A on my test," **O:** Mr. Aimes, my mom said she'll come by the school later to help." **O:** "As principal, part of being productive is having positive	

			interactions with my entire school community"	
Situation	S	Setting, scene, or place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Dewey, 1938)	**O:** Teachers taught in small teams amongst grade levels. **O:** several teachers lined down the hall greeting the many middle school children entering their classrooms. **I:** We have around 750 kids and staff of [about] 40 teachers…"	
Experiential	EXP	Experiential learning is an opportunity for growth and development through on the job experience (Mitchell & Poutiatine, 2001; DeRue & Wellman, 1999).	**I:** "I can't really think of any of these situations that actually didn't prepare me" **I:** "I think [my experience] gave a good foundation for to know what to expect, how to respond to what you expect…also for the unexpected" **I:** "Having those, you know, those experiences shared from other individuals who had already been there and done it,	**I:** "Going into the role, of course, this with any other position has always trepidation"

			um, gives you more well-rounded approach"	
Familiarity/Relationship	FAM	Bond or familiarity with culture, individuals, or organization	**I:** "Relationships also create, you know, not only a strong sense of community but a strong sense of partnership" **I:** "Being familiar with, you know, the stakeholders or community at large prepared me for the role" **O:** "just a few weeks ago, we went into the community and spoke to some of the kids and parents."	
Student-Centered	SC	Decisions/actions/practice influenced or determined based on students' needs	**I:** "She didn't really want to be here, be seen, or be spoken to…she was in the back of the room…students and teachers felt weird…I told myself I wouldn't do that."	**O:** "I understood what we needed in the classroom, but it seemed that I was consumed with buses, cafeteria, and discipline."