

**Secondary Assistant Principals as Instructional Leaders:
Characteristics and Experiences That Contribute to Their
Perceptions of Readiness for the Role**

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Auburn University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Auburn, Alabama
August 6, 2016

Keywords: assistant principal, instructional leadership, mentoring, principal

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Abstract

This quantitative research study examined the characteristics and experiences that are significant in contributing to secondary assistant principals' perceptions of readiness to serve as instructional leaders. Secondary assistant principals were the only group used in this study. Very little can be found in the literature pertaining to assistant principals and their instructional leadership role within the school. According to researchers, school leaders must possess more than just managerial skills in order to attain all of the organization's goals; they must possess effective leadership characteristics (Gülcan, 2012). The researcher studied an existing data set; the results of a survey instrument administered to assistant principals across the state of Alabama. The survey instrument was designed by Dr. Tricia Browne-Ferrigno from the University of Kentucky and Dr. Linda Searby from Auburn University. The experiences and factors that contribute to a secondary assistant principal's perception of readiness as an instructional leader were identified. Age and years of experience were found to have no influence on assistant principals' perceptions of readiness. The number of instructional leadership tasks and responsibilities the principal is willing to share or relinquish to the assistant principal, professional development, and quality principal mentoring were found to greatly impact how well assistant principals perform in their current role as well as their perceptions of readiness to assume the role of principal and instructional leader of the school.

Acknowledgements

I wish to express my appreciation to my dissertation chair, Dr. Linda Searby, for her continued support and guidance throughout this process. Her willingness to provide continuous feedback and advice when I needed it the most was invaluable to the completion of this research study. I would also like to acknowledge and express gratitude to my other committee members, Dr. Ellen Reames, Dr. Lisa Kensler, Dr. Chih-hsuan Wang, and Dr. Brittany Larkin, for their professional guidance, support, and friendship during this study.

I am extremely grateful for my good friend and dissertation partner, Robert Hunter, who encouraged me throughout the dissertation process. Special thanks are due to my late father, Dr. John S. Enloe, Jr., who led, guided, and encouraged me throughout my life and for the majority of the dissertation process. This Christian husband, father, and educator was truly my greatest inspiration.

I wish to dedicate this effort to my beautiful wife, Candy. Her patience, encouragement, and support made this possible. Our children Blake, Brock, Brooke, and Britton have been patient and supportive throughout this process. I thank them for giving up many things to make my dream a reality. I thank God for giving me the ability, health, and desire to achieve this goal.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
List of Tables	viii
List of Figures	ix
CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION	1
Background for the Study: Instructional Leadership	2
Purpose of the Study	3
Problem Statement	4
Methodology and Research Questions.....	5
Significance of the Study	6
Organization of the Study	6
Limitations of the Study.....	7
Definition of Terms.....	8
Summary	12
CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW	14
Instructional Leadership.....	14
New Standards Define the Role of the Principal	20
Age of Accountability.....	26
Trends or Changes	28
Digital Leadership.....	29

Challenges for the Principal as Instructional Leader	33
Special Challenges for the Rural Principal as Instructional Leader	38
The Assistant Principal Assists.....	39
The Role of the Assistant Principal	40
Training Ground for the Principalship.....	42
Challenges for the Assistant Principal as Instructional Leader	43
Socialization of Secondary School Administrators	48
Assistant Principals and Socialization	52
Professional Development	53
Mentoring.....	56
Summary	62
CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY	65
Purpose of the Study	67
The Role of the Researcher.....	67
Methods.....	68
Population and Sample	68
Instrumentation	69
Instrument Reliability	70
Research Design.....	71
Independent / Dependent Variables	71
Research Procedures	71
Institutional Review Board (IRB).....	71
Data Collection	72

Statistical Analysis.....	72
Summary.....	74
CHAPTER IV. PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA.....	75
Introduction.....	75
Methodology and Research Questions.....	76
Instrumentation and Reliability.....	77
Research Design.....	78
Independent / Dependent Variables	79
Population and Sample	79
Results of Research Questions.....	81
Summary of Findings.....	91
Conclusion	93
CHAPTER V. DISCUSSION.....	95
Literature Review Revisited	96
Design of Study and Participant Sample	99
Summary of Findings and Interpretations.....	104
Implications.....	116
The Making of a “Ready” Instructional Leader.....	122
Limitations	123
Recommendations for Further Research.....	124
Researcher’s Positionality and Learning Experiences	127
Summary.....	129
References.....	130

Appendix 1 Alabama Assistant Principal Instructional Leadership Survey 148

Appendix 2 Auburn University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval 160

Appendix 3 Auburn University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Informed Consent Letter . 164

List of Tables

Table 1	Respondents' Age Groups (Survey Question #1).....	69, 80, 103
Table 2	Years of Experience as an Assistant Principal (Survey Question #12) ...	69, 80, 103
Table 3	Survey Research Questions Statistical Analysis.....	73, 104
Table 4	Extent to which Secondary Assistant Principals Perform Instructional Leadership Functions	82
Table 5	Secondary Assistant Principals' Readiness to Serve as Instructional Leaders	83
Table 6	Logistic Regression to Ascertain the Effects of Age and Years of Experience on Perceptions of Readiness	84
Table 7	Test Statistics for Determining Effectiveness of Mentoring Activities	86
Table 8	Effectiveness of District Assigned Formal Mentoring Program.....	86
Table 9	Effectiveness of One-On-One Mentoring By Current Principal.....	87
Table 10	Effectiveness of University Sponsored Mentoring Program	87
Table 11	Effectiveness of State Agency Sponsored Mentoring Program.....	88
Table 12	Effectiveness of Self-Initiated Mentoring Provided By Senior Administrators	88
Table 13	Professional Growth Opportunities That Led Assistant Principals to Report Readiness	89
Table 14	Group Means and Standard Deviations	91

List of Figures

Figure 1	Respondents' Gender (Survey Question # 2).....	102
Figure 2	The Making of a "Ready" Instructional Leader.....	122

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

School leadership competency has been the subject of extensive research since the early 1980s. With major changes taking place in the educational landscape over the past four decades, it follows that school leadership demands have changed as well (Ash, Hodge, & Connell, 2013). According to Armstrong (2014), local and global reforms, rapid technological and demographic shifts, added levels of accountability, and diminished levels of support have created more complex and challenging roles for school leaders. According to Carraway and Young (2015), principals today must focus on the teaching and learning of both the students and the teachers in order for schools to be successful. It is well established that principals can have a positive effect on student performance by influencing teacher behavior (Kowalski, 2010). As instructional leaders, they take responsibility for adult growth, learning, and development as well. Principals must be able to supervise instruction, effectively lead school reform, facilitate professional development for teachers, encourage teachers to take risks and think outside of the box, evaluate teacher performance, and develop curriculum, all while fostering a positive learning environment. The contemporary principalship involves performing all leadership activities that may affect learning within the organization (Gulcan, 2012).

Researchers suggest that many principals are expected to leave or retire from their positions in the near future (Armstrong, 2009; Hunt, 2011; Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett, 2012). As a result, there is a great need for a new generation of principals who can positively influence instruction and learning (Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett, 2012). Already having administrative

experience, assistant principals are the individuals who will inevitably be promoted to fill these positions. With this in mind, it follows that assistant principals should acquire the instructional leadership skills necessary to positively influence instruction and learning prior to assuming the principalship. According to Muijs and Harris (2003), the assistant principal's role has evolved, gradually making way for a much stronger institutional presence. Barnett, Shoho, and Oleszewski (2012) contend that the role of the assistant principal must continue to evolve from the traditional perspective of disciplinarian and manager to a perspective in which enhancing the instructional program of the school is at the forefront. Celikten (2001) believed that an important element in the definition of the responsibilities of the assistant principal ought to include the role of instructional leader. Oleszewski, Shoho, and Barnett (2012) agreed, in part, that two of the most prominent duties of assistant principals are student management and instructional leadership. However, little is known about how the assistant principal develops the capacity to be an instructional leader, or about the perceptions of assistant principals concerning their readiness for this aspect of the role.

Background for the Study: Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership is a skill set developed and demonstrated by effective school leaders to improve teaching and promote learning. This skill set includes the ability to define and clearly communicate a vision, effectively manage the instructional program, facilitate growth by providing adequate professional development opportunities for teachers, and promote a positive school climate (Gulcan, 2012). It is the reason why some administrators are more effective than others at managing their schools and improving teaching and student learning. According to Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004), instructional leadership is the most important responsibility of the principal. Lynch (2012) concurred and added that,

“today’s principals must accept the responsibilities associated with being their schools’ instructional leaders” (p.40).

In 2014, Baylor noted that principals’ top priority must be to improve education, instruction, and learning which will lead to greater student achievement in schools. As instructional leader, the principal must organize the learning environment and contribute to improving the instruction and learning process (Gulcan, 2012). It is the principal’s responsibility to facilitate effective teaching and learning with the primary goal of improving student achievement. According to Carraway and Young (2015), principals understand that for schools to be successful, they must focus on the teaching and learning of both students and teachers. It is well established that good schools have good principals, but, Zepeda (2003) afforded that high-performing schools are led by instructional leaders. Principals must be able to supervise instruction, lead school reform effectively, facilitate professional development for teachers, encourage teachers to take risks and think outside of the box, evaluate teacher performance, and develop curriculum, all while fostering a positive learning environment (Asiyai & Ifeoma, 2013; Gulcan, 2012). The extensive literature concerning the role of the principal and how this role has changed dramatically over the past century is presented in the Review of Literature in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify the characteristics and experiences that are significant in contributing to secondary assistant principals’ perceptions of readiness to serve as instructional leaders. The researcher attempts to answer the question: What factors or experiences contribute to assistant principals’ perception of readiness to be instructional leaders?

This study is based upon the assumption that assistant principals need to develop instructional leadership skills prior to assuming the role of principal in order to be successful school leaders.

Problem Statement

Researchers suggest that many principals are expected to leave or retire from their positions in the near future (Armstrong, 2009; Hunt, 2011; Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett, 2012). As a result, there is a great need for a new generation of principals who can positively influence instruction and learning (Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett, 2012). Already having administrative experience, assistant principals are the individuals who will inevitably be promoted to fill these positions. Daresh and Voss (2001) mentioned that the role of assistant principal serves as a stepping stone to the principalship. That being the case, assistant principals need experience, training specific to their position, professional development, and mentoring in order to successfully fill these positions (Armstrong, 2009; Hunt, 2011). “By far the biggest challenge facing assistant principals,” according to Melton, Mallory, Mays, and Chance (2012), “was the allocation of time for things they considered important” (p. 94). Participants in a study conducted by Armstrong (2014) concurred and mentioned additional challenges such as dealing with overwhelming workloads, conflicting expectations, and high levels of demand from the principal, assistant principal colleagues, and school stakeholders. According to Crow (2006), the assistant principal’s role is too narrowly focused and rarely provides the experiences and the full range of responsibilities needed to prepare for the principalship. Gurley, Anast-May, and Lee (2015) agree and add that the exclusively managerial focus of the assistant principal’s role limits time needed for professional growth and the development of effective leadership skills, therefore making it a questionable training ground for the principalship. In the State of Alabama, both the principal and the assistant principal will soon be evaluated for their instructional leadership

skills. Do assistant principals in the State of Alabama feel ready to serve as instructional leaders? If so, what contributes to this perception of readiness?

Methodology and Research Questions

A quantitative study was undertaken to answer the central research question: What factors, characteristics, or experiences contribute to secondary assistant principals' perceptions of readiness to serve as instructional leaders? Data from a large statewide survey of assistant principals conducted in 2014 in Alabama by Dr. Linda Searby of Auburn University was used for this study. From this existing data set, subsets of data from secondary assistant principals were extracted for this dissertation study. Various statistical tests were conducted (see Chapter Three for detailed explanation) to answer the following six questions:

1. To what extent do secondary assistant principals report they are required to perform the four functions of instructional leadership?
2. To what extent do secondary assistant principals report they are ready to serve as instructional leaders as defined by the four functions of instructional leadership?
3. Which variable, age or years of experience, carries more weight in the perception of readiness of secondary assistant principals to assume the role of instructional leader?
4. For those who reported they were ready to assume the role of instructional leader, which mentoring activities were most effective in assisting their perception of readiness?
5. Which professional growth opportunities did secondary assistant principals participate in that led them to report readiness to serve as instructional leaders?
6. Did the number of professional growth opportunities participated in by secondary assistant principals affect their perceptions of readiness to serve as instructional leaders?

Significance of the Study

Assistant principals are vital school administrators, heavily involved in the day-to-day operations of the school as they work closely with faculty and staff to improve safety, supervision, and student learning. Already having administrative experience, assistant principals are the individuals who will inevitably assume the principalship when current principals leave or retire. This study is based upon the assumption that assistant principals need to develop instructional leadership skills prior to assuming the role of principal in order to maximize their effects on student learning and become successful school leaders. This study focuses on the factors, characteristics, and experiences that are significant in contributing to secondary assistant principals' perceptions of readiness to serve as instructional leaders – a study which has not been conducted before now. This research study also identifies challenges for secondary assistant principals as instructional leaders. Barnett, Shoho, and Oleszewski (2012) contend that the role of the assistant principal must continue to evolve from the traditional perspective of disciplinarian and manager to a perspective in which enhancing the instructional program of the school is at the forefront. This study will add to the knowledge base in educational leadership by offering empirical evidence of the challenges of being an instructional leader and the factors, experiences, and professional characteristics that contribute to an assistant principal's perception of readiness for assuming the role of instructional leader.

Organization of the Study

This study includes four additional chapters that explore the instructional leadership roles of the principal and assistant principal as well as the factors, characteristics, and experiences that are significant in contributing to secondary assistant principals' perceptions of readiness to serve as instructional leaders. Chapter 2 includes a review of related literature. Chapter 3 describes

the methodology of the study to include the research questions, population sample, instrumentation, research design, and procedures. Chapter 4 includes an analysis of the data collected from the secondary assistant principals who participated in the study. Chapter 5 discusses the findings, conclusions, implications for educational leadership, and recommendations for further research.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study include the following:

1. There is a limited amount of literature on assistant principals and their instructional leadership role in schools, making it more difficult to create a conceptual framework for the study;
2. The sample size was acceptable; however, due to the size of the population sampled, the findings may not be generalizable to all secondary assistant principals in the State of Alabama;
3. Due to the fact that only data collected from secondary assistant principals was used in this study, the findings of the study may not be generalizable to assistant principals at other levels in the State of Alabama;
4. Incomplete surveys that were returned by respondents were not counted in the survey data;
5. The conditions where the surveys were completed may have impacted participants' responses;
6. Participants may not have devoted the time necessary to respond appropriately to the survey questions due to the time constraints associated with the assistant principal role; and

7. Survey results were based upon the respondents own perceptions of readiness and may not accurately portray the actual readiness of participants to serve as instructional leaders.

Definition of Terms

Alabama Standards for Instructional Leadership – The new state evaluation system that defines principals and other school administrators as instructional leaders and holds them to eight standards, each having a number of key performance indicators. The key performance indicators are important because they constitute sets of expectations within standards against which administrators’ current practices will be measured. The Alabama Standards for Instructional Leadership are Planning for Continuous Improvement, Teaching and Learning, Human Resources Development, Diversity, Community and Stakeholder Relationships, Technology, Management of the Learning Organization, and Ethics.

Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSS) – An initiative with the primary goal of providing educators, parents, and students with consistent, rigorous, knowledge-based skills to prepare students for college and career (CCSS Initiative Mission Statement, <http://www.corestandards.org/>).

Digital Citizenship – Digital Citizenship describes the norms of appropriate and responsible technology usage. According to the International Society for Technology in Education (2009), good digital citizens:

1. Advocate for equal digital rights and access for all;
2. Treat others with respect in online spaces and never cyberbullies;
3. Does not steal or damage others’ digital work, identity, or property;

4. Makes appropriate decisions when communicating through a variety of digital channels;
5. Uses digital tools to advance their learning and keeps up with changing technologies;
6. Makes responsible online purchasing decisions and protects their payment information;
7. Upholds basic human rights in all digital forums;
8. Protects personal information from outside forces that might cause harm; and
9. Proactively limits health risks of technology.

Digital Leadership – “Digital Leadership consists of a dynamic combination of mindset, behaviors, and skills that are employed to change and enhance school culture through the use of technology” (Sheninger, 2014; p. xix).

Educational Technology – An array of educational tools such as media, machines, or networking hardware used to enhance learning (Sheninger, 2014).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) – Legislation that ensures students with disabilities are provided with a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) that is tailored to their individual needs.

Instructional Leadership – A skill set developed and demonstrated by effective school leaders to improve teaching and promote learning. This skill set includes the ability to define and clearly communicate a vision, effectively manage the instructional program, facilitate growth by providing adequate professional development opportunities for teachers, and promote a positive school climate (Aisiyai & Ifeoma, 2013; Gülcan, 2012; Hallinger, 2005; Leithwood & Seashore-Louis, 2012; Murphy, 1988).

International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) – The International Society for Technology in Education is a nonprofit professional organization dedicated to providing leadership and service to improve teaching and learning through the effective use of technology.

LEAD Alabama – The online formative evaluation process for all administrators in Alabama schools (<http://leadalabama.asc.edu/Public/sdeLogin.aspx>).

Mentoring – Mentoring is a form of professional development in which experienced individuals provide counsel, guidance, and assistance to younger or newer employees to help them develop leadership skills and advance within the organization (Lanna-Lipton, 2009; Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett, 2012).

Formal Mentoring – Formal mentoring relationships typically develop as a result of a state or district initiated programs that assign mentors to protégés with little regard to similarities, values, or background and, according to Ragins and Cotton (1999), are usually much shorter in duration than informal mentoring relationships.

Informal Mentoring – Informal mentoring relationships are much longer in duration than formal mentoring relationships, develop spontaneously (Ragins & Cotton, 1999), and occur when the mentees are free to choose the mentors they feel will best serve their professional development needs. According to Dunbar and Kinnersley (2011), informal mentoring typically develops through mutual selection out of natural interactions between the mentor and mentee and is based upon a relationship of fundamental similarities.

National Educational Technology Standards (NETS) – In June of 1998, the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) developed the first National Education Technology Standards (NETS) for students, teachers, administrators, technology coaches, and computer science teachers in order to encourage the integration of technology in schools to

further enable students to learn effectively and live productively in an increasingly digital society (International Society for Technology in Education, 2009).

National Educational Technology Standards for Administrators (NETS-A) – The NETS for Administrators (NETS-A) contain five standards: (a) visionary leadership, (b) digital age learning culture, (c) excellence in professional practice, (d) systemic improvement, and (e) digital leadership. These standards are the skills and knowledge that school administrators and leaders need to successfully integrate technology in their schools (International Society for Technology in Education, 2009).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) – The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 authorizes several federal education programs that are administered by the states. The law is a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. No Child Left Behind put schools on notice that students would have to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in reading and mathematics with 100% attainment of goals by 2014. As a result, stakeholders require more information concerning curricular processes and educational results which in turn has caused principals to be more focused on student achievement.

Organizational Socialization – Organizational socialization refers to how individuals break free of the roles they occupied in the past and adapt to new roles within the organization (Jones, 1986). Enomoto (2012) notes that organizational socialization is focused on actual practice by the administrator in the new role.

Professional Education Personnel Evaluation Program (PEPE) – The Alabama Professional Education Personnel Evaluation Program (PEPE) was a tool that was designed to deliver quality educational services through performance evaluation and professional growth. Rather than focusing on personal traits, which may or may not relate to the quality of

performance, the program concentrated on competencies and knowledge/skills which effective educators are known to possess, on performance standards, and on results. The evaluation program's primary goal was the improvement of teaching and learning; and it sought to effect growth, collegiality and assistance as opposed to dismissal or demotion. The intended outcomes of the program were written assessments of each educator's performance, documentation of the educator's continuous performance over time, increased accountability, improved performance, and improved quality of education in the State of Alabama. PEPE was replaced in 2011 by LEAD Alabama as the online formative evaluation process for all administrators in Alabama schools.

Professional Socialization – Professional socialization is the process of identifying with the norms and beliefs of the profession to which you have become a member (Armstrong, 2009). It primarily focuses on university preparation for school administrators.

Summary

Assistant Principals are vital resources who support principals in a number of ways. They are heavily involved in the day-to-day operations of their schools as they work closely with faculty and staff to ensure safety, supervision, and student learning. With major changes taking place in the educational landscape and an increase in school accountability, the role of the assistant principal has changed accordingly to include a strong focus on instructional leadership. Some assistant principals perceive themselves as being ready to serve as instructional leaders while others do not. Many assistant principals participate in university preparation programs, receive professional development, or take advantage of formal or informal mentoring opportunities that ultimately contribute to their perceptions of readiness to serve as instructional leaders. In the following chapters, the researcher provides a review of current literature,

methodology, survey analysis, and implications for secondary assistant principals as instructional leaders.

CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to identify the factors, characteristics, or experiences that are significant in contributing to secondary assistant principals' perceptions of readiness to serve as instructional leaders. The research question guiding this study was: What factors, characteristics, or experiences contribute to secondary assistant principals' perceptions of readiness to serve as instructional leaders? Before delving into this study, a review of current literature was conducted to discuss instructional leadership and why it plays such an important role in the effective schools today. The roles of the principal and the assistant principal, changes to these roles, and the impact that accountability has had on school leaders are discussed. Challenges for principals and assistant principals as instructional leaders, such as time and daily demands, pressure resulting from comparison to predecessors, teacher resistance, and the responsibility for increasing student performance are reviewed. The review of current literature culminates with a brief discussion of the induction and socialization of principals into their new roles and the professional development and mentoring opportunities that have been deemed as beneficial to the role.

Instructional Leadership

School leadership competency has been the subject of extensive research since the early 1980s. With major changes taking place in the educational landscape over the past four decades, it follows that school leadership demands have changed as well (Ash, Hodge, & Connell, 2013). According to Armstrong (2014), local and global reforms, rapid technological and demographic

shifts, added levels of accountability, and diminished levels of support have created more complex and challenging roles for school leaders. In the past, principals focused primarily on non-instructional managerial concerns such as hiring, budget decisions, building maintenance, and scheduling. School leaders today must possess more than just managerial skills in order to attain all of the organization's goals; they must possess effective leadership characteristics (Gulcan, 2012). School administrators must become the instructional leaders of their respective schools in order to ensure the academic success of their students. Instructional leadership has come into prominence with an increase in expectations and accountability and has drawn considerable interest of researchers (Hallinger, 2005).

It is well established in the literature that principals' practices positively affect student learning (Ash, Hodge, & Connell, 2013; Asiyai & Ifeoma, 2013; Carraway & Young, 2015; Gulcan, 2012; Hamilton, 2010; Kowalski, 2010; Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004; Purinton, 2013; Rigby, 2014; Sahin, 2011; Wallin & Newton, 2013). According to Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom (2004), the principal's leadership is second only to teacher instruction as a factor that contributes to student learning in schools. Principals are the cornerstone of student achievement (Sahin, 2011). Hamilton (2010) noted that "the presence of a knowledgeable and skillful principal positively impacts the probability of increasing student performance" (p. 1). Among the explanations as to why some principals are more effective than others, the notion of the practice of instructional leadership echoes the loudest in the existing literature on educational administration (Grissom, Loeb, & Master, 2013).

The term *instructional leadership* dates back to the mid-1980s. There are many definitions and descriptions of instructional leadership in the literature. Flath (1989), who

provided us with one of the earliest definitions, defined instructional leadership as those actions taken by a principal to promote growth in student learning. Glickman (1985) offered that assisting teachers, fostering group and staff development, developing curriculum, and conducting action research are the primary tasks of an instructional leader. Murphy (1988) described instructional leadership as the class of leadership functions that support teaching and student learning. In 2005, Hallinger summarized instructional leadership as the clear communication of a school's mission and/or vision, the effective management of the instructional program, and the fostering of a positive school climate. According to Asiyai and Ifeoma (2013), instructional leadership is exhibited when school leaders focus on learning and instruction. It involves supervision of instruction, leading change, facilitating teacher professional development, encouraging risk taking, performance evaluation, curriculum development, and the fostering of an environment that is conducive to teaching and learning. It is basically the process of performing all leadership activities that may affect learning within the organization (Gulcan, 2012).

Leithwood and Seashore-Louis (2012) developed the following operational definition of instructional leadership based on a comprehensive review of literature on leading learning and teaching in P-12 schools. It is the definition that was utilized in the current study reported in this dissertation. Instructional leadership is a combination of knowledge, skills, and dispositions demonstrated by the school leader and characterized by her or his active engagement in

- (a) *Setting direction* (i.e., building and sustaining a shared vision for student achievement, fostering acceptance of group goals, articulating high performance expectations, staying aware of external influences),

- (b) *Developing people* (i.e., expanding knowledge about what constitutes quality teaching, providing formal and informal professional development for staff, being available),
 - (c) *Focusing on learning* (i.e., discussing instructional strategies and student learning with teachers, using observation and assessment data to initiate reflective conversations with teachers about achievement goals, using data to inform decisions about the instructional program, conducting action research to improve professional practice and student performance), and
 - (d) *Improving the instructional program* (i.e., designing a system of collaboration and support for teachers through professional learning communities, monitoring classrooms regularly, providing essential instructional materials and resources).
- (Leithwood & Seashore-Lewis, 2012)

According to Carraway and Young (2015), principals today must focus on educating both students and the teachers in order for schools to be successful. It is well established that principals can have a positive effect on student performance by influencing teacher behavior (Kowalski, 2010; Leithwood & Seashore-Louis, 2012). As instructional leaders, they take responsibility for adult growth, learning, and development as well. They are able to effectively lead people; not just programs. They provide the support, professional development, and positive school climate necessary to promote overall teacher growth. According to Asiyai and Ifeoma (2013), principals can facilitate instruction and learning in school by providing effective instructional leadership. Kruger (2008) also maintained that good instructional leadership is the key to good instruction. Purinton (2013) noted that strategy, policy, research and

experimentation have increased the extent to which effective leadership is seen as a primary catalyst of teacher performance.

Several authors in the literature suggest that instructional leaders should regularly get out of the office and into the classrooms in order to know what is actually happening in the classrooms; this is the only way to make informed decisions concerning teaching and learning (Grissom, Loeb, & Master, 2013; Palandra, 2010; Protheroe, 2009). Protheroe (2009) noted that good principals frequently visit classrooms using formal observations or informal walkthroughs. Palandra (2010) noted that frequent observation and the provision of meaningful feedback about an individual teacher's work in the classroom may serve as a powerful tool for instructional improvement. A study conducted by Grissom, Loeb, and Master (2013) yielded results providing evidence that walkthroughs are a principal's primary source of information about a teacher's level of practice; however, they are only beneficial to improving instruction if they feature some component of feedback. These findings supported prior research conducted by Downy, Steffy, English, Frase, and Poston (2004). Principals must be able to engage in professional dialogue with teachers concerning the teaching and learning that occurs in the classroom. These conversations require knowledge about the curriculum and appropriate teaching strategies. In order to effectively influence teacher behavior, the principal must be seen as a credible instructional leader by his or her teachers (Hassenpflug, 2013). Effective instructional leaders are confident in their content-specific knowledge and regularly carry out meaningful dialogue with teachers concerning student achievement. According to Blasé and Blasé (1999), talking with teachers inside and outside of instructional conferences is the cornerstone of effective leadership. Principals can indirectly impact student learning by improving and maintaining effective lines of communication with teachers. Asiyai and Ifeoma

(2013) stated that being visibly present in the school is another instructional leadership behavior of the principal that is invaluable to teacher morale and student perceptions of the school.

Principals can also have a major impact on teaching and learning by introducing changes to improve school culture. According to Deal and Peterson (1993), school culture is the “inner reality” of the school that reflects the overall climate or learning environment. Peterson (2002) added that school culture refers to the values, patterns, and beliefs that develop over time in a school community influencing how people think, feel, and act. Peterson (2002) suggested that school leaders, teachers, parents, and students can work together over time to build or even change school culture. Hamilton (2010) offered that “principals serve the students, teachers, parents, and community as instructional leaders. They focus on the elevation of student achievement and development of a positive climate” (p. 2). Ohlsen (2009) noted that a strong positive relationship exists between instructional leadership and school culture. Khan (2012) added that instructional leaders serve as the link between student learning and the development of a culture in which adult learning can take place. A positive school culture reinforces the relationship between effective teaching and leadership (Ohlsen, 2009). Sahin (2011) suggested that school leaders, as the primary role model in their schools, should exhibit instructional leadership behaviors as these skills help to unite vision and mission and tend to improve overall school culture. Ohlsen (2009) added that “it is often the school culture that influences staff development and professional growth” (p. 103).

In summary, instructional leadership is a skill set developed and demonstrated by effective school leaders to improve teaching and promote learning. This skill set includes the ability to define and clearly communicate a vision, effectively manage the instructional program, facilitate growth by providing adequate professional development opportunities for teachers, and

promoting a positive school climate. It is the reason why some administrators are more effective than others at managing their schools and improving teaching and student learning. According to Leithwood, et al. (2004), instructional leadership is the most important responsibility of the principal. The extensive literature concerning the role of the principal and how this role has changed dramatically over the past century is presented in the following section of this literature review.

New Standards Define the Role of the Principal

The role of the school principal is a topic that has been widely researched and discussed in the literature. The role of principal, as defined by the Alabama Professional Education Personnel Evaluation Program (PEPE), is to serve as the instructional and administrative leader of the school, to work with the staff, students, and community to ensure a high-quality educational program, and to formulate and accomplish the school mission. It is to provide leadership for an environment of high expectations for both staff and students. In an effort to enhance school leadership among principals and administrators in Alabama, the Alabama Professional Education Personnel Evaluation Program (PEPE) was replaced in 2011 with LEAD Alabama as the online formative evaluation process for all administrators in Alabama schools. This new state evaluation system defines principals and other school administrators as instructional leaders and holds them to eight standards, each having a number of key performance indicators. The key performance indicators are important because they constitute sets of expectations within standards against which administrators' current practices will be measured.

The Alabama Standards for Instructional Leadership are: Planning for Continuous Improvement, Teaching and Learning, Human Resources Development, Diversity, Community

and Stakeholder Relationships, Technology, Management of the Learning Organization, and Ethics. These new standards were established to help realize the mission of enhancing school leadership among principals and administrators in Alabama resulting in improved academic achievement for all students. Under standard one, principals' are expected to engage the school community in developing and maintaining a shared vision; plan effectively; use critical thinking and problem-solving techniques; collect, analyze, and interpret data; allocate resources; and evaluate results for the purpose of continuous improvement. Principals are to improve their level of practice under standard two by promoting and monitoring the success of all students in the learning environment by collaboratively aligning the curriculum; by aligning the instruction and the assessment processes to ensure effective student achievement; and by using a variety of benchmarks, learning expectations, and feedback measures to ensure accountability. Under standard three, principals are to recruit, select, organize, evaluate, and mentor faculty and staff to accomplish school and system goals. Under standard four, they are expected to respond to and influence the larger personal, political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context in the classroom, school, and the local community while addressing diverse student needs to ensure the success of all students. Principals are expected to improve their level of practice under standard five by identifying the unique characteristics of the community to create and sustain mutually supportive family-school relations. Under standard six, they are to plan, implement, and evaluate the effective integration of current technologies and electronic tools in teaching, management, research, and communication. Under standard seven, they are expected to manage the organization, facilities, and financial resources; implement operational plans; and promote collaboration to create a safe and effective learning environment. Finally, under standard eight,

principals are to demonstrate honesty, integrity, and fairness to guide school policies and practices consistent with current legal and ethical standards for professional educators.

From the works of Asiyai and Ifeoma (2013), Balyer (2014), Black (2001), Catano and Stronge (2007), Hess and Kelly (2007), Leithwood et al. (2004), Lynch (2012), Preston, Jakubiec, and Kooymans (2013), Wallin and Newton (2013), and Watkins (2005), one can identify five areas of responsibility for the contemporary school principal. These five areas of responsibility include the overall organization and management of the school, shaping the schools future, personnel management, instructional leadership, and school/community relations. The *overall organization and management* of a school includes a myriad of non-instructional tasks that can overwhelm principals and keep them from getting into the classroom as much as they would like. As a result, some of these tasks and duties may be delegated to assistants or other trustworthy designees. These tasks may include overseeing student safety and supervision, ensuring proper order and discipline, monitoring school finances, interpreting and acting upon school law, and tending to the typical day to day operational duties involved with running a school. According to Catano and Stronge (2007), good management requires a level of consistency and daily operations that must be expedited in a fair manner. Even though there is more emphasis today on improving teaching and instruction, this “technical knowledge” or managerial aspect of how to operate a school is something that every principal must still possess (Hess & Kelley, 2007).

Secondly, an effective principal will *shape the school's future* by establishing and clearly communicating a shared vision and mission to the school and all of its stakeholders. Attainable goals will then collectively be set and the administrator will lead, encourage, and motivate the faculty, staff, and students towards the successful attainment of those goals. According to

Leithwood, et al. (2004), instructional leaders set direction in their respective schools by building and communicating a compelling vision, developing shared goals, planning and organizing, clarifying objectives, motivating and inspiring others, and setting high expectations for performance. A study conducted by Catano and Stronge (2007) of 132 school districts in the State of Virginia produced results that reveal that 70% of the school districts evaluate principal performance in the area of facilitation of a vision focused upon high standards of learning where school leaders use assessment data to develop the school's vision, mission, and goals. According to Ash, Hodge, and Connell (2013), focusing on direction is a critical practice for effective principals who focus on learning. Effective school principals provide their organizations with a sense of direction and a vision for the future.

The third area of responsibility for the principal that was gleaned from the literature is that of *personnel management*. Principals fill many crucial roles in the operation of schools, but none more important than the retention and development of new staff members (Watkins, 2005). The principal's role as personnel leader is one that will ultimately determine success as principal and should be accordingly balanced with managerial duties. The school leader is second only to the teacher among school-related factors that impact student learning (Leithwood et al., 2004), so they need to hire well. As those responsible for hiring new employees at their respective schools, principals have the unique ability to quickly improve the quality of instruction in the classroom, thereby improving student performance. Effective principals raise the bar when it comes to hiring teachers and then supports those teachers with quality professional development and resources to improve instruction. According to Watkins (2005), "retaining and developing quality teachers must become a principal's top priority" (p. 83). Hess and Kelly (2007) added that "the pressures of accountability have added new significance to the principal's role as

personnel manager, increasing the expectations for administrators to hire, induct, and evaluate personnel in a sensible manner” (p. 247).

Upon hiring quality instructors, principals must provide for their professional growth and instructional well-being. Although a lot of the training is done during induction by mentoring teachers, it is still the principal’s duty to see that teachers are sufficiently trained in how to perform their duties. In reference to developing people, Wallin and Newton (2013) stated that school leaders must foster and engage in opportunities to mentor others, model appropriate practices, provide support and intellectual stimulation, and recognize good work and good people. One way that principals can support and develop their teachers is by establishing a learning community that values the ideas and experiences of all of its members. This could sustain new teachers through the early years by providing encouragement, support, and intellectual stimulation from their colleagues. Without a strong learning community that supports new teachers, the principal could face attrition rates that affect student achievement (Watkins, 2005).

Asiyai and Ifeoma (2013) offered that principal effectiveness in the area of teacher training and development can determine the level of teacher job commitment and academic achievement of students. The principal should never place teacher training and development on another person or support team. According to Black (2001), principals that are involved in the teacher training process have the most competent and qualified teachers. It is well documented in the literature cited above that the importance of the human resources function in the role of principal cannot be emphasized enough. A school is only as good as the personnel the principal employs, trains, develops, and retains. Personnel performance is the core element fundamental to any organizational endeavor. Planning, recruitment, selection, training and development,

performance appraisal, and compensation are personnel issues that a principal must attend to in order to be effective (Asiyai & Ifeoma, 2013; Black, 2001; Hess & Kelly, 2007; Wallin & Newton, 2013; Watkins, 2005).

The fourth area of responsibility, widely discussed in the literature as the most important principal responsibility, is that of *instructional leadership* (Aisiyai & Ifeoma, 2013; Baylor, 2014; Carraway & Young, 2015; Gulcan, 2012; Leithwood, et al., 2004; Sheninger, 2014; Zepeda, 2003). According to Leithwood (2004), instructional leadership is the most important responsibility of the principal. Lynch (2012) concurred and added that, “today’s principals must accept the responsibilities associated with being their schools’ instructional leaders” (p. 40). In 2014, Baylor noted that principals’ top priority must be to improve education, instruction, and learning which will lead to greater student achievement in schools. As instructional leader, the principal must organize the learning environment and contribute to improving the instruction and learning process (Aisiyai & Ifeoma, 2013; Gulcan, 2012). It is the principals’ responsibility to facilitate effective teaching and learning with the primary goal of improving student achievement. It is well established that good schools have good principals, but Zepeda (2003) affirmed that high-performing schools are led by instructional leaders. Principals must be able to supervise instruction, lead school reform effectively, facilitate professional development for teachers, encourage teachers to take risks and think outside of the box, evaluate teacher performance, and develop curriculum, all while fostering a positive learning environment.

The fifth and final area of responsibility that has been identified is that of *school/community relations*. It is impossible to effectively educate the children of a particular community without having the local community as an educational partner (Balyer, 2014). The best interests of students, parents, and community members require a school leader who is

knowledgeable of all educational policies, yet receptive to the distinct needs, perceptions, and culture of educational stakeholders in the community (Preston, Jakubiec, & Kooymans; 2013). Principals must be able to effectively conciliate relations within the local community as well as the overall school system. According to Balyer (2014), “as schools are influenced by the social and cultural contexts in which they operate, establishing cooperative relations between the school and its community becomes vital for realizing the school’s vision” (p. 27). Within this context, principals should develop a productive partnership with other institutions, bodies, and organizations within or around school communities (Balyer, 2014). By working alongside and learning from members of the community, students learn a great deal more than just using the resources that the school alone can offer. These partnerships allow the stakeholders to play a more active part in the educational process as well and prepares students by giving them the practical hands-on workplace experience that will pave the way to employment in their desired professions. Through committed and effective public relations, the principal influences both the state- and community-level perceptions of the school (Hess & Kelly, 2007). Increased principal effectiveness in the area of school/community relations serves both students and communities as schools prepare students to advance into adulthood (Catano & Stronge, 2007).

Age of Accountability

The principal’s job changed dramatically in 2001 with the ushering in of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett, 2012). No Child Left Behind put schools on notice that students would have to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in reading, mathematics, science, and social studies each year, with 100% attainment of goals by 2014. As a result, stakeholders require more information concerning curricular processes and educational results which in turn has caused principals to be more focused on student achievement. As a

matter of fact, their job performance rests on the performance of all students, including those students with disabilities (Lynch, 2012). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA) increased the principal's responsibilities by mandating that students with disabilities receive individualized instruction in the least restrictive environment.

The renewal of IDEA in 2004 authorized the implementation of the Response To Instruction (RTI) system (Hamilton, 2010). RTI is a system that utilizes regular student assessment, data analysis, frequent monitoring, and student response data to make decisions concerning student placement. Under this system, students are identified who cannot meet grade level core requirements in English and math and they receive individualized instruction specific to their learning deficit. This help may come in the form of three tiers of instruction and, if implemented appropriately, reduces the number of unnecessary referrals and placements in special education services (Hamilton, 2010). According to Hamilton (2010), the role of the principal is critical to maximizing the effect of RTI implementation.

According to Catano and Stronge (2007), increased emphasis on accountability has seen a commensurate increase in the number of responsibilities expected of principals. Another example of this is the Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSS) of 2010 that placed another task upon principals to monitor new standards in English language arts and mathematics for kindergarten through twelfth grades. The goal of the standards initiative was to provide educators, parents, and students with consistent, rigorous, knowledge-based skills to prepare students for college and career (CCSS Initiative Mission Statement). The political pressure of high stakes accountability requires principals to balance improving instruction and student achievement with the overall management of the organization. This increased accountability and

responsibility has been a major factor in the changing roles of the principal and has made the school principal the primary agent of school reform.

Trends or Changes

There is extensive literature on the principal's role and how it has changed dramatically over the course of the past century (Armstrong, 2014; Balyer, 2014; Leithwood & Levin, 2005; Lynch, 2012; Rousmaniere, 2007; Siegrist, Weeks, Pate, & Monetti, 2009). In 2005, Leithwood and Levin defined the role of principal as an individual who does not directly teach, but who influences teaching and learning in the school indirectly through the supervision of teachers and management of instruction. This definition, however, has not always been accurate. Originally, students were all taught in a single, one room school house, containing every grade, ability level, and subject taught by one teacher. As the number of students and the services provided increased, there became a demand for more teachers. The principal was originally a veteran teacher, called at that time the "principal teacher," who not only taught but was responsible for the daily organization and management of the school. Eventually, the teaching and other duties required became so time consuming that they had to focus strictly on school management. Around that time they began to be known as just the "principal" instead of the "principal teacher." According to Rousmaniere (2007), these early administrators worked almost entirely free of job descriptions, legal guidelines, professional support, and their professional relationships with their superiors and their teachers were often unregulated. By the mid-twentieth century, the principal's office was established, but its professional status was quite uncertain.

Lynch (2012) stated that "historically, principals served as disciplinarians and the teachers' boss" (p. 40). In the process of school reform that has followed over the past 70 years,

the role of the principal has become increasingly more complex. Recent changes in the educational environment have influenced these changes in the leadership role of the principal. According to Balyer (2014), during this process of change, principals were at one time termed the legal leaders of their school in the 1950s and the school's human resources managers in the 1970s. By the beginning of the 1980s they were viewed as being the managers of their school and by the 1990s they were considered to be school change experts. With a drastic change in the environment, goals, and student expectations, the educational administration role has seen diverse changes accordingly. It is essential for administrators to change their management practices (Balyer, 2014). The principal's role in the educational process has shifted from that of manager to instructional leader resulting in an increasingly diverse set of responsibilities (Siegrist, Weeks, Pate, & Monetti, 2009). According to Armstrong (2014), local and global reforms, rapid technological and demographic shifts, added levels of accountability, and diminished levels of support have created more complex and challenging roles for school leaders. In the past, principals focused primarily on non-instructional managerial concerns such as hiring, budget decisions, building maintenance, and scheduling. School leaders today must possess more than just managerial skills in order to attain all of the organization's goals; they must possess effective leadership characteristics (Gulcan, 2012). Their new roles have continually transformed the expectations on leaders in today's schools.

Digital Leadership

There has been an increased demand to prepare students for the twenty-first century by ensuring that they are college and workforce ready, having the ability to compete in this ever-changing technological and globalized society (Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett, 2012). In order to meet these needs, schools require a new generation of leaders who can transform schools and

provide instructional leadership unlike previous generations. Technology has become a part of everyday life and its integration into school curriculum is yet another important issue that school administrators must address (Crowne, 2008). According to Sheninger (2014), advancements in educational technology have added a new challenge to the principal's instructional leadership role and have made it imperative that principals establish a vision and implement a strategic process that fosters a positive culture of teaching and learning. This new school culture must provide students with the following essential skill sets—creativity, communication, collaboration, critical thinking, problem solving, technological proficiency, and global awareness (Sheninger, 2014). According to Crowne (2008), technology should be used by school leaders to transform the learning experience of all students. Crowne continued by adding that administrators and teachers should make the most of technology as learners deserve no less than the best that can be given them. Principals must be innovative, they must facilitate the integration of technology into the curriculum, and they must provide teachers with effective professional development in order to ensure that students are graduating with the skills and knowledge necessary to successfully compete for employment in the digital age (Crowne, 2008; Hayes, 2006; Sheninger, 2014).

In June of 1998, the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) developed the first National Education Technology Standards (NETS) for students, teachers, administrators, technology coaches, and computer science teachers in order to encourage the integration of technology in schools. These standards were later revised in 2000. In November of 2001, NETS for Administrators was released. The NETS for Administrators (NETS-A) contain five standards: (a) visionary leadership, (b) digital age learning culture, (c) excellence in professional practice, (d) systemic improvement, and (e) digital leadership. These standards are the skills and

knowledge that school administrators and leaders need to successfully integrate technology in their schools (ISTE, 2009).

The literature strongly suggests that principal leadership is the prominent factor in successful technology integration in schools today (Chang, 2012; Dawson & Rakes, 2003; Holt & Burkman, 2013; Polizzi, 2011; Ramirez, 2011; Sheninger, 2014; Wang, Hsu, Campbell, Coster, & Longhurst, 2014; Waxman, Boriack, Lee, & MacNeil, 2013). Technology has changed the very nature of our current generation (Wang et al., 2014). Because our students today are digital natives, always immersed in or in contact with some form of digital device, they have developed different ways of learning and expressing themselves. According to Sheninger (2014), “Advances in technology have led to changes in the way people communicate, collaborate, solve problems, create projects, and consume content” (p. xvii). A study conducted by Holt and Burkman (2013) found that technology, used appropriately to enhance curriculum, has a positive impact on student achievement. The goal of technology integration, however, is to engage learners, not to simply use technology for technology sake (Holt & Burkman, 2013). According to Chang (2012), principals who can embrace their ever-changing roles and become leaders in technology integration will be able to effectively lead their schools for many decades to come. Ramirez (2011), stated that “school administrators must recognize the importance of becoming users of technology in order to maximize their effectiveness as instructional leaders” (p. 72). They must be innovative, effectively facilitating the integration of technology into the school curriculum and providing meaningful professional development in order to supply students with the technical knowledge and skills needed to compete for employment in the digital age (Sheninger, 2014).

Two factors have been identified in the literature that could hinder the integration of technology into schools: principals' perceptions of technology in schools and teachers' resistance to change. According to Polizzi (2011), successful technology integration in schools requires that the adopters (the school principals) hold favorable attitudes towards technology integration. A study conducted by Waxman, Boriack, Lee, and MacNeil (2013) on a sample of 311 principals from the southwestern United States, yielded results indicating that gender and years of experience greatly influence the principal's perceptions of technology use in schools. Older principals lacked the technical skills to effectively promote technology integration and, as a result, typically had a negative view of technology use in the classroom. Another major barrier to successful technology integration mentioned in the literature is teachers' resistance to change. According to Dawson and Rakes (2003), the resistance of teachers to change is a fundamental reason for the lack of technological progress in schools. Many of the older teachers are used to traditional teaching methods and struggle to learn how to use the new technologies that are available to them today. Technology is oftentimes not fully integrated into a school because administrators do not afford an appropriate amount of attention to individual teacher concerns and readiness to change (Dawson & Rakes, 2003). This is where the instructional leader becomes a digital leader. A digital leader will provide teachers with the individualized one-on-one support and professional development necessary to help alleviate the stress associated with new technology integration (Sheninger, 2014).

According to Ivester (2011), technology has fundamentally changed high school life in many positive ways, but also in some negative ways. Digital tools, however useful they may be, provide administrators with yet another entirely new set of possible issues and problems to address (Ivester, 2001; Ribble, 2012; Sheninger, 2014). According to Ribble (2012), school

leaders must be concerned about teachers being behind students in their technological know-how as well as situations where students use their technology inappropriately; these situations include student's reputation management, how they treat others on-line (cyberbullying), and ethical digital citizenship. This list of issues and concerns will most certainly continue to grow as new educational technologies are developed and introduced into the curriculum. This being the case, it is imperative that digital citizenship be taught to our students today (Ribble, 2012).

Challenges for the Principal as Instructional Leader

While the principalship is often quite rewarding, it can present new principals with many challenges and difficulties (Farley-Ripple, Raffel, & Welch, 2012; Lee, 2015; Spillane & Lee, 2014). According to Barnett, Shoho, and Oleszewski (2012), as they take on the job for the first time, principals contend with four types of difficulties: workload demands, pressure resulting from comparison to predecessors, teacher resistance, and the responsibility for increasing student performance. School administrators are often overwhelmed by the daily demands that have no connection to instructional improvement (Barnett, Shoho, & Oleszewski, 2012; Carraway & Young, 2015; Catano & Story, 2007; Celikten, 2001; Pounder & Merrill, 2001; Sackney & Walker, 2006). Sackney and Walker (2006) describe the position as involving numerous brief encounters and multitasking. Disruptive students, angry parents, managerial concerns, untimely meetings, and other time-taking demands can foster challenges that diminish the instructional leadership focus of many administrators. Sackney and Walker (2006) noted that "the long hours, excessive workloads, increased responsibility, and great expectations leads to considerable stress" (p. 344) for principals. According to Walker and Qian (2006), principals quickly discover that educational aims are difficult to pursue due to the time afforded to administrative matters. Having little or no help, many administrators flounder about as they attempt to juggle

the numerous demands placed upon them (Sackney & Walker, 2006). Cheung and Walker (2006) add to the literature by stating that “traversing such a multifaceted terrain is difficult enough for even the most seasoned leaders, and even more so for those taking their first steps into the principal’s office” (p. 389).

A qualitative study conducted by Pounder and Merrill (2001) explored potential candidates’ views of a number of high school principal job attributes along with their perceptions of the position’s overall job desirability. The findings of the study suggest that the time demands placed upon the principal is a major detractor to the position. In fact, the changing role of the principal, in light of recent reforms, is now perceived to be more complex than in past decades (Stone-Johnson, 2014). It is not surprising then, with the increased pressures and the complexities of this new role, that many potential principals are rethinking their decision to take on such a role (Ash, Hodge, & Connell, 2013; Pounder & Merrill, 2001; Stone-Johnson, 2014). From the previously mentioned study, Pounder and Merrill (2001) also discovered that the probability of being offered a job, the desire to achieve and influence education, the additional time demands of the position, and the position’s salary and benefits were the four significant predictors of the overall desirability of the principalship.

Another major challenge that must be overcome by many new principals is living up to the expectations created by the previous administration. Several researchers note in the literature that school community members often compare the new administrator to the previous one and are likely to resist any changes to the school norm (Cheung & Walker, 2006; Hart, 1993; Spillane & Lee, 2014; Walker & Qian, 2006). Many principals struggle to live up to or overcome the legacy, level of practice, and style of the previous principal (Hart, 1993; Spillane & Lee, 2014). According to Walker and Qian (2006) “many principals are faced with the ghosts

of principals past and their lasting influence on the school” (p. 301). A study conducted by Lester (2011) produced findings that indicate working together with teachers and community members toward improved educational outcomes is the only way build mutual trust and respect and facilitate acceptance of the new principal. Without the development of trust and respect, according to Lester (2011), the principal will remain the “new Principal” (p. 83). Briggs, Bush, and Middlewood (2006) discovered through a qualitative study of newly appointed school principals that previous school leaders had an effect on staff expectations, even if they were not thought to be successful leaders. Rather than focusing upon what the new individual can offer the school, the new principal is inevitably compared with the previous principal (Briggs, Bush, & Middlewood, 2006). Being compared to one’s predecessor results in pressure to match the previous administrator’s accomplishments and can create an undue amount of stress on the new principal (Barnett, Shoho, & Oleszewski, 2012; Briggs, Bush, & Middlewood, 2006).

Teacher resistance to change poses yet another significant challenge for many beginning principals (Nelson, de la Colina, & Boone 2008; Spillane & Lee, 2014). Fink and Brayman (2006) noted that principal transition can be an upsetting time for teachers and principals alike and often gives rise to problems and challenges. Lee (2015) added that if principal succession is intended to change the status quo within the school, the new principal will face even greater resistance and opposition to changing practices. A principal may even experience a situation where teachers “act less maturely than those they teach” (Malone & Caddell, 2000, p. 162). According to Lee (2015), “the new principal often finds that supporting, reprimanding, and counseling out these individuals is difficult and stressful” (p. 264). To lessen the challenges of teacher/staff resistance, Northfield (2014) adds that new administrators must quickly solidify their position as the school’s authority figure and develop and nurture a relationship of trust with

their teachers. Building this trusting relationship, however, takes time. The findings of a study conducted by Fink and Brayman (2006) suggest that principals need sufficient time to negotiate an identity and find acceptance within their schools. Walker and Qian (2006) encourage new principals to work closely with students, teachers, and parents to improve communication and build a relationship of trust that will help to move the school forward.

Yet another challenge for the school principal is the responsibility to increase student performance. Principals are increasingly being held accountable for student achievement by policy makers (Spillane & Hunt, 2010). According to Siegrist, Weeks, Pate, and Monetti (2009), “any meaningful discussion on the principal’s influence on student achievement must include an examination of the changing leadership roles of the principalship” (p. 174). Northfield (2014) added that

the current context of educational reform places greater responsibility on principals to positively impact student achievement via direct influence on the teaching and learning process, while, at the same time, requiring those principals to perform increased bureaucratic and management tasks that ultimately limit and reduce their ability to be instructional leaders. (p. 170)

Today, leaders of 21st century schools must incorporate school safety, crisis management, cultural diversity, marketing, public relations, grant writing, data management, and technology integration into their job skills while simultaneously working to improve student performance (Siegrist, Weeks, Pate, & Monetti, 2009). To add even more to the existing challenges, principals are expected to increase student performance even though the number of special needs and at-risk students are steadily increasing (Lynch, 2012; Walker & Carr-Stewart, 2006).

According to Walker and Carr-Stewart (2006), “This has placed a tremendous amount of pressure upon principals” (p. 18).

The increase in accountability due to No Child Left Behind, state testing, and accountability programs, has forced principals to become more involved and more proficient in the areas of academic achievement (Siegrist, Weeks, Pate, & Monetti, 2009). Tatlah, Iqbal, Amin, and Quraishi (2014) add that influential behaviors of principals can have an impact on student achievement. Many times, principals’ attitudes and/or beliefs about their ability to impact student achievement play a role in actually increasing student achievement. The results of a study conducted by Siegrist, Weeks, Pate, and Monetti (2009) suggest that there is a significant relationship between a principal’s beliefs about his or her ability to influence student achievement and actual student achievement. From this study it can be concluded that principals who lack confidence or who have a tendency to be pessimistic could find increasing student performance to be a more challenging and formidable task. According to Walker and Carr-Stewart (2006), the self-efficacy (self-judgement about one’s capabilities) of beginning principals to perform certain leadership and administrative tasks has been shown to influence their overall motivation for improving instruction and improving student performance.

In addition to these challenges, the research indicates that the principal’s role can be very isolated and lonely (Lee, 2015; Walker, Anderson, Sackney, & Woolf, 2003; Walker & Qian, 2006). According to Spillane and Lee (2014), “new principals often struggle with feelings of professional isolation and loneliness as they transition into a role that carries ultimate responsibility and decision-making powers” (p. 433). Moving up in the leadership hierarchy naturally makes former peers and colleagues view the principal differently. Beginning principals are often surprised by how assuming the title of principal immediately results in teachers and

other faculty members becoming distant and more cautious around them (Spillane & Lee, 2014). According to Sackney and Walker (2006), principals may lose friends who were former peers as a result of this new role transition. Because of this, they add that “the resulting behavior on the part of some beginning principals is to depersonalize their job” (p. 345). To counter this feeling of loneliness and isolation, many administrators form networking and peer relationships with other principals (Farley-Ripple, Raffel, & Welch, 2012). According to Walker and Qian (2006), however, they may also feel isolated from their principal colleagues “given the competitive environment between schools” (p. 301).

Special Challenges for the Rural Principal as Instructional Leader

The state of Alabama, where this study was conducted, is predominantly a rural state; therefore, it is important to point out some special challenges faced by rural principals. It has been noted in the literature that rural principals face significantly more challenges in their role than their urban counterparts (Ashton & Duncan, 2012; Enomoto, 2012; Preston, Jakubiec, & Kooymans, 2013; Renihan & Noonan, 2012; Wallin & Newton, 2013). They commonly face specific sociocultural and economic challenges uniquely associated with rural school settings that may include hiring constraints, lack of professional development opportunities, little administrative assistance, trouble acquiring teachers in specialized areas, and a lack of physical resources (Preston, Jakubiec, & Kooymans, 2013). Rural school leaders often face these challenges alone, unlike large schools with administrative assistants and numerous resources, yet they are expected to meet the same accountability standards as their larger urban counterparts (Ashton & Duncan, 2012). Preston, Jakubiec, and Kooymans (2013) stated that “compared to urban principals, rural principals wear many more dynamic hats” (p. 4). They play a major role in determining the organizational structure of the school and help to shape school culture

(Ashton & Duncan, 2012). In many instances, rural principals are obligated to spend a significant amount of their day in the classroom teaching students (Renihan & Noonan, 2012; Wallin & Newton, 2013). Many of these principals struggle to balance the diverse political, social, and personal interests of the community while promoting school objectives (Preston, Jakubiec, & Kooymans, 2013; Renihan & Noonan; Wallin & Newton, 2013). Ashton and Duncan (2012) added that a new rural principal can often be overwhelmed by the combination of being both inexperienced and in a rural setting. Rural principals who do find success in their role realize that the school is a source of great pride within the community; it is a symbol of the community's social wealth, economic prosperity, and overall identity (Preston, Jakubiec, & Kooymans, 2013).

The Assistant Principal Assists

Although the role of the principal is unlikely to change, “the negative elements may be lessened through job redesign” (Pounder & Merrill, 2001, p. 49). According to Oleszewski, Shoho, and Barnett (2012), assistant principals are being asked to share much of the responsibilities of the principal in an effort to lighten the load as accountability demands are ever increasing. Researchers suggest that even more responsibility should be shared with the assistant principal and others, such as the athletic director, and lead teachers; they contend that this would only enhance the assistant principal's role and better prepare the assistant principal for leadership succession (Armstrong, 2010, 2014; Barnett, Shoho, & Oleszewski, 2012; Celik, 2013; Hunt, 2011; Oliver, 2005; Pounder & Merrill, 2001).

It is clear, from the extensive amount of literature presented above, that the principal has numerous duties and responsibilities and is presented with many challenges. Because the workload is often too much for one individual, principals typically have an assistant with whom

they share or delegate a number of tasks (Armstrong, 2009; Barnett, Shoho, & Oleszewski, 2012; Celikten, 2001; Muijs & Harris, 2003; Petrides, Jimes, & Karaglani, 2014). Principals may even have two or more assistant principals, depending on the type of school, size of school, or the number of students enrolled. The existing literature on the role of the assistant principal and trends or changes in that role are presented in the following section of this literature review.

The Role of the Assistant Principal

The existing literature on the role of the assistant principal is miniscule in comparison to that of the principal. The assistant principal is literally the “forgotten individual” in the literature (Armstrong, 2009). Researchers have historically overlooked the specific role of the assistant principal and focused rather on the role of the principal (Armstrong, 2009; Cranston, Tromans, & Reugebrink, 2004; Enomoto, 2012; Lee, Kwan, & Walker, 2009; Oliver, 2005; Petrides, Jimes, & Karaglani, 2014; Yu-kwong & Walker, 2010). Because the principal was ultimately held accountable for everything that occurred at school, literature pertaining to the role of the assistant principal remained scarce until only recently. According to Enomoto (2012), the literature is primarily focused on the principalship despite the fact that the vast majority of school administrators begin their careers as assistant principals. As recently as fifteen years ago, the assistant principal was regarded simply as an individual employed to take some of the burden off of the principal (Glans, 1994). Fortunately, recent changes in expectations and accountability have forced others to recognize the important role that assistant principals play in our schools. The assistant principal is one of the greatest untapped leadership resources (Barnett, Shoho, & Oleszewski, 2012) and a critical leader (Armstrong, 2009) in our school systems.

In Alabama, assistant principals are individuals who have a minimum of three years of teaching experience and have earned a master’s degree in School Administration or Instructional

Leadership; this may differ in other states. Armstrong (2010) referred to the transition from teacher to assistant principal as “an important professional and organizational passage that carries significant dreams and transformational possibilities for new administrators and their communities” (p. 686). These individuals enter into educational administration because they want to be school leaders—leaders of vision, people, and purpose (Hutton, 2012). Assistant principals are vital resources who support principals in a host of ways (Oliver, 2005). They are heavily involved in the day-to-day operations of the school as they work closely with faculty and staff to improve safety, supervision, and student learning. As schools continue to face demands to improve student performance, the role of the assistant principal will be critical for school improvement (Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett, 2012). Harris and Lowery (2004) contend that the role of the assistant principal has grown in complexity and now mirrors that of the principal; this includes leadership of the instructional program as well. This wide expanse of almost unachievable duties makes the assistant principal position crucial to the daily operations of the school (Barnett, Shoho, & Oleszewski, 2012). According to Herrington and Kearney (2012), this position is the most critical role that makes or breaks an administrator’s career in the upward progression from teacher to higher levels in the administrative hierarchy.

The role of assistant principal is one that typically entails a number of tasks the principal does not want to perform (Celikten, 2001; Chirichello, 2003) or does not have time to perform and is based on the amount of power the principal is willing to share or delegate to the assistant principal (Celikten, 2001). Good (2008) wrote that assistant principals tend to fill their days with three Bs – “books, behinds, and buses” (p. 46). According to Hassenpflug (1991), the assistant principal generally has five major responsibilities: disciplining students, distributing textbooks, supervising students (cafeteria and bus duty), assigning lockers, and attending student activities.

It is clear in the research that management comprises a large portion of the assistant principal's daily work load. Due to its chiefly managerial focus, the role of the assistant principal is a questionable training ground for the principalship (Gurley, Anast-May, & Lee, 2015).

According to Muijs and Harris (2003), the assistant principal's role has evolved, gradually making way for a much stronger institutional presence. Barnett, Shoho, and Oleszewski (2012) contend that the role of the assistant principal must continue to evolve from the traditional perspective of disciplinarian and manager to a perspective in which enhancing the instructional program of the school is at the forefront. Celikten (2001) believed that an important element in the definition of the responsibilities of the assistant principal ought to include the role of instructional leader. Oleszewski, Shoho, and Barnett (2012) agreed in part that two of the most prominent duties of assistant principals are student management and instructional leadership. Although assistant principals today have a desire to get into the classroom more and impact student achievement, several studies suggest that few are actually taking on instructional leadership duties (Barnett, Shoho, & Oleszewski, 2012; Hausman, Nebeker, McCreary, & Donaldson, 2002; Kuan & Walker, 2008). A narrative capture study conducted by Petrides, Jimes, and Karaglani (2014) of forty-five assistant principals in two large urban school systems revealed that while participating assistant principals had a clear vision of their roles as instructional leaders, the majority failed to see their vision fulfilled due to oppositional mindsets, endless managerial tasks, and daily practices at their schools.

Training Ground for the Principalship

Researchers suggest in the literature that many principals are expected to leave or retire from their positions in the near future (Armstrong, 2009; Hunt, 2011; Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett, 2012). As a result, there is a great need for a new generation of principals who can

positively influence instruction and learning (Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett, 2012). As previously stated, assistant principals are the individuals who will inevitably be promoted to fill these positions. Daresh and Voss (2001) mentioned that the assistant principalship serves as a stepping stone to the principalship. That being the case, assistant principals need experience, training specific to their position, professional development, and mentoring in order to successfully fill these positions (Armstrong, 2009; Hunt, 2011). According to Marshall and Hooley (2006), university educational administration programs do not typically provide courses specifically designed for the assistant principalship. As a result, most assistant principals must gain experiences through on-the-job training and mentoring from an experienced administrator. According to Hunt (2011), one of the most important things a principal can do is involve the assistant principal in all aspects of running the school. This is the only way in which the assistant principal will gain the skills necessary to eventually become the administrator in charge.

Challenges for the Assistant Principal as Instructional Leader

Although the literature is scarce on the role of the assistant principal in comparison to that of the principal, literature that does exist on the topic of the difficulties and challenges presented to the novice as well as the veteran assistant principal (Armstrong, 2005, 2009, 2010; 2014; Austin & Brown, 1970; Barnett, Shoho, & Oleszewski, 2012; Busch, MacNeil, & Baraniuk, 2012; Celikten, 2001; Collins, 1976; Gurley, Anast-May, & Lee, 2015; Hartzell, 1993; Kwan & Walker, 2011; Melton, Mallory, Mays, & Chance, 2012; Muijs & Harris, 2003; Read, 2012; Rintoul, 2012; Sackney & Walker, 2006; Sun, 2012). According to Armstrong (2014), newly appointed assistant principals, as 21st century leaders are challenged cognitively, socially, and emotionally. These challenges are somewhat similar to what beginning principals have reported (Barnett, Shoho, & Oleszewski, 2012) but deviate slightly due to hierarchical

differences between the role of the principal and the assistant principal (Armstrong, 2005; Gurley, Anast-May, & Lee, 2015; Hartzell, 1993; Read, 2012). These challenges include problems with time allocation due to a primarily managerial focus of the work, being compared with their predecessors while trying to live up to school and community expectations, adjusting from the classroom teacher setting where they worked primarily with students to an administrative setting where they are now working more often with adults, sharing responsibility for increased student performance with the principal, and the lack of a clearly defined role.

Even though principals and assistant principals are both school administrators, they operate in different organizational contexts and occupy different levels of the leadership hierarchy (Gurley, Anast-May, & Lee, 2015; Hartzell, 1993; Read, 2012). As a result, Hartzell (1993) states that principals and assistant principals are perceived differently and therefore face different leadership challenges. Gurley, Anast-May, and Lee (2015) add that “because assistant principals’ work is at the second level of this leadership hierarchy, it is much more internally focused and its direction is often set by others” (p. 210). The role of assistant principal usually entails a number of assigned tasks that the principal does not have time to do or does not necessarily want to do (Celikten, 2001; Chirichello, 2003). These typically managerial duties, which may include student discipline, student supervision, textbook inventory, assigning lockers, and attending student activities, can consume much of the assistant principal’s time and limit attention given to more important tasks such as supervising instruction or developing curriculum (Hassenpflug, 1991; Melton, et al., 2012). “By far the biggest challenge facing assistant principals,” according to Melton, et al. (2012), “was the allocation of time for things they considered important” (p. 94). Participants in a study conducted by Armstrong (2014) concurred and mentioned additional challenges such as dealing with overwhelming workloads, conflicting

expectations, and high levels of demand from the principal, assistant principal colleagues, and school stakeholders. According to Crow (2006), the assistant principal's role is too narrowly focused and rarely provides the experiences and the full range of responsibilities needed to prepare for the principalship. Gurley, Anast-May, and Lee (2015) agree and add that the exclusively managerial focus of the assistant principal's role limits time needed for professional growth and the development of effective leadership skills.

The work of chief disciplinarian consumes much of the assistant principal's time (Busch, MacNeil, & Baraniuk, 2012; Glanz, 1994; Read, 2012) and creates a lack of balance in role and responsibilities (Melton, et al., 2012). According to Busch, MacNeil, and Baraniuk (2012), assistant principals spend the majority of their time working with student discipline and the teachers and parents of those students. Researchers suggest that the role of the assistant principal offers little satisfaction due to its primarily disciplinary nature (Austin & Brown, 1970; Celikten, 2001; Collins, 1976; Glanz, 1994). Celikten (2001) adds that these discipline responsibilities often cause the assistant principal to be viewed as the antagonist which in and of itself brings negative side effects. Assistant principals who were recently adored by their students when they were teachers are now viewed as the principal's "hatchet man" or someone who is out to get them (Celikten, 2001). Celikten (2001) stated that "assistant principals should become more associated with constructive programs that help students succeed rather than their current association with a weak leadership image due to their almost total immersion in student disciplinary matters" (p. 75). Glanz (1994) added that reducing time spent on student discipline would permit assistant principals more time for instructional leadership and other more important responsibilities.

Similar to the challenge facing many principals, new assistant principals must also live up to the expectations created by their predecessor (Barnett, Shoho, & Oleszewski, 2012; Briggs, Bush, & Middlewood, 2006; Cheung & Walker, 2006). New assistant principals quickly discover that their preconceived notions and anticipations about their new role conflict with the realities of the job (Marshall & Hooley, 2006). Just like many other professions, when a transition in leadership occurs, the new person is immediately compared to the predecessor (Hart, 1993; Spillane & Lee, 2014). Marshall and Hooley (2006) add that community expectations of the assistant principal tend to vary by school setting and culture. These expectations can be very high when the predecessor raised the bar and was an exceptional leader. The pressure to live up to these expectations and to continually be compared to ones' predecessor can create an immense amount of stress on the new administrator and is a challenge that is not easily overcome (Barnett, Shoho, & Oleszewski, 2012; Briggs, Bush, & Middlewood, 2006). The socialization process will tend to ease much of this pressure over time as it perpetuates the existing administrative subculture (Sackney & Walker, 2006).

Transitioning into the assistant principal role can be challenging for new administrators, due in part to the fact that they previously worked primarily with students and now find themselves regularly communicating with adults (Barnett, Shoho, & Oleszewski, 2012). Newly appointed assistant principals, in a study by Armstrong (2009), described their interactions with adults as the most stressful part of their job. The primarily disciplinary focus of the assistant principalship often brings conflict with parents, and sometimes teachers as well. Not only are they having to interact differently with parents, they are now forced to interact differently with teachers — their former colleagues and peers. Many are aghast by the total lack of respect shown them by some of the parents, teachers, and central office staff (Armstrong, 2009). The

abrupt nature of relationship change with former colleagues should come as no surprise; yet, Armstrong (2009) notes that it *is* a great shock for many administrators. Spillane and Lee (2014) noted that hierarchical moves make former peers and colleagues view the new administrator differently and also results in them becoming more distant and cautious around the new administrator. Armstrong (2009) added that some teachers resist the change in administration by testing, discounting, or even by-passing the new administrator and going directly to the principal. The social and psychological changes that accompany hierarchical changes resulting from career advancement into an administrative role can prove to be quite challenging for new administrators (Armstrong, 2009). According to Sackney and Walker (2006), many administrators are haunted by the fear of failure and some have found the position to be less enjoyable and rewarding than anticipated.

Yet another challenge gleaned from the literature for the assistant principal as instructional leader is the shared responsibility for increasing student performance. Assistant principals will only be involved in instructional leadership activities if the principal is willing to restructure the assistant principal role and share this responsibility (Barnett, Shoho, & Oleszewski, 2012; Buser, Gorton, & McIntyre, 1988; Celikten, 2001; Gurley, Anast-May, & Lee, 2015; Hunt, 2011; Muijs & Harris, 2003). According to Celikten (2001), although instructional leadership is stressed today for improved student achievement, the opportunity for many assistant principals to be involved with instructional improvement has been denied. Assistant principals want more active involvement in the challenge of sharing instructional leadership duties to improve student performance but lack the time due to their primarily managerial focus (Buser, Gorton, & McIntyre, 1988; Cranston, Tromans, & Reugebrink, 2004; Glanz, 1994). In a survey of assistant principals conducted by Glanz (1994), he found that

assistant principals consider their work with teachers and improving instruction to be their most important job functions. Glanz (1994) also noted that, given their natural progression from assistant principal to principal, assistant principal training must improve and their job responsibilities must grow to include leadership activities that are aimed at impacting student performance. To enhance the instructional leadership process, principals must look at more effective ways of involving their assistant principals (Buser, Gorton, & McIntyre, 1988).

Their job description is rapidly growing in complexity as assistant principals strive to transform schools by being an integral part of the instructional program in the twenty-first century (Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett, 2012). With this complexity, many assistant principals are struggling in their newly acquired positions because their roles are not clearly defined (Celik, 2013; Celikten, 2001; Glanz, 1994; Melton, Mallory, Mays, & Chance, 2012; Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett, 2012). Job descriptions are often unclear and the explicit responsibilities differ between districts and schools (Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett, 2012). This combination of an unclear framework for their actions and seemingly endless responsibilities may expose assistant principals to role ambiguity and role conflict (Celik, 2013). According to Celikten (2001), it is imperative that there be a concrete job definition for the assistant principal; otherwise, efforts to prepare assistant principals and to study current problems will be ineffective. Read (2012) added that “the refusal to address the differences in the complexities of the assistant principal’s role, as opposed to the principal’s, may lead to an inability to create constructive change within schools” (p. 32).

Socialization of Secondary School Administrators

The first days on the job for an administrator can be a time of great vision, ambition, and excitement. This excitement, according to Enomoto (2012), often comes to an abrupt end as

many school leaders receive little support once appointed to their positions. With the responsibility of effectively operating a school placed solely upon them, many administrators feel isolated, overworked, and overwhelmed (Enomoto, 2012). It is very important that administrators know what to expect when assuming their new position. Oleszewski, Shoho, and Barnett (2012) noted that assistant principals must not only be prepared for their new role, they must learn the norms and expectations of the organization; this is often referred to as career or organizational socialization. According to Brown-Ferrigno and Muth (2004), becoming a principal requires being socialized into a new community of practice and taking on a new role identity. This role socialization involves “the often unsystematic acculturation of people to new normative and performance expectations through socially constructed activities” (p. 469). Sackney and Walker (2006) add that central office administrators, other principals, and even members of the community are external sources that can greatly impact the socialization process of the new principal. Beginning principals must learn what is expected of them and how they are to get things accomplished in their new organization, much like a person entering a new country must learn the language (Sackney & Walker, 2006).

Two types of socialization, professional and organizational, have been identified in the literature (Armstrong, 2009; Enomoto, 2012; Jones, 1986). Professional socialization, according to Armstrong (2009), is “the process of becoming a member of a profession and identifying with its norms and beliefs” (p. 18). The sources of professional socialization traditionally include teachers, veteran principals, and university professors (Crow, 2004). Professional socialization typically focuses on preservice preparation for school administrators provided through university-based programs and is considered by Brown-Ferrigno and Muth (2004) as only the first step to the making of a principal. In a study conducted by Walker, Anderson, Sackney and

Woolf (2003), it was discovered that beginning principals learn through mentorship, graduate studies, on-the-job experience as an assistant principal, professional development, and even through experience as a teacher. Brown-Ferrigno and Muth (2004) add that there must be “close ties between universities and school districts” (p. 482) in order to successfully prepare future leaders.

Different from professional socialization, which primarily focuses on university preparation for school administrators, Enomoto (2012) notes that organizational socialization is focused on actual practice by the administrator in the new role. Organizational socialization refers to how individuals break free of the roles they occupied in the past and adapt to new roles within the organization (Jones, 1986). Kartal (2009) defined it as the obedience of the individual to the values and norms of the organization and added that one of its primary targets is “to create ideal communication between members of an organization” (p. 135). Many sources in the literature define it as the process of learning and/or simply obeying new social roles (Armstrong, 2010; Ashforth, 2001; Crow, 2004; Hart 1991, Kartal, 2009). Crow (2006) stated that “organizational socialization is context-bound and includes the knowledge, skills and dispositions necessary to conduct the role in a particular setting” (p. 311). This knowledge, however, may change as individuals leave the organization and new ones are hired. Sackney and Walker (2006) noted that principals will never know everything about their school because new individuals continuously impact on the principal’s environment causing the principal, through a process of interaction, to continually change his or her perception of that environment. According to Armstrong (2010), organizational socialization is the way in which individuals adopt the new values, norms, and beliefs that are required to fulfill organizational roles. These

“rites of passage,” as coined by Armstrong (2010), remain unquestioned because they are often normalized within the daily school routine.

A study of 229 administrators conducted by Kartal (2009) revealed that organizational acceptance and socialization levels increase as seniority increases. Basically, the longer administrators are in that position, the greater their socialization and overall organizational acceptance. It has been discovered, however, to be a two-way street. Not only does seniority lead to greater socialization, successful socialization may lead to seniority. Kartal (2009) discovered that successful organizational socialization efforts actually increase employees’ job satisfaction and devotion to their job. He added that “personal attitudes about a job acquired through organizational socialization have a positive influence on the performance and effectiveness of an organization” (p. 129).

According to Armstrong (2009), the research suggests that there are four broad stages of organizational socialization: anticipatory, encounter, adjustment, and stabilization. Anticipatory socialization is the first stage of pre-arrival that occurs prior to the new administrator taking on the new role (Armstrong, 2009). Hart (1993) describes this stage as the time when the individual makes the decision to leave his previous position to take on the new administrative role. The encounter stage occurs when the new administrator actually takes on the role and the plethora of new tasks that this role entails. The adjustment stage is where the new administrator tries to “fit in.” The fourth and final stage of stabilization occurs when new administrators are both socially and psychologically embedded within the organization (Armstrong, 2009). Hart (1993) adds that this stage involves negotiations with all members of the school environment, both internally and externally.

Assistant Principals and Socialization

Because principals and their assistants often share roles, it is assumed that their induction and socialization experiences are similar (Armstrong, 2010); this, however, is not necessarily the case. Because of positional and power differences, they face different kinds of challenges and pressures and thus experience socialization differently (Armstrong, 2005; Enomoto, 2012). Most principals, having served previously as assistant principals, have already encountered the shock of induction and socialization into a newly acquired administrative role. Assistant principals, however, have to learn to manage these shocks without any formal training, and no set time or method for evaluating their development (Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett, 2012). In a qualitative study of new vice principals conducted by Armstrong (2010), findings revealed that novice assistant principals experienced separation, initiation, and incorporation rites that tested them physically, mentally, and emotionally. The school's organizational success, students' lives, and the individual administrator's career are all impacted by how assistant principals resolve these transitional challenges (Armstrong, 2009).

Educational leadership literature highlights the need for leadership preparation programs to socialize aspiring administrators, but there is very little literature focused on teachers' understanding of leadership and the role that this understanding plays in their own advancement to positions of leadership (Shoho, Barnett, & Tooms, 2012). As a matter of fact, assistant principals are scarcely mentioned in any leadership preparation curricula, policy documents, or even textbooks that focus on the challenges of this role transition (Armstrong, 2009). The result of this lack of socialization and preparation for the role is that many assistant principals, according to Armstrong (2009), are unprepared for the depth and breadth of this transition to administration and its many challenges. According to Brown-Ferrigno and Muth (2004), "role

socialization from teacher to administrator requires long term investments in time, energy, and attention” (p. 489).

Professional Development

The professional development needs of principals and assistant principals are extensively discussed in the literature (Bottoms & Schmidt-Davis, 2010; Bradshaw & Buckner, 1994; Brown-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004; Carraway & Young, 2015; Enomoto, 2012; Glanz, 2004; Gurley, Anast-May, & Lee, 2015; Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett (2012); Pounder, 2011; Spanneut, Tobin, & Ayers, 2013; Walker & Qian, 2006). The fact that the principal’s role has transitioned to a primarily instructional leadership focus highlights the importance of continued professional development (Spanneut, Tobin, & Ayers, 2013). According to Bradshaw and Buckner (1994), it is vital that this professional development be focused on instructional leadership to equip principals with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to successfully promote student learning. Walker and Qian (2006) add that “in too many cases, the experience of the climb has done little to prepare beginning principals for the balancing act they are asked to perform” (p. 297). Because most principals lack the knowledge and skills necessary to be effective instructional leaders, they need structured staff development and effective local support (Bottoms & Schmidt-Davis, 2010). Concerted joint efforts by university preparation programs and local school districts is a must for developing effective school leaders (Brown-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004).

Enomoto (2012) suggested that rural school principals have a much greater need for professional development than their counterparts in urban school districts. He added that “to successfully design, develop, and sustain instructional leaders in rural schools, professional development must be considered over the long term” (p. 275). A study conducted by Preston,

Jakubiec, and Kooymans (2013) found that rural principals have difficulty networking and participating in professional development due primarily to their geographic isolation from programs, resources, and fellow administrators. Although challenging, finding professional development and networking opportunities to meet the needs of rural principals can be accomplished. According to Brown-Ferrigno and Allen (2006), one rural school district in Kentucky determined that efforts to improve instruction required “an investment in human capital” (p.8). This district made a year-long commitment to professional development by releasing administrators one day each week to participate in professional development. This commitment to release administrators from school during the day sent a message to how important the professional development was and gave credibility and value to the activities that the participants were involved in (Brown-Ferrigno & Allen, 2006).

Herrington and Kearney (2012) state that there is a significant gap between what assistant principals need and what is actually provided in the form of professional development. All other education system employees receive some form of professional development in their field. According to Hutton (2012), teachers receive professional development in the areas of instruction and learning, supervisors and central office personnel receive professional development in the areas of curriculum and assessment, and principals receive professional development on data-based decision making, effective school leadership, and general management. Assistant principals, however, “typically do not receive any professional development in the areas to which they are traditionally assigned—these areas include student conflict, staff relations, and facilities management; and professional development in only those areas does not prepare them to become lead principals” (Hutton, 2012, p. 1). According to Muijs and Harris (2003), assistant principals will continue to see themselves as only being concerned

with low level maintenance activities without proper training and professional development. Training and professional development for assistant principals should continue preparing them with effective management skills while at the same time increasing their capacity to assume greater instructional leadership responsibilities (Glanz, 2004; Gurley, Anast-May, & Lee, 2015).

Effective leadership preparation programs have a strong instructional leadership focus, knowledgeable faculty, and effective support structures in place to enhance professional socialization and provide learners with exceptional opportunities for skill development (Pounder, 2011). A study conducted by Enomoto (2012) on eight assistant principals from a rural school district supported the idea that a professional development program delivered through a university-school partnership served to socialize new assistant principals to their new setting. Although this study supported the idea that professional development may impact socialization, there are questions regarding university preparation's impact on assistant principals' job preparedness. The literature suggests that university preparation alone does not prepare assistant principals for their newly acquired positions (Celikten, 2001; Enomoto, 2012; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Oleszewski, Shoho, Barnett, 2012; Walker & Qian, 2006). The large majority of them have to learn on the job. Marshall and Hooley (2006) likened the transition and orientation into the role of assistant principal to "baptism by fire, sink or swim." According to Celikten (2001), principals, not university preparation programs, have the biggest influence on assistant principals' job preparedness by offering a number of leadership activities for them to participate in. Behind the influence of the principal, however, there are other factors that influence or otherwise enhance the instructional leadership activities taken on by assistant principals. In a study conducted by Celikten (2001), a very large percentage of assistant principals confirmed that reading educational journals, class-related materials, newspapers, and networking with their

administrative colleagues enhanced their instructional leadership skills. They went on to say that attending workshops, seminars, and other curriculum-related activities were beneficial and served to enhance their knowledge and skills in the area of instructional leadership (Celikten, 2001).

Mentoring

Instructional leadership, until recently, has been a duty primarily relegated to the principal. As schools continue to face academic performance demands, Barnett, Shoho, and Oleszewski (2012) contend that the role of the assistant principal must include enhancing the instructional program. It is unfortunate, however, that many assistant principals are not afforded the opportunity to learn and utilize those instructional skills necessary to prepare them for the role of principal. A study conducted by Barnett, Shoho, and Oleszewski (2012) discovered that many assistant principals lack competence in the area of instructional leadership because they were not afforded the opportunity to develop this knowledge and skill set in their leadership preparation program and/or in their initial induction into their assistant principal role. Hunt (2011) offered that “supporting the professional growth of assistant principals should become a part of successor planning for the principalship in school districts” (p. 170). According to Augustine-Shaw (2015), a top priority for every new leader should be to build a shared vision and a collective purpose that focuses on learning and strives for excellence in instruction. This is where principal-mentoring may assist in an assistant principal’s overall development and readiness to assume the role of instructional leader.

The literature is rife with references to the importance of the mentoring relationship to administrator development (Armstrong, 2010; Augustine-Shaw, 2015; Daresh, 2007; Hunt, 2011; Hutton, 2012; Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett, 2012; Ragins & Cotton, 1999; Robinson,

Horan, & Nanavati, 2009). Mentoring is an important component of professional development for school administrators (Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett, 2012). According to Augustine-Shaw (2015), it is imperative that experienced principals provide guidance to new administrators in their initial years of practice through quality mentoring. Hunt (2011) added that “one of the most important things a principal can do is involve the assistant principal in all aspects of running the school” (p. 166). This is the primary way in which the assistant principal will gain the skills necessary to eventually become the administrator in charge. According to Hutton (2012), principals have a responsibility to mentor their assistant principals and develop their leadership capacity, which prepares them for career mobility that usually includes rising to the lead principalship. Armstrong (2010) stated that “supporting new assistant principals as they make this important transition is an integral part of the educational organizations’ responsibility to newcomers and an important first step in achieving their espoused commitment to developing humane and democratic learning communities” (p. 718).

Mentoring, according to Lanna-Lipton (2009), is the process whereby a more experienced individual counsels and offers assistance to a younger or newer employee to develop leadership skills and afford advancement within the organization. Robinson, Horan, and Nanavati (2009) add that mentoring accelerates learning, reduces isolation, and increases the confidence and skill of newly appointed administrators. Mentoring, according to Saban and Wolfe (2009), promotes continued development and improvement of skills which are already present in many aspiring principals.

Two types of mentoring are discussed in the literature; mentoring can be either formal or informal in nature (Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011; McGregor & Tweed, 2002; Ragins & Cotton, 1999). Formal mentoring relationships typically develop as a result of state- or district-initiated

programs that assign mentors to protégés with little regard to similarities, values, or background and, according to Ragins and Cotton (1999), are usually much shorter in duration than informal mentoring relationships. Informal mentoring relationships, however, are much longer in duration, develop spontaneously (Ragins & Cotton, 1999), and occur when the mentees are free to choose the mentors they feel will best serve their professional development needs. According to Dunbar and Kinnersley (2011), informal mentoring typically develops through mutual selection out of natural interactions between the mentor and mentee and is based upon a relationship of fundamental similarities. Dunbar and Kinnersley (2011) add that the mentoring relationship is more successful when the mentor and mentee share similarities such as gender, ethnicities, experiences, values, and background. An empirical study conducted by Ragins and Cotton (1999) comparing the mentoring functions and career outcomes associated with formal and informal mentoring relationships delivered findings indicating that informal mentoring relationships are more effective than formal mentoring relationships. This is attributed to the relationships that are built through natural interactions as a part of the informal mentoring process. Very little is more important than the relationships with those with whom we work (Saban & Wolfe, 2009). Saban and Wolfe (2009) stated that “mentoring may be the key to learning that relationships are critical to effective leadership for effective schools in the 21st Century” (p. 5).

Understanding the important role that mentoring plays in administrator development, many programs include mentoring as a form of professional development for aspiring administrators (Augustine-Shaw, 2015; Daresh, 2007; Hunt, 2011; Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett, 2012). In the Canadian professional development program, mentors are assigned to participants to serve as peer coaches and share knowledge concerning school leadership

(Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett, 2012). A study conducted by Augustine-Shaw (2015) highlighted the Kansas Building Leader Mentoring and Induction Task Force initiated by the Kansas Educational Leadership Institute (KELI) to guide and shape a program of support for new principals. One sub-group of this task force, given the responsibility of researching best practices in mentoring and induction, identified the following critical competencies or attributes for first year principals:

- shaping a vision of academic success for all students;
- developing leadership capacity in others;
- developing positive relationships;
- creating community outreach;
- setting goals;
- managing people and process to foster school improvement;
- using data to effectively make decisions, and
- providing professional development rich in leadership activities (p. 25).

These competencies and attributes were then used to guide ongoing professional development and successfully meet the mentoring needs of new school administrators in the state of Kansas. Daresh (2007) studied the mentoring programs for beginning school principals in two different urban school districts in which the goal of mentoring was to support the instructional leadership behaviors of novice principals. One of the school districts in this study was guided by a clear framework related to instructional improvement and identified the following five essential competencies to guide ongoing professional development of all principals:

1. Articulating a belief system through voice and action.
2. Assessing the quality of classroom instruction.

3. Engaging and developing faculty.
4. Facilitating and motivating change.
5. Balancing the demands for leadership with expectations for management (p. 26).

Mentors in this study reported that reviewing individual progress in these essential competencies extended far beyond merely showing the attainment of management skills; it served as an ongoing discussion guide that initiated dialogue between the mentor and mentee (Daresh, 2007). Hunt, in a 2011 study, mentioned another mentoring program in the state of Illinois. The Illinois New Principal Mentoring Program, developed in 2007, requires all principals to participate in the program and compensates mentors \$2000 per mentee for their services. Although successful, this program is targeted primarily toward meeting the professional growth needs of new principals and is not extended to assistant principals.

Although formal mentoring programs for new building principals are abundant, very few programs exist for assistant principals (Hunt, 2011; Oleszewski, Barnett, & Shoho, 2012). As a result, many assistant principals learn to become effective instructional leaders through informal mentoring that develops out of natural interactions between the principal and assistant principal (Dunbar & Kinnersley, 2011). Barnett, Shoho, and Oleszewski (2012) contend that “principals have the power to provide meaningful growth and development opportunities for their assistant principals, especially in building their capabilities to become future principals” (p. 97).

What should principals do in order to effectively mentor assistant principals? The process begins with hiring assistants who are already strong in instruction (Daresh, 2007; Hunt 2011). Hunt (2011) adds that the principal and assistant principal should get on the same page very quickly to present a unified front to the faculty. Frequent conversations should be held concerning the school and the issues, problems, challenges, and opportunities that come along

with administration. Finally, the principal should involve the assistant principal in every aspect of running the school and provide support when needed. Brown-Ferrigno and Muth (2004) add that principals should assist aspiring principals with role socialization by working closely with them and helping them to develop confidence through engaging leadership activities and administrative tasks. According to Barnett (Hutton, 2012), the lead principal must regard the assistant principal as a valuable partner and must be willing to share leadership as well as create opportunities for growth. Daresh (2007) added that mentors are not simply providers of information but rather guides to help new administrators learn how to think differently about their roles. A study conducted by Saban and Wolfe (2009) added a compelling argument for supporting mentoring as a tool for professional development. This study found that what administrators value most of all from mentors is “the opportunity for reflective conversations, emotional and moral support, and affirmation that they are doing a good job” (p. 5).

In a study of several mentoring programs, Daresh (2007) raised an important question concerning the goal of mentoring. Should the goal of mentoring be to assist newcomers in their socialization to the role of school administrator or to prepare them to be effective instructional leaders? He noted that all too often mentoring programs tend to be short in duration and focused on merely helping the new administrator survive the first year on the job. This is in direct contrast to what new administrators actually need today. According to Augustine-Shaw (2015), new principals are presented today with many complexities due to rapid educational changes that require an investment of time and acquired knowledge in order to positively impact instruction and learning. The model discussed in the study by Daresh (2007) suggests that an effective mentoring program supports a vision of instructional leadership by talking about that goal; there is no set time limit. The pursuit of that vision is accomplished only when it is desired by the

mentor. As a result, he offered that “efforts to assist newcomers must be ongoing with a focus on guiding rather than simply intervening on a short-term basis” (p. 22). He concluded that mentoring is a personal commitment guided by a vision that is “not easily or quickly achieved” (p.26).

Summary

In summary, instructional leadership focuses on learning and instruction. It involves supervision of instruction, leading change, facilitating teacher professional development, encouraging risk taking, performance evaluation, curriculum development, and the fostering of an environment that is conducive to teaching and learning. It is basically the process of performing all leadership activities that may affect learning within the organization (Gülcan, 2012). School administrators today must become the instructional leaders of their respective schools in order to ensure the academic success of their students.

Administrative roles have changed dramatically over the course of the past century (Armstrong, 2014; Balyer, 2014; Leithwood & Levin, 2005; Lynch, 2012; Rousmaniere, 2007; Siegrist, Weeks, Pate, & Monetti, 2009). An increase in accountability has seen a comparable increase in the number of responsibilities extended to principals. Principals are responsible for the overall organization and management of the school, shaping the school’s future, personnel management, instructional leadership, and school/community relations. Although hierarchical differences exist between the role of the principal and assistant principal, changes in accountability have had effects on the role of the assistant principal. This role is one that typically entails a number of tasks the principal does not have time to perform (Celikten, 2001; Chirichello, 2003) and until recently has had a primarily managerial focus (Gurley, Anast-May, & Lee, 2015). Due to this primarily managerial focus, the assistant principal’s role, according to

Gurley, Anast-May, and Lee (2015), has been a questionable training ground for the principalship. Several researchers in the literature have suggested that the assistant principal's role must evolve to include instructional leadership as one of its most prominent duties (Barnett, Shoho, & Oleszewski, 2012; Celikten, 2001; Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett, 2012).

There are several challenges presented to assistant principals as instructional leaders. These challenges include problems with time allocation, being compared with their predecessors while trying to live up to school and community expectations, adjusting from the classroom teacher setting to an administrative setting, sharing responsibility to increase student performance with the principal, and the lack of a clearly defined role. All of these challenges must be addressed and confidence must be developed in order for the assistant principal to have a positive impact on instruction and learning.

The socialization of a school administrator into a new community of practice requires taking on a new role identity (Brown-Ferrigno & Muth, 2014). Two types of socialization, professional and organizational, were identified in the literature. Different from professional socialization, which primarily focuses on university preparation for school administrators, organizational socialization is focused on actual practice by the administrator in the new role (Enomoto, 2012). According to Armstrong (2010), organizational socialization is the way in which individuals adopt the new values, norms, and beliefs that are required to fulfill organizational roles. Because of positional and power differences, principals and assistant principals face different kinds of challenges and pressures and thus experience socialization differently (Armstrong, 2005; Enomoto, 2012).

The changing role of school administrators to include an instructional leadership focus has brought to light the need for continued professional development (Spanneut, Tobin, & Ayers,

2013). It is vital that this professional development be focused on instructional leadership to equip principals with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to successfully promote student learning (Bradshaw & Buckner, 1994). This professional development does not always meet the needs of assistant principals, however. Many assistant principals rely on the guidance of an experienced principal or mentor to educate them in the area of instructional leadership. According to Celikten (2001), principals have the biggest influence on assistant principals' job preparedness by offering a number of leadership activities for them to participate in.

Mentoring is a process whereby a more experienced individual provides counsel, guidance, and assistance to another. The importance of the mentoring relationship to the aspiring school administrator cannot be overemphasized. Oleszewski, Shoho, and Barnett (2012) contend that the principal-mentor relationship facilitates development and growth and positively influences the level of preparation for the principalship. Informal mentoring relationships are developed spontaneously without organizational assistance and, according to Ragins and Cotton (1999), are more effective than formal mentoring relationships because of the natural relationship that develops between mentor and mentee. According to Brown-Ferrigno and Muth (2004), "when mentoring effectively engages veteran, novice, and aspiring principals in reciprocal professional development, the community of practice continually improves, expands, and deepens leadership capacity in schools and districts" (p. 489).

CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

Administrative roles have changed dramatically over the course of the past century (Armstrong, 2014; Balyer, 2014; Leithwood & Levin, 2005; Lynch, 2012; Rousmaniere, 2007; Siegrist, Weeks, Pate, & Monetti, 2009). With the increase in accountability, principals and assistant principals have seen a comparable increase in the number of responsibilities extended to them. Several researchers in the literature have suggested that the assistant principal's role must evolve to mirror that of the principal and include instructional leadership as one of its prominent duties (Barnett, Shoho, & Oleszewski, 2012; Celikten, 2001; Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett, 2012). There are several challenges presented to assistant principals as instructional leaders. All of these challenges must be addressed and confidence must be developed in order for assistant principals to have a positive impact on instruction and learning. Knowing the important role that assistant principals play in schools, the researcher wanted an answer to the following question: Do assistant principals in the state of Alabama feel ready to serve as instructional leaders? If so, what contributes to this perception of readiness?

A quantitative study was undertaken to answer the central research question: What characteristics or experiences contribute to secondary assistant principals' perceptions of readiness to serve as instructional leaders? Data from a large statewide survey of assistant principals conducted in 2014 in Alabama by Dr. Linda Searby of Auburn University was used for this study. From this existing data set, subsets of data from secondary assistant principals

were extracted for this dissertation study. Various statistical tests were conducted to answer the following six questions:

1. To what extent do secondary assistant principals report that they are required to perform the four functions of instructional leadership?
2. To what extent do secondary assistant principals report that they are ready to serve as instructional leaders as defined by the four functions of instructional leadership?
3. Which variable, age or years of experience, carries more weight in the perception of readiness of secondary assistant principals to assume the role of instructional leader?
4. For those who reported they were ready to assume the role of instructional leader, which mentoring activities were most effective in assisting their perception of readiness?
5. Which professional growth opportunities did secondary assistant principals participate in that led them to report readiness to serve as instructional leaders?
6. Did the number of professional growth opportunities participated in by secondary assistant principals affect their perceptions of readiness to serve as instructional leaders?

We do not know the extent to which elementary or secondary assistant principals perceive themselves as ready to be instructional leaders, nor do we know their prior experiences that may enhance their readiness. In addition, we do not know the sources of support they access in order to improve as instructional leaders. To investigate these unknowns, this researcher and a doctoral student colleague designed companion dissertations — one with secondary assistant principals as the subjects, and one with elementary assistant principals as the subjects. The study reported here pertains to the investigation with secondary (7–12) assistant principals.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify the characteristics and experiences that are significant in contributing to secondary assistant principals' perceptions of readiness to serve as instructional leaders. It attempts to answer the question: What factors or experiences contribute to assistant principals' perception of readiness to be instructional leaders? This study is based upon the assumption that assistant principals need to develop instructional leadership skills prior to assuming the role of principal in order to be successful school leaders.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher for this study was to identify the characteristics and experiences that are significant in contributing to secondary assistant principals' perceptions of readiness to serve as instructional leaders. The researcher has served as a classroom teacher for seventeen years and a secondary assistant principal for the past three years. The researcher earned an administrative degree in 1996 but chose to remain in the classroom working with students and coaching for seventeen years prior to attaining an administrative position. At the time of the survey, the researcher was a secondary assistant principal of a 10–12 high school in south Alabama. The years of experience in the classroom after having earned a degree in secondary administration afforded the researcher numerous opportunities to participate in instructional leadership activities. Also, the three years of experience as an assistant principal provided the researcher a unique insight and a professional advantage into the current role of assistant principals in the state of Alabama. The researcher can identify strongly with the data provided in the survey and is sympathetic to the challenges presented to assistant principals as instructional leaders. As a result, this may introduce some bias into the researcher's interpretation of the study.

Methods

The data set being analyzed for this study was originally collected for a mixed methods study conducted between October, 2013, and April, 2014 in the state of Alabama, with approval from the Auburn University Institutional Review Board. The conceptual framework for the study was based on the work of Leithwood and Seashore-Louis (2012) and their description of instructional leadership characterized as four essential components (i.e., setting direction, developing people, focusing on learning, improving the instructional program). This description was repeated throughout the survey instrument that was utilized in this study.

Population and Sample

For the purpose of this study the researcher used a subset of the large data set, extracting the survey data that was created from secondary assistant principal respondents in the state of Alabama. The designed survey was sent to approximately 1,000 elementary and secondary assistant principals across Alabama and elicited 581 responses. From the 581 respondents, 352 of those were secondary assistant principals. The participants for this study were 295 secondary assistant principals from schools across the state of Alabama. The sample consisted of 134 females and 161 males. Surveys that were not filled out completely were not counted in the survey data for this study. Table 1 displays respondents' age groups, and Table 2 their total years of experience as an assistant principal.

Table 1

Respondents' Age Groups (Survey Question # 1)

Age Groups	Number of Respondents	Percentage
22–30 years of age	9	3
31–35 years of age	29	10
36–40 years of age	56	19
41–45 years of age	68	23
Over 45 years of age	133	45
Total	295	100

Table 2

Years of Experience as an Assistant Principal (Survey Question # 12)

Years of Experience as Assistant Principal	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Less than 5 years	109	40
5 or more years	186	60
Total	295	100

Instrumentation

The method for data collection in this quantitative study was a survey instrument designed by Dr. Tricia Browne-Ferrigno from the University of Kentucky, and Dr. Linda Searby, from Auburn University, Alabama. This survey was part of a large two-state study of assistant principals. Survey items were developed and validated by aligning content with current literature on assistant principals and the Leithwood and Seashore-Louis (2012) concepts on

instructional leadership-setting direction, developing people, focusing on learning, and improving the instructional program. The survey consisted of 37 main questions. Among these 37 main questions were 30 multiple choice questions (with several sub-questions in most cases), one question with 9 items with a four-point Likert-type scale response choice, and six open-ended questions.

Upon completion of the survey items, it was necessary to establish the content validity of the survey (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2011). In order to assess the content validity an expert panel was assembled. The survey was piloted face-to-face before a set of three expert panels comprised of current principals and assistant principals. The panel members completed a paper version of the survey and then provided feedback concerning general and specific ways to improve the survey. Suggested changes were made to the survey. The final print of the survey was then critiqued by an assistant superintendent responsible for professional development and evaluation of assistant principals and critical feedback was provided that resulted in further minor changes. After the survey was converted into electronic format, it was sent to a select group of assistant principals who piloted it in the same online format that was to be used during the original study. This select group of assistant principals provided feedback on technical issues associated with the design and delivery of the instrument. Finally, the survey was reviewed and approved by members of the Institutional Review Board at Auburn University, and formal administration of the survey began.

Instrument Reliability

The survey has been administered only once and only internal consistency reliability on related items could be determined (Creswell, 2002; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2011). Hence,

Cronbach's alpha coefficients were computed on appropriate items, which revealed a range from .65 to .75.

Research Design

The study was a quantitative design to determine the relationship that exists, if any, between independent variables such as age, years of experience, and the types and number of mentoring or professional growth opportunities secondary principals participated in and secondary assistant principals' perceptions of readiness to serve as instructional leaders.

Independent / Dependent Variables

According to Gall, Borg, and Gall (2010), "quantitative research designs either explicitly or implicitly conceptualize variables as reflecting a causal relationship to each other" (p. 241). This researcher's study conceptualized variables as reflecting a causal relationship between variables. In this research the cause variables or independent variables were age and years of experience of assistant principals, and assistant principal's background experiences as they related to mentoring and professional growth opportunities. The effect variable or the dependent variable was the perception of readiness to become an instructional leader.

Research Procedures

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Although an existing data set is being used to conduct this study, the researcher must still apply for Institutional Board Approval. Upon completion of an oral defense, the researcher will submit an application for human subject research to the Auburn University Institutional Review Board. The application will include the type of research, the objectives of the research and its significance, methods for selecting subjects, a consent form, and methods to ensure confidentiality. The researcher will attempt to acquire exempt status for the study.

Data Collection

Data were collected through a survey to Alabama elementary and secondary assistant principals (with the assistance of each superintendent in all districts in Alabama) via electronic mail through the web service SurveyMonkey. This method allowed for a greater sampling population and more flexibility on the part of the subjects in responding. All practicing assistant principals in Alabama received invitations to participate in the study between October 2013 and April 2014. Multiple reminder emails were effective in recruiting a large number of assistant principals to participate.

Statistical Analysis

Responses for the 295 surveys were downloaded and analyzed using Version 23 of the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The statistical analyses used to answer the research questions in this study were: Pearson Chi Square (χ^2), Logistic Regression, and Analysis of Variance (One-Way ANOVA). Because the data in this study consists of frequencies in categories, the Pearson chi-square (χ^2) test was an appropriate statistical test to implement because the data collected consists of frequencies in categories (Gall, 2013). Logistic regression was an appropriate analysis to use because logistic regression assists researchers to determine how well scores for each set of independent variables predict the scores on the measured dependent variable and how well the combination of scores for the all the measured independent variables predict the scores on the measured variables (Gall, 2013). In this study age and years of experience were compared to see which one carries more weight in predicting perception of readiness to assume the role as an instructional leader. According to Ross and Shannon (2008), “The one-way ANOVA allows you to determine whether or not statistically significant differences exists across groups or levels, which indicates whether or not there is a

main effect for the independent variable” (p. 71). The ANOVA was an appropriate analysis because this study examined which mentoring activities were most effective in secondary elementary assistant principals’ perception of readiness and the number of professional growth opportunities participated in by secondary assistant principals to determine if there was an affect in their perception of readiness. Table 3 displays the six research questions used in this study, the corresponding survey questions, and the statistical analyses conducted on each research question.

Table 3

Survey Research Questions Statistical Analysis

Research Question	Correlating Survey Questions	Descriptive Statistics
1. To what extent do secondary assistant principals report they are required to perform the four functions of instructional leadership?	#22	Chi Square (χ^2)
2. To what extent do secondary assistant principals report they are ready to serve as instructional leaders as defined by the four functions of instructional leadership?	#30	Chi Square (χ^2)
3. Which variable, age or years of experience, carries more weight in the perception of readiness of secondary assistant principals to assume the role of instructional leader?	#1, #12, #30	Logistic Regression
4. For those who reported they were ready to assume the role of instructional leader, which mentoring activities were most effective in assisting their perception of readiness?	#29, # 30	Chi Square (χ^2)
5. Which professional growth opportunities did secondary assistant principals participate in that led them to report readiness to serve as instructional leaders?	#28	Chi Square (χ^2)
6. Did the number of professional growth opportunities participated in by secondary assistant principals affect their perceptions of readiness to serve as instructional leaders?	#28, #30	One-way ANOVA

Summary

This chapter provided a detailed discussion of the methods used for the present study. It included information regarding the instrument's development, the validity and reliability of the instrument, the pilot study and the statewide survey of assistant principals. The study focused on the factors, characteristics, and experiences that are significant in contributing to secondary assistant principals' perceptions of readiness to serve as instructional leaders. All practicing assistant principals in Alabama received invitations to participate in the study via electronic mail through the web service SurveyMonkey. The designed survey elicited 581 responses of which 357 were from secondary assistant principals. Only 295 of the secondary assistant principal responses were completed in their entirety. Validity was established using a set of three expert panels comprised of current principals and assistant principals. The survey has been administered only once and only internal consistency reliability on related items determined.

The next chapter details the findings of the study. It includes demographic information of the study participants and their perceptions of readiness to serve as instructional leaders in relation to independent variables such as age, years of experience, and the number of mentoring or professional growth opportunities participated in.

CHAPTER IV. PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify the characteristics and experiences that are significant in contributing to secondary assistant principals' perceptions of readiness to serve as instructional leaders. The researcher attempts to answer the question as to why some assistant principals perceive themselves as being ready to take on the role of principal and primary instructional leader of a school while others do not. This study is based upon the assumption that assistant principals need to develop instructional leadership skills prior to assuming the role of principal in order to be successful school leaders.

Researchers suggest that many principals are expected to leave or retire from their positions in the near future (Armstrong, 2009; Hunt, 2011; Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett, 2012). As a result, there is a great need for a new generation of principals who can positively influence instruction and learning (Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett, 2012). Already having administrative experience, assistant principals are the individuals who will inevitably be promoted to fill these positions. Daresh and Voss (2001) mentioned that assistant principals serve as stepping stones to the principalship. That being the case, assistant principals need experience, training specific to their position, professional development, and mentoring in order to successfully fill these positions (Armstrong, 2009; Hunt, 2011). "By far the biggest challenge facing assistant principals," according to Melton, et al. (2012), "was the allocation of time for things they considered important" (p. 94). Participants in a study conducted by Armstrong (2014) concurred and mentioned additional challenges such as dealing with overwhelming workloads, conflicting

expectations, and high levels of demand from the principal, assistant principal colleagues, and school stakeholders. According to Crow (2006), the assistant principal's role is too narrowly focused and rarely provides the experiences and the full range of responsibilities needed to prepare for the principalship. Gurley, et al. (2015) agree and add that the exclusively managerial focus of the assistant principal's role limits time needed for professional growth and the development of effective leadership skills; therefore making it a questionable training ground for the principalship. In the state of Alabama, both the principal and the assistant principal will soon be evaluated for their instructional leadership skills. Do assistant principals in the state of Alabama feel ready to serve as instructional leaders? If so, what contributes to this perception of readiness?

Methodology and Research Questions

A quantitative study was undertaken to answer the central research question: What characteristics or experiences contribute to secondary assistant principals' perceptions of readiness to serve as instructional leaders? Data from a large statewide survey of assistant principals conducted in 2014 in Alabama by Dr. Linda Searby of Auburn University was used for this study. From this existing data set, subsets of data from secondary assistant principals were extracted for this dissertation study. Various statistical tests were conducted to answer the following six research questions:

1. To what extent do secondary assistant principals report they are required to perform the four functions of instructional leadership?
2. To what extent do secondary assistant principals report they are ready to serve as instructional leaders as defined by the four functions of instructional leadership?

3. Which variable, age or years of experience, carries more weight in the perception of readiness of secondary assistant principals to assume the role of instructional leader?
4. For those who reported they were ready to assume the role of instructional leader, which mentoring activities were most effective in assisting their perception of readiness?
5. Which professional growth opportunities did secondary assistant principals participate in that led them to report readiness to serve as instructional leaders?
6. Did the number of professional growth opportunities participated in by secondary assistant principals affect their perceptions of readiness to serve as instructional leaders?

Instrumentation and Reliability

The method for data collection in this quantitative study was a survey instrument designed by Dr. Tricia Browne-Ferrigno from the University of Kentucky, and Dr. Linda Searby, from Auburn University, Alabama. This survey was part of a large two-state study of assistant principals. Survey items were developed and validated by aligning content with current literature on assistant principals and the Leithwood and Seashore-Louis (2012) concepts on instructional leadership-setting direction, developing people, focusing on learning, and improving the instructional program. The survey consisted of 37 main questions. Among these 37 main questions were 30 multiple choice questions (with several sub-questions in most cases), one question with 9 items with a four-point Likert-type scale response choice, and six open-ended questions.

Upon completion of the survey items, it was necessary to establish the content validity of the survey (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2011). In order to assess the content validity an expert panel

was assembled. The survey was piloted face-to-face before a set of three expert panels comprised of current principals and assistant principals. The panel members completed a paper version of the survey and then provided feedback concerning general and specific ways to improve the survey. Suggested changes were made to the survey. The final print of the survey was then critiqued by an assistant superintendent responsible for professional development and evaluation of assistant principals and critical feedback was provided that resulted in further minor changes. After the survey was converted into electronic format, it was sent to a select group of assistant principals who piloted it in the same online format that was to be used during the original study. This select group of assistant principals provided feedback on technical issues associated with the design and delivery of the instrument. Finally, the survey was reviewed and approved by members of the Institutional Review Board at Auburn University, and formal administration of the survey began.

The survey has been administered only once and only internal consistency reliability on related items could be determined (Creswell, 2002; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2011). Hence, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were computed on appropriate items, which revealed a range from .65 to .75.

Research Design

The study was a quantitative design to determine the relationship that exists, if any, between independent variables such as age, years of experience, and the types and number of mentoring or professional growth opportunities secondary principals participated in and secondary assistant principals' perceptions of readiness to serve as instructional leaders.

Independent / Dependent Variables

According to Gall, Borg, and Gall (2010), “quantitative research designs either explicitly or implicitly conceptualize variables as reflecting a causal relationship to each other” (p. 241). In this study, the researcher conceptualized variables as reflecting a causal relationship between variables. In this research the cause variables or independent variables were age and years of experiences of assistant principals and assistant principal’s background experiences as they relate to mentoring and professional growth opportunities. The effect variable or the dependent variable was the perception of readiness to become an instructional leader.

Population and Sample

For the purpose of this study the researcher used a subset of the large data set, extracting the survey data that was created from secondary assistant principal respondents in the State of Alabama. The designed survey was sent to approximately 1,000 thousand elementary and secondary assistant principals across Alabama and elicited 581 responses. From the 581 respondents, 352 of those were secondary assistant principals. The participants for this study were 295 secondary assistant principals from schools across the state of Alabama. The sample consisted of 134 females and 161 males. Surveys that were not filled out completely were not counted in the survey data for this study. Table 1 displays respondents’ age groups, and Table 2 their total years of experience as an assistant principal.

Table 1

Respondents' Age Groups (Survey Question # 1)

Age Groups	Number of Respondents	Percentage
22 – 30 years of age	9	3%
31 – 35 years of age	29	10%
36 – 40 years of age	56	19%
41- 45 years of age	68	23%
Over 45 years of age	133	45%
Total	295	100%

Table 2

Years of Experience as an Assistant Principal (Survey Question # 12)

Years of Experience as an Assistant Principal	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Less than 5 years	109	40%
5 or more years	186	60%
Total	295	100%

Results of Research Questions

Research Question 1: To what extent do secondary assistant principals report they are required to perform the four functions of instructional leadership?

A Chi-square goodness-of-fit test was conducted to determine the extent to which assistant principals were required to perform the four functions of instructional leadership. Of the 295 participants, 3 of them did not record an answer for survey question #22. Of the remaining 292 participants who did answer the survey question, 60 assistant principals (20%) reported the entirety of their job required they perform the four functions of instructional leadership, and 114 assistant principals (39%) reported over 50% of their job required they perform the four functions of instructional leadership. Combining these first two, 174 of the 292 participants that answered the survey question (nearly 60%) reported instructional leadership duties make up more than half of their job. Of the remaining 118 participants, 66 assistant principals (23%) reported that 25 to 50% of their job required they perform the four functions of instructional leadership and 49 assistant principals (17%) reported that less than 25% of their job required they perform the four functions of instructional leadership. Only 3 assistant principals (1%) reported no part of their job required they perform the four functions of instructional leadership. The minimum expected frequency was 58.4. The chi-square goodness-of-fit test indicated that the extent to which assistant principals are required to perform the four functions of instructional leadership were not equally represented by the participants of the study. The results were statistically significantly different ($\chi^2(4) = 108.034, p < .001$), with the largest number of participants recording over 50% of their duties involved performing the four functions of instructional leadership (see Table 4).

Table 4

Extent to which Secondary Assistant Principals Perform Instructional Leadership Functions

Job involves Instructional Leadership	Frequency	Percentage
Entire job involves Instructional Leadership	60	20
Over 50%	114	39
Approximately 25–50%	66	23
Less than 25%	49	17
Duties do not involve Instructional Leadership	3	1
Total	292	100

Research Question 2: To what extent do secondary assistant principals report they are ready to serve as instructional leaders as defined by the four functions of instructional leadership?

A chi-square goodness-of-fit test was conducted to determine the extent to which assistant principals report they are ready to serve as instructional leaders as defined by the four functions of instructional leadership. One of the 295 participants did not record an answer for survey question #30. Of the remaining 294 participants who did answer the survey question, 161 assistant principals (55%) reported they were *very ready* to serve as an instructional leader as defined in this study. One hundred and twenty three assistant principals (42%) reported they were *somewhat ready* to serve as an instructional leader as defined in this study. Nine assistant principals (3%) reported that they were *not ready* to serve as an instructional leader as defined in this study. Only 1 assistant principal (.3%) reported this question was not applicable; they were not responsible for instructional leadership duties at their school. The minimum expected

frequency was 73.5. The chi-square goodness-of-fit test indicated the extent to which assistant principals felt ready to serve as instructional leaders as defined by the study were not equally represented by the participants of the study. The results were statistically significantly different ($\chi^2(3) = 265.619, p < .001$), with over 50% of participants recording they feel *very ready* to serve as an instructional leader (see Table 5).

Table 5

Secondary Assistant Principals' Readiness to Serve as Instructional Leaders

Readiness to Serve as an Instructional Leader	Frequency	Percentage
Very Ready	161	55
Somewhat Ready	123	42
Not Ready	9	3
Not Applicable	1	0.3
Total	294	100

Research Question 3: Which variable, age or years of experience, carries more weight in the perception of readiness of secondary assistant principals to assume the role of instructional leader?

A logistic regression was performed to ascertain the effects of age and years of experience on the perceptions of readiness of secondary assistant principals to assume the role of instructional leader (see Table 6). The logistic regression model was not statistically significant, $\chi^2(2) = 1.906, p = .386$. The model explained 0.9% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance in perceptions of readiness to assume the role of instructional leader and correctly classified 55.7%

of the cases. Sensitivity was 9.8%, specificity was 90.6%, positive predictive value was 44.4% and negative predictive value was 56.8%. Of the two predictors, age and years of experience, neither one statistically significantly predicted readiness of secondary assistant principals to assume the role of instructional leader.

Table 6

Logistic Regression to Ascertain the Effects of Age and Years of Experience on Perceptions of Readiness

	B	SE	Wald	df	p	Exp(B)
Age	.093	.120	.604	1	.437	1.098
Years of Experience	-.133	.097	1.881	1	.170	.875
Constant	-.103	.459	.050	1	.823	.903

Research Question 4: For those who reported they were ready to assume the role of instructional leader, which mentoring activities were most effective in assisting their perception of readiness?

A chi-square independence analysis was conducted to determine which mentoring activities were most effective in assisting assistant principals’ perceptions of readiness to assume the role of instructional leader. The results were statistically significantly different from the expected N in each case showing us that all five of the mentoring activities contributed to assistant principals’ perception of readiness (see Table 7). The first mentoring activity, — *district assigned formal mentoring programs for assistant principals*, produced the following results ($\chi^2 (3) = 36.307, p < .001$), with 52% of participants recording that district assigned

mentoring programs were “effective” for developing instructional leadership skills. The second mentoring activity, — *one-on-one mentoring for instructional leadership by your current principal*, produced the following results ($\chi^2 (3) = 70.984, p < .001$), with over 50% of participants recording that one-on-one mentoring for instructional leadership by their current principal was “very effective” for developing instructional leadership skills. The third mentoring activity, — *formal or informal mentoring program sponsored by a local university*, yielded the following results ($\chi^2 (3) = 36.377, p < .001$), with 55.7% of participants recording that formal or informal mentoring programs sponsored by local universities were “effective” for developing instructional leadership skills. The fourth mentoring activity, — *formal or informal mentoring program sponsored by state agency*, produced the following results ($\chi^2 (3) = 43.174, p < .001$), with 56.5% of participants recording that formal or informal mentoring programs sponsored by state agencies were “effective” for developing instructional leadership skills. The fifth and final mentoring activity, — *mentoring provided by experienced or senior administrators that you initiated (i.e., you sought help)*, produced the following results ($\chi^2 (3) = 66.068, p < .001$), with 47% of participants recording that mentoring sought out and provided by experienced or senior administrators was “very effective” for developing instructional leadership skills. All five of the mentoring activities contributed to assistant principals’ perception of readiness with the overwhelming majority of participants reporting that the mentoring activities were “effective” or “very effective” for developing instructional leadership skills.

Table 7

Test Statistics for Determining Effectiveness of Mentoring Activities

Mentoring Activity	$\chi^2(3)$	<i>p</i> value
District Assigned Formal Mentoring	36.307	< .001
One-on-one Mentoring	70.984	< .001
Formal or Informal Mentoring Program Sponsored by Local University	36.377	< .001
Formal or Informal Mentoring Program Sponsored by State Agency	43.174	< .001
Mentoring Provided by Experienced or Senior Administrator That You Initiated	66.068	< .001

Table 8

Effectiveness of District Assigned Formal Mentoring Program

	Frequency	Percentage
Not Effective	3	4
Somewhat Effective	19	25
Effective	39	52
Very Effective	14	19
Total	75	100

Table 9

Effectiveness of One-On-One Mentoring By Current Principal

	Frequency	Percentage
Not Effective	4	3
Somewhat Effective	13	11
Effective	44	36
Very Effective	62	50
Total	123	100

Table 10

Effectiveness of Formal / Informal University Sponsored Mentoring Program

	Frequency	Percentage
Not Effective	3	5
Somewhat Effective	16	26
Effective	34	56
Very Effective	8	13
Total	61	100

Table 11

Effectiveness of Formal / Informal State Agency Sponsored Mentoring Program

	Frequency	Percentage
Not Effective	3	4
Somewhat Effective	18	26
Effective	39	57
Very Effective	9	13
Total	69	100

Table 12

Effectiveness of Self-Initiated Mentoring Provided By Senior Administrators

	Frequency	Percentage
Not Effective	3	3
Somewhat Effective	13	11
Effective	46	39
Very Effective	56	47
Total	118	100

Research Question 5: Which professional growth opportunities did secondary assistant principals participate in that led them to report readiness to serve as instructional leaders?

A chi-square independence analysis was conducted to determine which of the nine professional growth opportunities participated in led secondary assistant principals to report readiness to serve as instructional leaders. Only one of the nine professional growth

opportunities participated in by assistant principals statistically significantly led them to report readiness to serve as instructional leaders (see Table 13). Those who reported that they were very ready and somewhat ready participated in *informal meetings among principals and assistant principals to discuss issues* with moderate effect size ($\chi^2 (2) = 17.662, p < .001$, Cramer's $V = 0.246$) (Cohen, 1988).

Table 13

Professional Growth Opportunities That Led Assistant Principals to Report Readiness

Professional Growth Opportunity	$\chi^2 (df = 2)$	<i>p</i> value
District assigned formal mentoring	8.139	.017
District sponsored professional development	.119	.942
District paid professional conferences	3.982	.137
Programs provided by state administrator association	.953	.621
One-on-one mentoring by current principal	3.402	.183
Informal meetings with principal	17.662	< .001*
Formal/informal university sponsored mentoring	3.731	.155
Formal/informal state agency sponsored mentoring	.840	.657
Mentoring provided by senior administrator	4.840	.089

*= statistically significant

Research Question 6: Did the number of professional growth opportunities participated in by secondary assistant principals affect their perceptions of readiness to serve as instructional leaders?

A one-way analysis of variance was completed to assess if the perception of readiness to serve as an instructional leader had an effect on the number of professional growth opportunities participated in by secondary assistant principals. See Table 14 for group means and standard deviations. Perception of readiness served as the independent variable with three groups: very ready, somewhat ready, and not ready. The number of professional growth opportunities were the dependent variable. Levene's test indicated that the assumption of equal variance was not violated, $p = .984$. The analysis of variance revealed that there was a significant effect of perceptions of readiness on the number of professional growth opportunities participated in by secondary assistant principals at the $p < .05$ level, $F(2, 1) = 5.42$, $p = .005$, with a moderate effect size, $\eta^2 = .036$ (Cohen, 1988). To determine which groups differed, post hoc tests using the Bonferroni correction were conducted. Results revealed that professional growth opportunities are statistically significantly affected by perceptions of readiness when comparing those who are very ready to those who somewhat ready, $p = .01$. However, there is not a statistically significant difference when comparing those who are very ready to those who are not ready. Likewise, there is not a statistically significant difference when comparing those who are somewhat ready to those who are not ready. Taken together, these results suggest that secondary assistant principals who perceive themselves as ready to assume the role of instructional leader participate in more professional growth opportunities than do those who are only somewhat ready.

Table 14

Group Means and Standard Deviations

Group	Mean	Standard Deviation
Very Ready	5.79	2.05
Somewhat Ready	5.07	2.11
Not Ready	4.40	2.11

Summary of Findings

Various statistical tests were conducted to answer the six research questions concerning assistant principals and their perceptions of readiness to serve as instructional leaders. To help the reader better understand the following interpretation of results, the researcher thought it important to share the definition of instructional leadership in this section. According to Leithwood and Seashore-Louis (2012), instructional leadership is a combination of knowledge, skills, and dispositions demonstrated by the school leader and characterized by her or his active engagement in the four functions of instructional leadership—setting direction, developing people, focusing on learning, and improving the instructional program.

Research Question 1

Secondary assistant principals across the state of Alabama are reporting that they are required to perform the four functions of instructional leadership. In this study, 60% of participants reported that over 50% of their duties consisted of instructional leadership functions.

Research Question 2

Secondary assistant principals across the state of Alabama are reporting they are ready to serve as instructional leaders at a very high frequency. In this study, 97% of the participants

reported they were either very ready or somewhat ready to serve as instructional leaders as defined by the four functions of instructional leadership.

Research Question 3

Of the two predictors, age and years of experience, neither one statistically significantly predicted readiness of secondary assistant principals to assume the role of instructional leader.

Research Question 4

All five of the mentoring activities contributed to assistant principals' perception of readiness with the overwhelming majority of participants reporting that the mentoring activities were "effective" or "very effective" for developing instructional leadership skills. Two mentoring activities that directly involved the current principal or senior administrator, however, were consistently reported by the greatest percentage of participants as being "very effective." In this study, 50% of participants reported that *one-on-one mentoring by their current principal* was "very effective" and 47% of participants reported that *self-initiated mentoring provided by a senior administrator* was "very effective" for developing instructional leadership skills and assisting their perception of readiness.

Research Question 5

Only one of the nine professional growth opportunities participated in by assistant principals statistically significantly led them to report readiness to serve as instructional leaders. In this study, 89.3% of those who reported they were very ready and somewhat ready participated in *informal meetings among principals and assistant principals to discuss issues*.

Research Question 6

The results of this study suggest that the number of professional growth opportunities are affected by perceptions of readiness when comparing those who are very ready to those who are

somewhat ready. Assistant principals who perceive themselves as ready to assume the role of instructional leader participate in more professional growth opportunities than do those who are only somewhat ready.

Conclusion

The analysis of data collected indicates that secondary assistant principals across the state of Alabama are reporting they are required to perform the four functions of instructional leadership. As a result, they reported readiness to serve as instructional leaders at a very high frequency. Variables, such as age and years of experience, did not statistically significantly predict readiness of secondary assistant principals to assume the role of instructional leader as expected. However, all five of the mentoring activities, *district assigned formal mentoring programs for assistant principals, one-on-one mentoring for instructional leadership by your current principal, formal or informal mentoring programs sponsored by a local university, formal or informal mentoring program sponsored by state agency, and mentoring provided by experienced or senior administrators that you initiated*, were found to contribute significantly to assistant principals' perception of readiness. The overwhelming majority of participants reported these mentoring activities were "effective" or "very effective" for developing instructional leadership skills.

Only one of the nine professional growth opportunities participated in by assistant principals, *informal meetings among principals and assistant principals to discuss issues*, statistically significantly influenced their perceptions of readiness to serve as instructional leaders. Finally, the number of professional growth opportunities participated in were found proportional to perceptions of readiness when comparing those who are very ready to those who are somewhat ready. However, there is not a statistically significant difference when comparing

those who are very ready to those who are not ready. Likewise, there is not a statistically significant difference when comparing those who are somewhat ready to those who are not ready. Taken together, these results suggest that secondary assistant principals who perceive themselves as ready to assume the role of instructional leader participate in more professional growth opportunities than do those who are only somewhat ready.

CHAPTER V. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to identify the characteristics and experiences that are significant in contributing to secondary assistant principals' perceptions of readiness to serve as instructional leaders. The researcher attempted to answer the question: What factors or experiences contribute to assistant principals' perception of readiness to be instructional leaders? The study was based upon the assumption that assistant principals must develop instructional leadership skills prior to assuming the role of principal in order to be successful school leaders.

This fifth and final chapter is divided into seven sections. The researcher begins by revisiting the review of existing literature on instructional leadership, the roles of the principal and the assistant principal, challenges for principals and assistant principals as instructional leaders, and professional development and mentoring opportunities that have been deemed as beneficial to the role. The researcher then presents a summary of the study that includes the purpose of the study, the research questions, the research design, instrumentation and validity, participants, and the statistical analyses utilized in the study. The researcher then summarizes the findings of the study and ties it to existing literature to form conclusions and offer up an interpretation of findings. Implications for principals, assistant principals, central office personnel, and university leadership programs are provided by the researcher and limitations to the study and recommendations for further research are suggested. The researcher's learning experiences and positionality conclude the chapter.

Literature Review Revisited

School leadership competency has been the subject of extensive research since the early 1980's. With major changes taking place in the educational landscape over the past four decades, it follows that school leadership demands have changed as well (Ash, Hodge, & Connell, 2013). According to Armstrong (2014), local and global reforms, rapid technological and demographic shifts, added levels of accountability, and diminished levels of support have created more complex and challenging roles for school leaders. The principal's leadership is second only to teacher instruction as a factor that contributes to student learning in schools (Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Among the explanations as to why some principals are more effective than others, the notion of the practice of instructional leadership echoes the loudest in the existing literature on educational administration (Grissom, Loeb, & Master, 2013).

Flath (1989), provided an early definition of instructional leadership: those actions taken by a principal to promote growth in student learning. Leithwood and Seashore-Louis (2012) developed the following operational definition of instructional leadership that was utilized in the current study reported in this dissertation. Instructional leadership is a combination of knowledge, skills, and dispositions demonstrated by the school leader and characterized by her or his active engagement in setting direction, developing people, focusing on learning, and improving the instructional program (Leithwood & Seashore-Louis, 2012).

Administrative roles have changed dramatically over the course of the past century (Armstrong, 2014; Balyer, 2014; Leithwood & Levin, 2005; Lynch, 2012; Rousmaniere, 2007; Siegrist, Weeks, Pate, & Monetti, 2009). An increase in accountability has resulted in a comparable increase in the number of responsibilities extended to principals. Principals are

responsible for the overall organization and management of the school, shaping the school's future, personnel management, instructional leadership, and school/community relations. Although hierarchical differences exist between the role of the principal and assistant principal, changes in accountability have had effects on the role of the assistant principal as well. This role is one that typically entails a number of tasks the principal does not have time to perform (Celikten, 2001; Chirichello, 2003) and until recently, the role of the assistant principal has had a primarily managerial focus (Gurley, Anast-May, & Lee, 2015). Due to this focus, the assistant principal position, according to Gurley, Anast-May, and Lee (2015), has been a questionable training ground for the principalship. Several researchers have suggested that the assistant principal's role must evolve to include instructional leadership as one of its most prominent duties (Barnett, Shoho, & Oleszewski, 2012; Celikten, 2001; Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett, 2012).

There are several challenges presented to assistant principals as instructional leaders. These challenges are somewhat similar to what beginning principals have reported (Barnett, Shoho, & Oleszewski, 2012) but deviate slightly due to hierarchical differences between the role of the principal and the assistant principal (Armstrong, 2005; Gurley, et al., 2015; Hartzell, 1993; Read, 2012). These challenges include problems with time allocation, being compared with their predecessors while trying to live up to school and community expectations, adjusting from the classroom teacher setting to an administrative setting, sharing responsibility to increase student performance with the principal, and the lack of a clearly defined role. All of these challenges must be addressed and the assistant principal's confidence must be developed in order for the assistant principal to have a positive impact on instruction and learning.

The socialization of a school administrator into a new community of practice requires taking on a new role identity (Brown-Ferrigno & Muth, 2014). Two types of socialization, professional and organizational, were identified for assistant principals. Different from professional socialization, which primarily focuses on university preparation for school administrators, organizational socialization is focused on actual practice by the administrator in the new role (Enomoto, 2012). According to Armstrong (2010), organizational socialization is the way in which individuals adopt the new values, norms, and beliefs that are required to fulfill organizational roles. Because of positional and power differences, principals and assistant principals face different kinds of challenges and pressures and thus experience socialization differently (Armstrong, 2005; Enomoto, 2012).

The changing role of school administrators to include an instructional leadership focus has brought to light the need for continued professional development (Spanneut, Tobin, & Ayers, 2013). It is vital that this professional development be focused on instructional leadership to equip principals with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to successfully promote student learning (Bradshaw & Buckner, 1994). This professional development does not always meet the needs of assistant principals, however. Many assistant principals rely on the guidance of an experienced principal or mentor to educate them in the area of instructional leadership. According to Augustine-Shaw (2015), it is imperative that experienced principals provide guidance to new administrators in their initial years of practice through quality mentoring. Hutton (2012), suggested that principals have a responsibility to mentor their assistant principals and develop their leadership capacity, which prepares them for career mobility that usually includes rising to the lead principalship.

Mentoring is a process whereby a more experienced individual provides counsel, guidance, and assistance to another. The importance of the mentoring relationship to the aspiring school administrator cannot be overemphasized. Oleszewski, Shoho, and Barnett (2012) contend that the principal-mentor relationship facilitates development and growth and positively influences the level of preparation for the principalship. Informal mentoring relationships are developed spontaneously without organizational assistance and, according to Ragins and Cotton (1999), are more effective than formal mentoring relationships because of the natural relationship that develops between mentor and mentee. According to Brown-Ferrigno and Muth (2004), “when mentoring effectively engages veteran, novice, and aspiring principals in reciprocal professional development, the community of practice continually improves, expands, and deepens leadership capacity in schools and districts” (p. 489).

Design of Study and Participant Sample

A quantitative study was undertaken to answer the central research question: What characteristics or experiences contribute to secondary assistant principals’ perceptions of readiness to serve as instructional leaders? Data from a large statewide survey of assistant principals conducted in 2014 in Alabama by Dr. Linda Searby of Auburn University was used for this study. From this existing data set, subsets of data from secondary assistant principals were extracted for this dissertation study. Various statistical tests were conducted to answer the following six research questions:

1. To what extent do secondary assistant principals report they are required to perform the four functions of instructional leadership?
2. To what extent do secondary assistant principals report they are ready to serve as instructional leaders as defined by the four functions of instructional leadership?

3. Which variable, age or years of experience, carries more weight in the perception of readiness of secondary assistant principals to assume the role of instructional leader?
4. For those who reported they were ready to assume the role of instructional leader, which mentoring activities were most effective in assisting their perception of readiness?
5. Which professional growth opportunities did secondary assistant principals participate in that led them to report readiness to serve as instructional leaders?
6. Did the number of professional growth opportunities participated in by secondary assistant principals affect their perceptions of readiness to serve as instructional leaders?

Design of the Study

The conceptual framework for the study was based on the work of Leithwood and Seashore-Louis (2012) and their description of instructional leadership characterized as four essential components (i.e., setting direction, developing people, focusing on learning, improving the instructional program). This description was repeated throughout the survey instrument that was utilized in this study.

The method of data collection for this quantitative study was a survey instrument designed by Dr. Tricia Browne-Ferrigno from the University of Kentucky, and Dr. Linda Searby, from Auburn University, Alabama. This survey was part of a large two-state study of assistant principals. Survey items were developed and validated by aligning content with current literature on assistant principals and the Leithwood and Seashore-Louis (2012) concepts on instructional leadership-setting direction, developing people, focusing on learning, and improving the instructional program. The survey consisted of 37 main questions. Among these

37 main questions were 30 multiple choice questions (with several sub-questions in most cases), one question with 9 items with a four-point Likert-type scale response choice, and six open-ended questions. The survey has been administered only once and only internal consistency reliability on related items could be determined (Creswell, 2002; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2011). Hence, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were computed on appropriate items, which revealed a range from .65 to .75.

The study was a quantitative design to determine the relationship that exists, if any, between independent variables such as age, years of experience, and the types and number of mentoring or professional growth opportunities secondary principals participated in and secondary assistant principals' perceptions of readiness to serve as instructional leaders. According to Gall, Borg, and Gall (2010), "quantitative research designs either explicitly or implicitly conceptualize variables as reflecting a causal relationship to each other" (p. 241). This researcher's study conceptualized variables as reflecting a causal relationship between variables. In this research the cause variables or independent variables were age and years of experiences of assistant principals and assistant principal's background experiences as they relate to mentoring and professional growth opportunities. The effect variable or the dependent variable was the perception of readiness to become an instructional leader.

Participants

For the purpose of this study the researcher used a subset of the large data set, extracting the survey data that was generated from secondary assistant principal respondents in the state of Alabama. The designed survey was sent to approximately 1,000 thousand elementary and secondary assistant principals across Alabama and elicited 581 responses. From the 581 respondents, 352 of those were secondary assistant principals. After eliminating those who did

not fully complete the survey, the participants for this study numbered 295 secondary assistant principals from schools across the state of Alabama. The sample consisted of 134 females and 161 males. Figure 1 displays the respondents' gender. Table 1 displays respondents' age groups, and Table 2 their total years of experience as an assistant principal.

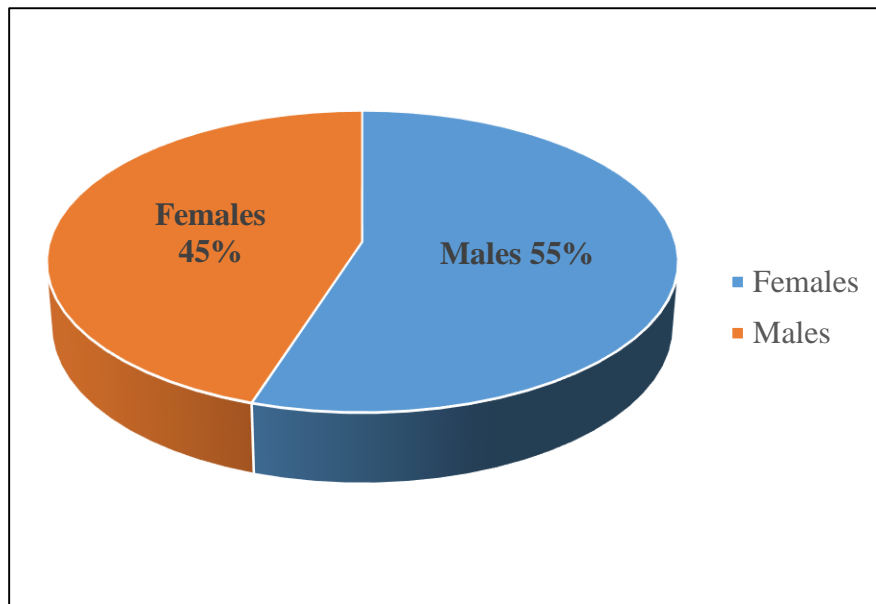


Figure 1. Respondents' Gender (Survey Question # 2)

Table 1

Respondents' Age Groups (Survey Question # 1)

Age Groups	Number of Respondents	Percentage
22–30 years of age	9	3
31–35 years of age	29	10
36–40 years of age	56	19
41–45 years of age	68	23
Over 45 years of age	133	45
Total	295	100

Table 2

Years of Experience as an Assistant Principal (Survey Question # 12)

Years of Experience as Assistant Principal	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Less than 5 years	109	40
5 or more years	186	60
Total	295	100

Responses for the 295 surveys were downloaded and analyzed using version 23 of the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The statistical analyses used to answer the research questions in this study were: Pearson Chi Square (χ^2), Logistic Regression, and Analysis of Variance (One-Way ANOVA) (see Table 3).

Table 3

Survey Research Questions Statistical Analysis

Research Question	Correlating Survey Questions	Descriptive Statistics
6. To what extent do secondary assistant principals report they are required to perform the four functions of instructional leadership?	#22	Chi Square (χ^2)
7. To what extent do secondary assistant principals report they are ready to serve as instructional leaders as defined by the four functions of instructional leadership?	#30	Chi Square (χ^2)
8. Which variable, age or years of experience, carries more weight in the perception of readiness of secondary assistant principals to assume the role of instructional leader?	#1, #12, #30	Logistic Regression
9. For those who reported they were ready to assume the role of instructional leader, which mentoring activities were most effective in assisting their perception of readiness?	#29, # 30	Chi Square (χ^2)
10. Which professional growth opportunities did secondary assistant principals participate in that led them to report readiness to serve as instructional leaders?	#28	Chi Square (χ^2)
6. Did the number of professional growth opportunities participated in by secondary assistant principals affect their perceptions of readiness to serve as instructional leaders?	#28, #30	One-way ANOVA

Summary of Findings and Interpretations

The statistical analyses used to answer the research questions in this study produced the following findings.

1. To what extent do secondary assistant principals report they are required to perform the four functions of instructional leadership? A majority of secondary assistant principals across the state of Alabama are required to perform one or more of the four functions of instructional leadership. Of the 295 participants, 3 of them did not record an answer for survey question #22. Of the remaining 292 participants who did answer the survey question, 60

assistant principals (20%) reported that the entirety of their job required that they perform one or more of the four functions of instructional leadership and 114 assistant principals (39%) reported that over 50% of their job required that they perform one or more of the four functions of instructional leadership. Combining these first two, 174 of the 292 participants that answered the survey question (nearly 60%) reported that instructional leadership duties make up more than half of their job. Of the remaining 118 participants, 66 assistant principals (23%) reported that 25 to 50% of their job required that they perform one or more of the four functions of instructional leadership and 49 assistant principals (17%) reported that less than 25% of their job required that they perform one or more of the four functions of instructional leadership. Only 3 assistant principals (1%) reported that no part of their job required that they perform any of the four functions of instructional leadership. The minimum expected frequency was 58.4. The chi-square goodness-of-fit test indicated that the extent to which assistant principals are required to perform the four functions of instructional leadership were not equally represented by the participants of the study. The results were statistically significantly different ($\chi^2 (4) = 108.034, p < .001$), with the largest number of participants (nearly 60%) recording that over 50% of their duties involved performing one or more of the four functions of instructional leadership (See Table 4).

These findings support the work of Muijs and Harris (2003), who insisted that the assistant principal's role has evolved, gradually making way for the assistant principal to be a stronger institutional presence. The findings also support the work of Harris and Lowery (2004), who contend that the role of the assistant principal has grown in complexity and now mirrors that of the principal; this includes leadership of the instructional program as well. Barnett, Shoho, and Oleszewski (2012) contend that the role of the assistant principal must continue to evolve

from the traditional perspective of disciplinarian and manager to a perspective in which enhancing the instructional program of the school is at the forefront.

The findings of this study contradict the typically managerial role of the assistant principal described in the works of Good (2008) and Hassenpflug (1991). As stated previously, Gurley, Anast-May, and Lee (2015) contend that the role of the assistant principal is a questionable training ground for the principalship due to its chiefly managerial focus. The findings of this study suggest otherwise for the majority of assistant principals across the state of Alabama. This study was based on the assumption that assistant principals need to attain instructional leadership skills prior to assuming the role of principal in order to be successful school leaders. The researcher suggests that with a majority of assistant principals reporting over 50% of their duties involve performing one or more of the four functions of instructional leadership, that the role of assistant principal *is* an excellent training ground for the principalship. This concurs with Daresh and Voss (2001) who mentioned that the assistant principal role serves as a stepping stone to the principalship.

The researcher speculates several assumptions to account for the high number of assistant principals reporting they are required to perform instructional leadership duties: 1) their senior principals recognize they have strengths in the instructional realm, and therefore assign or invite them to work with instruction in their regular duties, 2) the assistant principals themselves ask to work with instructional issues, or 3) the job role is truly changing because of the increased emphasis on student achievement; by default, all administrators are working regularly and more intensely with instructional issues while still having to be managers as well. The researcher also finds it interesting that 60% of the participants in this study had over 5 years of experience as an assistant principal. From this fact, the researcher speculates that experienced assistant principals

have possibly evolved with the changing emphasis on student achievement. As a result, they have re-tooled their skills through professional development to learn how to have more effective involvement with best classroom practices, teacher evaluations, etc.

2. To what extent do secondary assistant principals report they are ready to serve as instructional leaders as defined by the four functions of instructional leadership? A high percentage of secondary assistant principals across the state of Alabama report that they are ready to serve as instructional leaders. Of the 294 participants who answered the survey question, 161 assistant principals (55%) reported that they were *very ready* to serve as an instructional leader as defined in this study. One hundred twenty-three assistant principals (42%) reported that they were *somewhat ready* to serve as an instructional leader as defined in this study. Nine assistant principals (3%) reported that they were *not ready* to serve as an instructional leader as defined in this study. Only one assistant principal (.3%) reported that this question was not applicable; they were not responsible for instructional leadership duties at the school. The minimum expected frequency was 73.5. The chi-square goodness-of-fit test indicated that the extent to which assistant principals felt ready to serve as instructional leaders as defined by the study were not equally represented by the participants of the study. The results were statistically significantly different ($\chi^2(3) = 256.619, p < .001$), with the largest number of participants (97%) reporting that they were either very ready or somewhat ready to serve as instructional leaders as defined by the four functions of instructional leadership (see Table 5).

The role of the assistant principal is one that typically entails a number of tasks the principal does not want to perform (Celikten, 2001; Chirichello, 2003) or does not have time to perform and is usually based on the amount of power the principal is willing to share or delegate to the assistant principal (Celikten, 2001). That being the case, the researcher believes that

principals can greatly influence assistant principals' perceptions of readiness to assume the role of principal and instructional leader of the school by the duties they assign them. The researcher's interpretation coincides with Hunt (2011), who contends that one of the most important things a principal can do is to involve the assistant principal in all aspects of running the school, including supervising the instructional program. Assistant principals need experience, training specific to their positions, professional development, and mentoring in order to successfully fill these positions (Armstrong, 2009; Hunt, 2011).

So, according to the survey results, assistant principals in Alabama are strong in their perceptions of their readiness to serve as instructional leaders. However, the researcher wants to raise a possible limitation to this finding. The assistant principals were self-reporting on this survey, and there is always the danger of bias and inflationary ratings when individuals self-report. Would assistant principals really want to admit to being 'not ready' to be an instructional leader? And how did the respondents interpret the difference in the terms 'very ready' and 'somewhat ready?' Could 'somewhat ready' really mean 'not yet ready?' Not knowing the answers to these questions poses a potential limitation to the study.

3. Which variable, age or years of experience, carries more weight in the perception of readiness of secondary assistant principals to assume the role of instructional leader?

Factors such as age and years of experience do not statistically significantly predict readiness of secondary assistant principals to assume the role of instructional leader. A logistic regression model performed to ascertain the effects of age and years of experience on the perceptions of readiness of secondary assistant principals to assume the role of instructional leader was not statistically significant, $\chi^2(2) = 1.906, p = .386$ (see Table 6). The model explained 0.9% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance in assistant principal's perceptions of readiness to assume the

role of instructional leader and correctly classified 55.7% of the cases. Sensitivity was 9.8%, specificity was 90.6%, positive predictive value was 44.4% and negative predictive value was 56.8%. Of the two predictors, age and years of experience, neither one statistically significantly predicted readiness of secondary assistant principals to assume the role of instructional leader. In this study, these characteristics did not influence the assistant principals' self-perceptions of readiness to be instructional leaders.

These findings were quite puzzling to the researcher and contradict the findings of Hausman, Nebeker, and McCreary (2002), who contend that vice principals with greater years of experience spend more time as instructional leaders than less experienced vice principals. The findings of these researchers also revealed gender differences in the degrees of involvement in certain responsibilities; females were found to spend more time on instructional leadership activities in comparison to their male counterparts. The researcher reminds the reader that a slight majority of the respondents in this study were male (55%) and suggests that the results to this question might differ if the study were repeated using a population consisting predominately of female respondents. It is interesting to note, however, that a publication based on the entire data set for this current research study, did find that female assistant principals who had been K-2 elementary teachers were more ready than other assistant principals to be instructional leaders (Searby, Browne-Ferrigno, & Wang, in press). This is not altogether surprising, as teachers at this level teach all subject areas and are well-versed in a variety of instructional strategies that can serve them well as they supervise the instructional program in schools.

The researcher suggests that the major factor in predicting readiness of secondary assistant principals to assume the role of instructional leader is the principal under which the assistant principal is employed, not necessarily age or years of experience. This view coincides

with Celikten (2001), who afforded that principals have the greatest influence on assistant principals' job preparedness by offering a number of leadership activities for them to participate in. According to Hutton (2012), assistant principals enter into educational administration because they want to be school leaders—leaders of vision, people, and purpose. The assistant principal position is the most critical role that makes or breaks an administrator's career in the upward progression from teacher to higher levels in the administrative hierarchy (Herrington & Kearney, 2012). Glanz (1994) noted that given the natural progression from assistant principal to principal, assistant principal training must improve and their job responsibilities must grow to include leadership activities that are aimed at impacting student performance. According to Barnett, Shoho, and Oleszewski (2012), "principals have the power to provide meaningful growth and development opportunities for their assistant principals, especially in building their capabilities to become future principals" (p. 97).

The researcher adds that principals can positively influence assistant principals' perceptions of readiness by establishing clearly defined roles for assistant principals that include instructional leadership duties. The researcher's interpretation concurs with the views of Celikten (2001), Hunt (2011), Oleszewski, Shoho, and Barnett (2012), and Celik (2013) who advocate that there be a concrete definition for the role of the assistant principal to limit role ambiguity and conflict. Read (2012) contends that "the refusal to address the differences in the complexities of assistant principal's role, as opposed to the principal's, may lead to an inability to create constructive change within schools" (p. 32).

4. For those who reported they were ready to assume the role of instructional leader, which mentoring activities were most effective in assisting their perception of readiness? Mentoring activities contribute to Alabama assistant principals' perception of

readiness to assume the role of instructional leader. The overwhelming majority of participants in the study reported the five mentoring activities listed on the survey were “effective” or “very effective” for developing instructional leadership skills. The results were statistically significantly different from the expected N in each case, revealing all five of the mentoring activities contributed to assistant principals’ perception of readiness (see Table 7). The first mentoring activity, — *district assigned formal mentoring programs for assistant principals*, produced the following results ($\chi^2 (3) = 36.307, p < .001$), with 52% of participants recording district assigned mentoring programs were “effective” for developing instructional leadership skills. The second mentoring activity, — *one-on-one mentoring for instructional leadership by your current principal*, produced the following results ($\chi^2 (3) = 70.984, p < .001$), with over 50% of participants recording one-on-one mentoring for instructional leadership by their current principal was “very effective” for developing instructional leadership skills. The third mentoring activity, — *formal or informal mentoring program sponsored by a local university*, yielded the following results ($\chi^2 (3) = 36.377, p < .001$), with 55.7% of participants recording formal or informal mentoring programs sponsored by local universities were “effective” for developing instructional leadership skills. The fourth mentoring activity, — *formal or informal mentoring program sponsored by state agency*, produced the following results ($\chi^2 (3) = 43.174, p < .001$), with 56.5% of participants recording formal or informal mentoring programs sponsored by state agencies were “effective” for developing instructional leadership skills. The fifth and final mentoring activity, — *mentoring provided by experienced or senior administrators that you initiated (i.e., you sought help)*, produced the following results ($\chi^2 (3) = 66.068, p < .001$), with 47% of participants recording mentoring sought out and provided by experienced or senior administrators was “very effective” for developing instructional leadership skills. All five of the

mentoring activities contributed to assistant principals' perception of readiness with the overwhelming majority of participants reporting the mentoring activities were "effective" or "very effective" for developing instructional leadership skills.

Mentoring, according to Lanna-Lipton (2009), is the process whereby a more experienced individual counsels and offers assistance to a younger or newer employee to develop leadership skills and afford advancement within the organization. Mentoring, according to Saban and Wolfe (2009), promotes continued development and improvement of skills which are already present in many aspiring administrators. Robinson, Horan, and Nanavati (2009) add that mentoring accelerates learning, reduces isolation, and increases the confidence and skill of newly appointed administrators. In a study conducted by Searby, Browne-Ferrigno, and Wang (in press), assistant principals who indicated they were "somewhat ready" and "not ready" to assume the role of instructional leader reported that they did need mentoring. According to Augustine-Shaw (2015), it is imperative that experienced principals provide guidance to new assistant principals in their initial years of practice through quality mentoring.

Two mentoring activities that directly involved the current principal or senior administrator, however, were consistently reported by the greatest percentage of participants as being "very effective." In this study, 50% of participants reported that *one-on-one mentoring by their current principal* was "very effective" and 47% of participants reported that *self-initiated mentoring provided by a senior administrator* was "very effective" for developing instructional leadership skills and assisting their perception of readiness. The researcher interprets these findings to mean that informal, one-on-one mentoring by the principal is the most effective way to prepare assistant principals for an instructional leadership role. The researcher's interpretation coincides with the findings of Ragins and Cotton (1999) who contend that informal mentoring

relationships are more effective than formal mentoring relationships. Informal mentoring relationships, unlike formal mentoring relationships, are much longer in duration, develop spontaneously (Ragins & Cotton, 1999), and according to Dunbar and Kinnersley (2011), are more successful when the mentor and mentee share similarities such as gender, ethnicities, experiences, values, and background. Dunbar and Kinnersley (2011), contend that many assistant principals learn to become effective instructional leaders through informal mentoring that develops out of natural interactions between the principal and assistant principal.

5. Which professional growth opportunities did secondary assistant principals participate in that led them to report readiness to serve as instructional leaders? Informal meetings among principals and assistant principals lead assistant principals across the state of Alabama to report readiness to serve as instructional leaders. Each and every year, assistant principals across the state of Alabama participate in professional growth opportunities in an effort to gain the knowledge and skills needed to be effective school leaders. These professional growth opportunities may consist of district assigned formal mentoring, district sponsored professional development, district paid professional conferences, programs provided by state administrator associations, one-on-one mentoring by the current principal, informal meetings among principals and assistant principals to discuss issues, formal or informal university sponsored mentoring, formal or informal state agency sponsored mentoring, or mentoring provided by a senior administrator. In this study, 89.3% of those who reported that they were very ready and somewhat ready participated in *informal meetings among principals and assistant principals to discuss issues*. This was the only professional growth opportunity participated in by assistant principals that showed statistical significance with regards to readiness to serve as instructional leaders. Those who reported they were very ready and somewhat ready participated

in *informal meetings among principals and assistant principals to discuss issues* with moderate effect size ($\chi^2 (2) = 17.662, p < .001, \text{Cramer's } V = 0.246$) (Cohen, 1988).

Findings suggest that assistant principals rely heavily on the relationship they forge with their current principal, and this relationship may serve to influence their readiness to assume an instructional leadership role. These findings confirm the work of Dunbar and Kinnersley (2011) who contend that many assistant principals learn to become effective instructional leaders through informal mentoring that develops out of natural interactions between the principal and assistant principal. Celikten (2001) affords that principals, not university programs, have the biggest influence on assistant principals' job preparedness. According to Armstrong (2014), newly appointed assistant principals, as 21st century leaders, are challenged cognitively, socially, and emotionally. Marshall and Hooley (2006), likened the transition and orientation into the role of assistant principal to "baptism by fire, sink or swim." This highlights the need for an assistant principal to have a quality mentoring relationship with someone who is already succeeding in the senior principal role. The researcher suggests that supportive principals can help assistant principals through these tough times and prepare them for success in school administration. The researcher's view coincides with the findings of Eller (2010) who contended that administrators who receive proper support from mentors report a higher sense of productivity.

6. Did the number of professional growth opportunities participated in by secondary assistant principals affect their perceptions of readiness to serve as instructional leaders? Assistant principals who consider themselves "ready" to be instructional leaders participate in more professional growth opportunities than those assistant principals who are only "somewhat ready." However, there is not a statistically significant difference when comparing those who are very ready to those who are not ready. Likewise, there is not a statistically

significant difference when comparing those who are somewhat ready to those who are not ready. A one-way analysis of variance was completed to assess if the perception of readiness to serve as an instructional leader had an effect on the number of professional growth opportunities participated in by secondary assistant principals. See Table 14 for group means and standard deviations. Perception of readiness served as the independent variable with three groups: very ready, somewhat ready, and not ready. The number of professional growth opportunities were the dependent variable. Levene's test indicated that the assumption of equal variance was not violated, $p = .984$. The analysis of variance revealed that there was a significant effect of perceptions of readiness on the number of professional growth opportunities participated in by secondary assistant principals at the $p < .05$ level, $F(2, 1) = 5.42$, $p = .005$, with a moderate effect size, $\eta^2 = .036$ (Cohen, 1988). To determine which groups differed, post hoc tests using the Bonferroni correction were conducted. Results revealed that professional growth opportunities are statistically significantly affected by perceptions of readiness when comparing those who are very ready to those who somewhat ready, $p = .01$.

The researcher interprets these findings to mean that the more assistant principals engage in professional growth opportunities, the greater their perception of readiness will be to assume the role of principal and instructional leader. These findings confirm much of what is found in the literature. Training and professional development for assistant principals should continue preparing them with effective management skills while at the same time increasing their capacity to assume greater instructional leadership responsibilities (Glanz, 2004; Gurley, Anast-May, & Lee, 2015) because, according to Walker and Qian (2006), "in too many cases, the experience of the climb has done little to prepare beginning principals for the balancing act they are asked to perform" (p. 297). The fact that the principal's role has transitioned to a primarily instructional

leadership focus highlights the importance of continued professional development (Spanneut, Tobin, & Ayers, 2013). Oliver (2005), contends that assistant principals need the same professional growth experiences as principals “since they work in the same environment and may eventually become principals” (p. 90).

Implications

School leadership competency continues to be a subject of extensive research in continued efforts to find ways to improve student achievement and overall school success. This research focused primarily on secondary assistant principals and the characteristics or experiences that prepare them to assume instructional leadership roles. The role of the assistant principal has grown in complexity as accountability demands have increased. Assistant principals today are more than disciplinarians; they are school leaders dedicated to impacting student performance, even though that influence may be indirect. This study has implications for current assistant principals, principals, central office administrators, and university leadership programs. It will also benefit others who are researching the role of the assistant principal in school leadership.

This study seeks to add to the existing literature on assistant principals and their evolving role in school leadership. Researchers in the current literature suggest a need for more research on the assistant principal. According to Armstrong (2009), the assistant principal is literally the forgotten individual in the literature. Enomoto (2012) added that the literature is primarily focused on the principalship despite the fact that the vast majority of school administrators begin their careers as assistant principals. Specifically, do assistant principals in the state of Alabama feel ready to serve as instructional leaders? If so, what contributes to this perception of readiness? This research study answered those questions for secondary assistant principals.

Furthermore, the research study can serve to inform local school principals and district administrators of the importance of establishing a concrete job definition for assistant principals. According to Oleszewski, Shoho, and Barnett (2012), job descriptions are often unclear and the explicit responsibilities differ between districts and schools. This combination of an unclear framework for their actions and seemingly endless responsibilities may expose assistant principals to role ambiguity and role conflict (Celik, 2013).

The first implication of this study is for senior principals who need to know the importance of principal mentoring for assistant principals and to assist principals in this area. According to Celikten (2001), principals, not university preparation programs, have the biggest influence on assistant principals' job preparedness. Dunbar and Kinnersley (2011) contend that many assistant principals learn to become effective instructional leaders through informal mentoring that develops out of natural interactions between the principal and assistant principal. A study conducted by Saban and Wolfe (2009) added a compelling argument for supporting mentoring as a tool for professional development. The relationship that develops between the principal and assistant principal is crucial to the development and readiness of assistant principals for leadership succession. Principals must take responsibility for developing these relationships to ensure that assistant principals are ready to assume the role of instructional leader.

Brown-Ferrigno and Muth (2004) contend that principals should assist aspiring principals with role socialization by working closely with them and helping them to develop confidence through engaging leadership activities and administrative tasks. Their study found what administrators value most of all from their mentors is "the opportunity for reflective conversations, emotional and moral support, and affirmation that they are doing a good job"

(Browne-Ferrigno & Muth, 2004, p. 5). The researcher strongly suggests that principals make these opportunities happen in order to ensure their assistant principals are prepared to assume instructional leadership roles in the future. Quality mentoring relationships are the key to effective leadership in 21st Century schools (Saban & Wolfe, 2009). The researcher echoes the findings of Hunt (2011) who contends one of the most important things a principal can do is involve the assistant principal in all aspects of running the school. This research study can be used by principals to mentor assistant principals and prepare them for transition into the principalship.

The second implication of this study is the benefit it may provide to central office administrators as they plan training, professional development, and mentoring programs to improve the practice of assistant principals. The findings may also be utilized by central office administrators to appropriately plan succession training for principal positions. Assistant principals “typically do not receive professional development in the areas to which they are typically assigned—these areas include conflict, staff relations, and facilities management; and professional development in only these areas does not prepare them to become lead principals” (Hutton, 2012, p. 1). Herrington and Kearny (2012) concur that there is a significant gap between what assistant principals need and what is actually provided in the form of professional development. Searby, Browne-ferrigno and Wang (in press) found that the greatest mentoring need for those not ready to be instructional leaders was in the area of ‘improving the instructional program.’ Assistant principals want specific strategies and ways to work with teachers that will help in this realm. The researcher suggests that many central office personnel are simply out of touch with the current training, professional development, and mentoring needs of assistant principals. From his own personal experience, the researcher has learned that the central office

typically leaves assistant principal training at the discretion of the principal. As a result, assistant principal readiness and development differs across the state of Alabama with the differing views and opinions of local school principals. Some assistant principals flourish while others continue to struggle. The researcher believes the central office should take an active role in assistant principal training and professional development as well as in succession planning for schools. The results of this research study can assist those central office personnel who may be out of touch with developing training sessions, professional development, and mentoring programs that are relevant to the current role of the assistant principal and assist them in adequately preparing assistant principals for transition into the principalship.

The importance of professional development in the area of instructional leadership to improve assistant principals' level of practice cannot be overemphasized. The results of this quantitative study suggest that assistant principals who consider themselves "ready" to be instructional leaders participate in more professional growth opportunities (professional development) than those assistant principals who are only "somewhat ready." The fact that the principal's role has transitioned to a primarily instructional leadership focus highlights the importance of continued professional development (Spanneut, Tobin, & Ayers, 2013). According to Hallinger (2005), instructional leadership has come into prominence and has drawn considerable interest of researchers. Asiyai and Ifeoma (2013) contend that instructional leadership is exhibited when school leaders focus on learning and instruction. Leithwood and Seashore-Louis (2012) defined instructional leadership as the combination of knowledge, skills, and dispositions demonstrated by the school leader and characterized by her or his active engagement in four essential components (i.e., setting direction, developing people, focusing on learning, improving the instructional program). Research suggests that assistant principals who

engage in these instructional leadership activities are better prepared for transition to the role of principal. Because the role of assistant principal frequently serves as a stepping stone to the principal's office, Barnett, Shoho, and Oleszewski (2012) contend that the assistant principal's role must include enhancing the instructional program of the school.

The third implication for this research study is to guide university leadership programs in their preparation of assistant principals. In most cases, the assistant principalship serves as a stepping stone to the principalship (Daresh & Voss, 2001). According to Shoho, Barnett, and Tooms (2012), the role of assistant principal is the most common career path to the principalship and accordingly requires a focused level of preparation. Brown-Ferrigno and Muth (2004) contend that concerted joint efforts by university preparation programs and local school districts is a must for developing effective school leaders. University leadership programs are continually reflecting on way to improve pre-service training for prospective school leaders. However, many administrators contend that university leadership programs are not doing enough to effectively prepare them for their jobs (Armstrong, 2012; Marshall & Hooley, 2006). According to Hess and Kelly (2007), "all but 4 percent of practicing principals report that on-the-job experiences or guidance from colleagues has been more helpful in preparing them for their current position than their graduate school studies" (p. 245). This knowledge should alarm university leadership program faculty and alert them to the need for significant change in their preparation of school administrators.

The researcher strongly suggests that shadowing become a part of all leadership programs prior to internship. The internship often prepares aspiring administrators for the managerial aspects of the role but excludes them from some of the more important instructional leadership functions. Shadowing may expose aspiring administrators to quality administrators utilizing

their instructional leadership skills as well as inform them of what the role of an instructional leader is really all about. The researcher also suggests that university leadership programs bring in veteran administrators to speak to aspiring administrators on a regular basis concerning instructional leadership. This will help aspiring administrators to recognize quality instructional leaders and the skills they possess as well as allow them to begin networking and building relationships to facilitate future growth and development as instructional leaders themselves. The results of this research study can assist university leadership programs in developing appropriate leadership preparation programs that more effectively train assistant principals for their challenging and ever-changing role and ultimately prepares them for succession to the principalship.

The final implication of this study is for current practicing assistant principals themselves. The findings of this study indicate that informal mentoring by a senior administrator or principal is invaluable to assistant principals in their development of effective leadership skills and for positively influencing their perception of readiness to assume the role of instructional leader. Daresh (2007) contends that mentors are not simply providers of information but rather guides to help new administrators learn how to think differently about their roles. The researcher suggests that assistant principals who do not currently have a mentor should seek out a senior administrator or principal to serve as a mentor. Schechter and Firuz (2015) suggest that when selecting mentors, variables such as professional goals, interpersonal styles, and learning styles should be considered.

This research study may also serve to inform assistant principals of ways to lessen the shock and feelings of isolation associated with organizational socialization. According to Armstrong (2010), organizational socialization is the way in which individuals adopt the new

values, norms, and beliefs that are required to fulfill organizational roles. These “rites of passage,” as coined by Armstrong (2010), remain unquestioned because they are often normalized within the daily school routine. Oleszewski, Shoho, and Barnett (2012) noted that assistant principals must not only be prepared for their new role, they must also learn the norms and expectations of the organization. Central office administrators, other principals, and even members of the community are external sources that can greatly impact the socialization process of the new principal (Sackney & Walker, 2006). There is good news for assistant principals who have the fortitude to stay the course. Kartal (2009) revealed that organizational acceptance and socialization levels increase as seniority increases and that successful organizational socialization efforts actually increase employees’ job satisfaction.

The Making of a “Ready” Instructional Leader

The major factors identified in this study that influence assistant principals’ perceptions of readiness were professional development, the amount of instructional leadership tasks and responsibilities participated in by assistant principals, and the relationships developed with senior administrators through quality principal mentoring. Assistant principals who consider themselves “ready” to be instructional leaders participate in more professional growth opportunities than those assistant principals who are only “somewhat ready.” Age and years of experience were found to have no influence on assistant principals’ perceptions of readiness. Figure 2 explains the making of an assistant principal into an instructional leader.

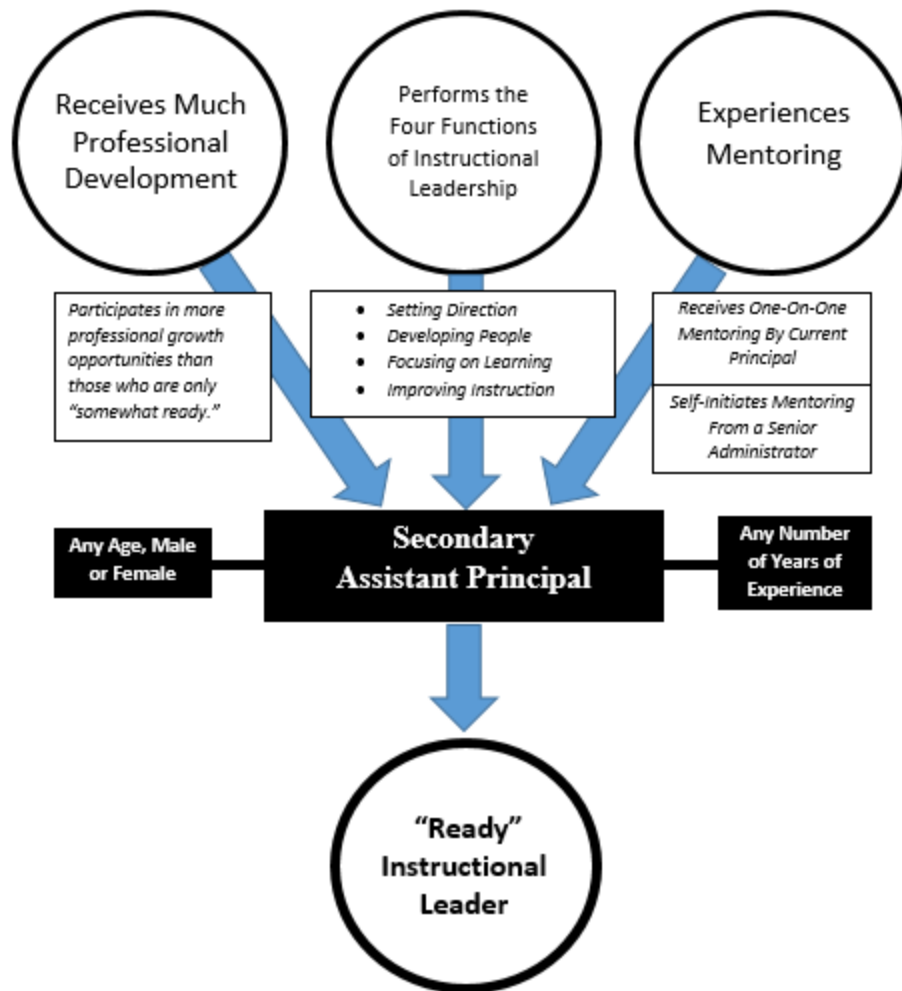


Figure 2. The Making of a "Ready" Instructional Leader

Limitations

The limitations of this study include:

1. There is a limited amount of literature on assistant principals and their instructional leadership role in schools, making it more difficult to create a conceptual framework for the study.

2. The sample size was acceptable; however, due to the size of the population sampled, the findings may not be generalizable to all secondary assistant principals in the State of Alabama.
3. Due to the fact that only data collected from secondary assistant principals was used in this study, the findings of the study may not be generalizable to assistant principals at other levels in the State of Alabama.
4. Participants may not have devoted the time necessary to respond appropriately to the survey questions due to the time constraints associated with the assistant principal role.
5. Survey results were based upon the respondents own perceptions of readiness and may not accurately portray the actual readiness of participants to serve as instructional leaders. There is a potential bias due to inflated responses when self-reporting; some administrators may be unwilling to admit that they are “not ready.”

Recommendations for Further Research

Very little can be found within the existing literature concerning assistant principals and their leadership role in schools. Even less can be found concerning assistant principals and their preparation to assume *instructional* leadership roles in their respective schools. This research study expands the investigation into the role of secondary assistant principals and their readiness to assume instructional leadership responsibilities in schools. To further expand assistant principal research, other areas could be addressed through future research. Based on the literature, results, and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made for future research.

Future research should include replication of the study using a larger sample size. The larger sample size could include respondents from other states or large geographic regions such as the Southeastern or Midwestern portions of the United States. A larger sample size could make the results generalizable to assistant principals over a broad geographic region or possibly across the nation.

Future research should include replication of the study using data collected from assistant principals at other grade levels. Due to the fact that only data collected from secondary assistant principals was used in this study, the results of the study may not be generalizable to assistant principals at other levels in the state of Alabama. Such a study, using elementary assistant principals, has been conducted by Robert Hunter, a doctoral student at Auburn University who wrote a companion dissertation to this one. Readers are encouraged to search ProQuest for that dissertation to read the results of the study conducted with elementary assistant principal data.

Future research could include sending the surveys to all principals across the state of Alabama to gauge their perception of the actual readiness of their assistant principals to serve as instructional leaders. The current survey results were based upon the respondents own perceptions of readiness and may not accurately portray the actual readiness of participants to serve as instructional leaders. Principals may give a more accurate assessment of their assistant principals' readiness to serve as instructional leaders.

Future research could also be conducted comparing the results of assistant principals from urban, suburban, and rural schools. This may shed some light on the reasons for the high turnover rate among administrators in urban and inner city schools, as well as rural schools.

Future research could include a replication of the study with further development of the survey instrument. In particular, the researcher feels that question number twelve should be

changed to include larger spans for years of experience. This question currently asks, how many years of experience do you have as an assistant principal? It includes 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 or more years of experience. The researcher suggests that five year spans may be more appropriate for this survey. This may change the results of the study and years of experience may indeed statistically significantly predict readiness of assistant principals to assume the role of instructional leader. Additionally, researchers suggest that females spend more time on instructional leadership activities in comparison to their male counterparts. As a result, the researcher believes that gender is another factor that should be tested along with age and years of experience to see if it predicts readiness of assistant principals to assume the role of instructional leader. The researcher believes that the results of this research could provide some interesting findings.

Finally, future research should be conducted on how to best infuse instructional leadership practices into the current role of assistant principals. The research should focus on a combination of specific training programs, professional development, and mentoring by veteran administrators, who themselves, are considered exemplary instructional leaders. Training and professional development that focuses on instructional leadership will likely equip assistant principals with the knowledge and skills needed to successfully promote student learning. Quality mentoring that focuses on instructional leadership will prepare the assistant principal for career mobility that may include rising to the principalship. However, some assistant principals choose to be career assistants. Whichever route the assistant principal chooses, he or she will benefit from giving attention to continuous learning and growth as an instructional leader.

Researcher's Positionality and Learning Experiences

The role of the researcher for this study was to identify the characteristics and experiences that are significant in contributing to secondary assistant principals' perceptions of readiness to serve as instructional leaders. The researcher has served as a classroom teacher for seventeen years, a secondary assistant principal for the past three years, and a K–12 principal for the past five months. The researcher earned an administrative degree in 1996 but chose to remain in the classroom working with students and coaching for seventeen years prior to attaining an administrative position. At the time of the survey, the researcher was a secondary assistant principal of a grades 10–12 high school in South Alabama. The researcher now serves as the principal and chief instructional leader of a K–12 school in South Alabama. The years of experience in the classroom after having earned a degree in secondary administration afforded the researcher numerous opportunities to participate in instructional leadership activities. Also, the three years of experience as an assistant principal provided the researcher a unique insight and a professional advantage into the current role of assistant principals in the state of Alabama. The researcher can identify strongly with the data provided in the survey and is sympathetic to the challenges presented to assistant principals as instructional leaders. The researcher found the mentoring relationship provided by a senior administrator while serving in an assistant principal role to be invaluable. The researcher was able to ask questions of his senior principal and have candid conversations about topics of educational and instructional leadership on a regular basis. The researcher feels very blessed to have worked for three years in the high school setting under an administrator who shared many responsibilities with him including instructional leadership duties. The researcher attributes his successful transition into the principalship to the principal

mentoring relationship and the responsibilities and experiences shared with him while serving as an assistant principal.

Because of these experiences, the researcher entered into the study with a preconceived notion or bias that the principal of a school is the key factor in determining the productivity and administrative success of her or his assistant principals. Results of this study suggest that assistant principals rely heavily on the relationship they forge with their current principal and that this relationship may serve to influence their readiness to assume an instructional leadership role. The results also suggest that informal, one-on-one mentoring by the principal is the most effective way to prepare assistant principals for an instructional leadership role. Finally, principals can positively influence assistant principals' perceptions of readiness by establishing clearly defined roles for assistant principals that include instructional leadership duties.

From conducting this study, the researcher learned what can be done to support the professional growth and ultimate leadership success of the assistant principals now under his leadership. The researcher has also learned from this study and from his own professional experience that he needs to involve assistant principals in every aspect of running the school; this includes sharing many instructional leadership responsibilities rather than delegating just managerial duties. His assistant principals need to be included in both formal and informal observations as well as the follow up interviews and conversations with teachers concerning curriculum and instruction. Through professional experience, the researcher has learned that nothing is more beneficial for the advancement of assistant principals than having candid and open conversations with them concerning educational and instructional leadership. There must be a relationship of trust between the principal and assistant principal where the principal can provide encouragement and support as well as sensitively deliver constructive feedback and

criticism. The researcher has ultimately learned that, in order to ensure that the school continues to move forward after his departure, he must prepare assistant principals for principal succession.

Summary

Assistant principals are an underrepresented group in the current literature on school administration. In particular, their current role and their preparation to assume leadership of the instructional program in their respective schools is under-researched. This research study focused on the characteristics and experiences that are significant in contributing to secondary assistant principals' perceptions of readiness to serve as instructional leaders. The researcher has answered the question: What factors or experiences contribute to assistant principals' perception of readiness to be instructional leaders? The factors and experiences that contribute to a secondary assistant principal's perception of readiness as an instructional leader have been identified.

The major factors identified in this study that influence assistant principals' perceptions of readiness are the quality of relationships developed with senior administrators, the amount of instructional leadership tasks and responsibilities participated in by assistant principals, professional development, and quality principal mentoring. Age and years of experience were found to have no influence on assistant principals' perceptions of readiness. Now that these significant factors and experiences have been identified, it is imperative that those who train, encourage, and develop assistant principals receive this message: A quality mentoring relationship with a senior administrator who actively encourages participation in instructional leadership functions and facilitates appropriate professional development is paramount to the development of assistant principals who are ready to assume the role of instructional leader.

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Appendix 1

Alabama Assistant Principal Instructional Leadership Survey

Survey Questions

Demographic Information

1. What is your age group?
 22-30
 31-35
 36-40
 41-45
 Over 45
2. What is your gender?
 Female
 Male
3. How many years did you serve as a full-time teacher in K-12 school?
 0-5
 6-10
 11-15
 16-20
 More than 20
4. In what size district did you work as a teacher? *Mark all that apply*
 Large urban district (total resident population of 250,000 or more)
 Midsize urban district (total resident population between 100,000 and 250,000)
 Small city district (total resident population less than 100,000)
 Predominately rural district (i.e., located approximately 25 miles from an urban or city center)
 Remote rural district (i.e., located more than 100 miles from an urban or city center)
5. If you were prepared as an **elementary teacher**, at what grade level(s) did you teach? What grade level or subject discipline did you teach before becoming an administrator? *Mark all that apply*
 All elementary grades (e.g., taught all core academic courses in self-contained classroom)
 All elementary grades (e.g., taught elective or special courses such as art, music, health/PE)
 Preschool
 Primary (Grades K-2)
 Intermediate (Grade 3-5)
 Other *Please describe* _____
 Not applicable. I never worked as an elementary school teacher
6. If you worked as an elementary school teacher, In what subject area(s) did you teach? *Mark all that apply*
 English/language arts/reading
 Foreign language
 Humanities/arts
 Mathematics
 Health/physical education
 Science
 Social studies
 Special education

- Other Please describe _____
- Not applicable: I never worked as an elementary school teacher

7. If you worked as a **secondary teacher**, in what type of school(s) did you teach? *Mark all that apply*
- Middle school
- Junior high school
- High school
- Other Please describe _____
- Not applicable: I never worked as a secondary school teacher
8. If you worked as a secondary school teacher, in what subject area(s) did you teach?
- Business/career and technical education
- English/language arts/reading
- Foreign language
- Humanities/arts
- Mathematics
- Health/physical education
- Science
- Social studies
- Special education
- Other Please describe _____

Teacher Leadership Experiences

9. Listed below are types of leadership activities in which teachers often engage. Please identify all TEACHER LEADERSHIP activities in which you engaged *BEFORE* becoming an assistant principal. Mark all that apply.
- Chair/member of building leadership team or school-based decision making council (including personnel hiring team)
- Chair/member of school committee (e.g., accreditation, curricular mapping, school improvement, textbook selection)
- Chair/member of district committee or task force (e.g., budget, calendar development, textbook selection)
- Chair/member of statewide committee or taskforce sponsored by state agency
- Chair/member of committee or taskforce sponsored by educator-oriented professional organization
- Officer or executive board member for educator-oriented professional organization
- Coach/sponsor of co-curricular or extracurricular activity (e.g., academic sponsor, athletic coach)
- Department chair or grade level chair
- Facilitator of staff/professional development activities
- Instructional peer coach (e.g., mentor for experienced teacher)
- Mentor teacher to a new teacher
- Mentor to an aspiring teacher (i.e., preparation-program sponsored practicum or internship)
- National Board Certified teacher
- Principal designee (i.e., stand in when principal was absent)
- Union representative
- Not applicable. I did not engage in teacher leadership activities before becoming an assistant principal

10. If you engaged in leadership activities listed in Question 9 prior to becoming an administrator, did those experiences help your practice as an assistant principal?

Yes

No

Not applicable (I did not engage in any leadership activities listed in Question 9)

11. If you responded “Yes” to Question 10, please explain how or why engaging in teacher-leadership activities have helped you in your professional practice as an assistant principal.

Assistant Principal Experience

12. How many years of experience do you have as an assistant principal? (including this current year)

1

2

3

4

5 or more

13. In what type of school do you currently serve as an assistant principal?

Preschool/Kindergarten

Elementary School

Middle School

Junior High School

High School

Other (*Please describe*) _____

14. In what size district did you currently work as an assistant principal?

Large urban district (total resident population over 250,000)

Midsize urban district (total resident population between 100,000 and 250,000)

Small city district (total resident population less than 100,000)

Predominately rural district (i.e., located approximately 25 miles from an urban center)

Remote rural district (i.e., located more than 100 miles from an urban center)

15. What type of preservice leadership preparation program did you complete?

Totally face-to-face

Hybrid (face-to-face with online learning activities, virtual meetings, some online courses)

Totally online

16. What degree did you earn through that leadership preparation program?

Master’s (e.g., MA, MS, MEd)

Specialist in Education (EdS)

Doctor of Education (EdD)

No degree (i.e., certification or licensure only)

17. In what state did you complete your preservice leadership preparation program?

Alabama

Other state (*Please specify*) _____

18. When did you complete your preservice principal preparation program?

- Prior to 2000
- 2009
- 2010
- 2012
- 2013

19. In what year did you assume your first position as an assistant principal?

- Prior to 2003
- 2003
- 2004
- 2005
- 2006
- 2007
- 2008
- 2009
- 2010
- 2011
- 2012
- 2013

20. Did your preservice preparation include a full-time internship? *“Full-time internship” is defined here as at least one semester release from all teaching responsibilities to serve as principal intern working under guidance of a school principal.*

- Yes
- No

Instructional Leadership

The questions about instructional leadership in the remainder of the survey are based on the operational definition presented below. This operational definition was informed by a review of diverse sources within the school-leadership literature.

Instructional leadership is a combination of knowledge, skills, and dispositions demonstrated by the school leader and characterized by her or his active engagement in

- (e) *Setting direction* (i.e., building and sustaining a shared vision for student achievement, fostering acceptance of group goals, articulating high performance expectations, staying aware of external influences),
- (f) *Developing people* (i.e., expanding knowledge about what constitutes quality teaching, providing formal and informal professional development for staff, being available),
- (g) *Focusing on learning* (i.e., discussing instructional strategies and student learning with teachers, using observation and assessment data to initiate reflective conversations with teachers about achievement goals, using data to inform decisions about the instructional program, conducting action research to improve professional practice and student performance), and

(h) *Improving the instructional program* (i.e., designing a system of collaboration and support for teachers through professional learning communities, monitoring classrooms regularly, providing essential instructional materials and resources).

21. Recall the courses you completed in your university-based preservice leadership preparation program: How would you characterize your preparation program’s emphasis on *instructional leadership as defined above*?

- All courses emphasized instructional leadership.
- Some courses emphasized instructional leadership.
- Instructional leadership was mentioned in courses, but not regularly emphasized.
- Instructional leadership was not emphasized in my leadership preparation courses.

22. To what extent does your current position as an assistant principal require you to perform the four functions of an instructional leader?

- My entire job description is about instructional leadership.
- Over 50% of my duties involve instructional leadership.
- Approximately 25-50% of my duties involve instructional leadership.
- Less than 25% of my duties involve instructional leadership.
- My duties do not involve instructional leadership.

23. How often do you engage in these activities as an assistant?

	Never	Occasionally	Monthly	Biweekly	Once weekly	Twice weekly	Daily
Complete administrative duties (e.g., attending district or state meetings, report writing, class scheduling, budgeting)							
Communicate or engage with parents or community members—other than to address student issues							
Conduct informal classroom observation (i.e., walk through)							
Conduct formal classroom observation linked to teacher supervision or evaluation							
Conduct formal teacher evaluation (i.e., complete required evaluation documents, conduct teacher conference)							
Facilitate or observe professional development activities for teachers or staff members							
Handle student supervision issues (e.g., discipline or behavior)							
Lead student services meeting (e.g., identification of special needs, development of individualized program, assessment of student progress)							
Participate in student services meetings conducted by others (e.g., academic intervention, behavior modification)							
Lead grade level or department meetings involving teachers							

Participate in or observe grade level or department meetings involving teachers								
Supervise or mentor new teacher(s)								
Supervise accountability testing, analyze student learning data, or monitor student achievement								
Supervise athletic or extracurricular activities								
Supervise building functions (e.g., facilities, transportation, safety regulations and drills)								
Engage in professional activities focused on improving your performance as an instructional leader (e.g., attending conferences, reading professional material, searching Internet for new information)								

24. When you are formally evaluated on your performance as an administrator, what percentage of your evaluation is based on your instructional leadership performance?

25%

50%

75%

I do not know

I am not sure because my school is piloting Alabama’s new administrator evaluation system this year

Instructional leadership is not an element of my performance evaluation.

25. In the school where you currently work, **who spends the most time** on the functions defined in our operational definition of instructional leadership?

	Principal	Me	Other AP	Academic dean	Curriculum specialist	Guidance counselor	Psychologist	Teacher leaders	All leaders in school
<i>Setting direction</i> (i.e., building and sustaining a shared vision for student achievement, fostering acceptance of group goals, articulating high performance expectations, staying aware of external influences)									
<i>Developing people</i> (i.e., expanding knowledge about what constitutes quality teaching, providing formal and informal professional development for staff, being available)									

<i>Focusing on learning</i> (i.e., discussing instructional strategies and student learning with teachers, using observation and assessment data to initiate reflective conversations with teachers about achievement goals, using data to inform decisions about the instructional program, conducting action research to improve professional practice and student performance),									
<i>Improving the instructional program</i> (i.e., designing a system of collaboration and support for teachers through professional learning communities, monitoring classrooms regularly, providing essential instructional materials and resources).									

26. In the school where you currently work, **who is most responsible** for the functions defined in our operational definition of instructional leadership?

	Principal	Me	Other AP	Academic dean	Curriculum specialist	Guidance counselor	Psychologist	Teacher leaders	All leaders in school
<i>Setting direction</i> (i.e., building and sustaining a shared vision for student achievement, fostering acceptance of group goals, articulating high performance expectations, staying aware of external influences)									
<i>Developing people</i> (i.e., expanding knowledge about what constitutes quality teaching, providing formal and informal professional development for staff, being available)									
<i>Focusing on learning</i> (i.e., discussing instructional strategies and student learning with teachers, using observation and assessment data to initiate reflective conversations with teachers about achievement goals, using data to inform decisions about the instructional program, conducting action research to improve professional practice and student performance),									
<i>Improving the instructional program</i> (i.e., designing a system of collaboration and support for teachers through professional learning communities, monitoring classrooms regularly, providing essential instructional materials and resources).									

27. In the school where you currently work, **whom do you think should be responsible** for the functions defined in our operational definition of instructional leadership?

	Principal	Me	Other AP	Academic dean	Curriculum specialist	Guidance counselor	Psychologist	Teacher leaders	All leaders in school
<i>Setting direction</i> (i.e., building and sustaining a shared vision for student achievement, fostering acceptance of group goals, articulating high performance expectations, staying aware of external influences)									
<i>Developing people</i> (i.e., expanding knowledge about what constitutes quality teaching, providing formal and informal professional development for staff, being available)									
<i>Focusing on learning</i> (i.e., discussing instructional strategies and student learning with teachers, using observation and assessment data to initiate reflective conversations with teachers about achievement goals, using data to inform decisions about the instructional program, conducting action research to improve professional practice and student performance),									
<i>Improving the instructional program</i> (i.e., designing a system of collaboration and support for teachers through professional learning communities, monitoring classrooms regularly, providing essential instructional materials and resources).									

Mentoring for Instructional Leadership

28. Among the professional growth opportunities for developing instructional leadership listed below, identity either “Yes, I have had opportunity to participate” or “No, I have not had opportunity to participate” by checking the appropriate box.

Yes	No	Activity
		District-assigned formal mentoring program for assistant principals
		District-sponsored professional development activities specifically for assistant principals
		District-paid professional conferences or meetings where attendance is expected or required
		Programs provided by state administrator association (e.g., academies, conferences)
		One-on-one mentoring for instructional leadership by your current principal.
		Informal meetings among principals and assistant principals to discuss issues.

		Formal or informal mentoring program sponsored by local university.
		Formal or informal mentoring program sponsored by state agency (e.g., CLAS, KASA).
		Mentoring provided by experienced or senior administrators that you initiated (i.e., you sought help).

29. Using the table below, indicate how effective the professional growth activities have been for you using the following scale:

0=Not applicable, 1=Not effective, 2= Somewhat effective, 3=Effective, 4=Very effective

0	1	2	3	4	Activity
					District-assigned formal mentor for assistant principals
					District-sponsored professional development activities specifically for assistant principals
					District-paid professional conferences or meetings where attendance is expected or required
					Programs provided by state administrator association (e.g., academies, conferences)
					One-on-one mentoring for instructional leadership by your current principal.
					Informal meetings among principals and assistant principals to discuss issues.
					Formal or informal mentoring program sponsored by local university.
					Formal or informal mentoring program sponsored by state agency (e.g., CLAS, KASA).
					Mentoring provided by experienced or senior administrators that you initiated (i.e., you sought help).

30. To what extent do you feel ready to serve as an instructional leader?

Very ready

Somewhat ready

Not ready

Not applicable: I am not responsible for instructional leadership in the school where I work.

Professional Experiences

31. In your current position as an assistant principal, what are the top three challenges you face in performing as an instructional leader?

32. In what ways do you attend to your own professional development as an instructional leader?

33. Read the each function of our operational definition for instructional leadership. Indicate whether or not you need additional mentoring or coaching in order to feel ready to be an instructional leader?

	I do NOT need mentoring	Not sure	Yes, I need mentoring in this area
<i>Setting direction</i> (i.e., building and sustaining a shared vision for student achievement, fostering acceptance of group goals, articulating high performance expectations, staying aware of external influences)			
<i>Developing people</i> (i.e., expanding knowledge about what constitutes quality teaching, providing formal and informal professional development for staff, being available)			
<i>Focusing on learning</i> (i.e., discussing instructional strategies and student learning with teachers, using observation and assessment data to initiate reflective conversations with teachers about achievement goals, using data to inform decisions about the instructional program, conducting action research to improve professional practice and student performance),			
<i>Improving the instructional program</i> (i.e., designing a system of collaboration and support for teachers through professional learning communities, monitoring classrooms regularly, providing essential instructional materials and resources).			

34. How often do you initiate **engagement with other assistant principals** outside formal professional development structures to discuss instructional leadership?

- Never
- Occasionally
- Monthly
- Biweekly
- Once weekly
- Twice weekly
- Daily

35. Reflecting back on your leadership preparation throughout your career as a K-12 educator, recall the various experiences you had (e.g., teacher leadership, university-based preparation program, internship, formal mentoring, informal mentoring, personal professional development). Which of those experiences **most significantly** prepared you for instructional-leadership responsibilities as an assistant principal?

36. Using your response to Question 35, please offer recommendation(s) for improving the preparation of assistant principals for instructional leadership.

37. Please share anything else about your professional practice as an assistant principal or instructional leader that is relevant to this study, but was not asked on this survey.

Seeking Volunteers for Group Interviews

Thank you for completing this online survey. The second phase of this study will be a series of small-group interviews with other assistant principals in your state. If you are willing to participate in a focus group, please provide your electronic-mail address in the space provided.

Below is the professor that will be contacting you about participating in focus groups: Dr. Linda Searby (ljs0007@auburn.edu)

Appendix 2

Auburn University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval

**AUBURN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD for RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS
REQUEST FOR EXEMPT CATEGORY RESEARCH**

For information or help completing this form, contact: THE OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE, 115 Ramsay Hall
Phone: 334-844-5966 e-mail: IRBAdmin@auburn.edu Web Address: <http://www.auburn.edu/research/irb/irba/index.htm>

Revised 2/1/2014 Submit completed form to IRBAdmin@auburn.edu or 115 Ramsay Hall, Auburn University 36849.
Form must be populated using Adobe Acrobat / Pro 9 or greater standalone program (do not fill out in browser). Hand written forms will not be accepted.
Project activities may not begin until you have received approval from the Auburn University IRB.

1. PROJECT PERSONNEL & TRAINING

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (PI):

Name Vohn David Enloe Title _____ Student _____ Dept./School Educational FLT/Edu.
Address 105 Lakeview Lane Headland, AL 36345 AU Email vde0001@tqemail.auburn.edu
Phone _____ 334-726-1300 _____ Dept. Head Sherida Downer

FACULTY ADMSOR (if applicable):

Name Dr. Linda Searty Title Associate Professor Dept./School Educational FLT/Edu.
Address 4075 Haley Center Auburn Univ, AL 36849
Phone 205-907-6285 AU Email ljs0007@auburn.edu

KEY PERSONNEL: List Key Personnel (other than PI and FA). Additional personnel may be listed in an attachment.

Name	Title	Institution	Responsibilities
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

KEY PERSONNEL TRAINING: Have all Key Personnel completed CITI Human Research Training (including elective modules related to this research) within the last 3 years? YES NO

TRAINING CERTIFICATES: Please attach CITI completion certificates for all Key Personnel.

2. PROJECT INFORMATION

Title: Factors, Characteristics, and Experiences That Contribute to Secondary Assistant Principals' Perceptions of Readiness to Serve As Instructional Leaders

Source of Funding: Investigator Internal External

List External Agency & Grant Number: _____

List any contractors, sub-contractors, or other entities associate with this project.

List any other IRBs associated with this project (including those involved with reviewing, deferring, or determinations).
13-259EP1308 The Mentoring Needs of Assistant Principals as Instructional Leaders. (Dr. Linda Searty)

FOR ORC OFFICE USE ONLY	
DATE RECEIVED IN ORC _____ by _____ APPROV _____	<div style="border: 2px solid blue; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> The Auburn University Institutional Review Board has approved this Document for use from <u>12/09/15</u> to <u>12/08/18</u> Protocol # <u>15-515 EX 1512</u> </div>
DATE OF IRB REVIEW _____ by _____ APPROV _____	
DATE OF ORC REVIEW _____ by _____ INTERVA _____	
DATE OF APPROVAL _____ by _____	
COMMENTS:	

3. **PROJECT SUMMARY**

a. Does the research involve any special populations?

- YES NO Minors (under age 19)
 YES NO Pregnant women, fetuses, or any products of conception
 YES NO Prisoners or Wards
 YES NO Individuals with compromised autonomy and/or decisional capacity

b. Does the research pose more than minimal risk to participants? YES NO

Minimal risk means that the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. 42 CFR 46.102(f)

c. Does the study involve any of the following?

- YES NO Procedures subject to FDA Regulation Ex. Drugs, biological products, medical devices, etc.
 YES NO Use of school records of identifiable students or information from instructors about specific students
 YES NO Protected health or medical information when there is a direct or indirect link that could identify the participant
 YES NO Collection of sensitive aspects of the participant's own behavior, such as illegal conduct, drug use, sexual behavior or use of alcohol
 YES NO Deception of participants

If you checked "YES" to any response in Question #3 STOP. It is likely that your study does not meet the "EXEMPT" requirements. Please complete a PROTOCOL FORM for Expedited or Full Board Review. You may contact IRB Administration for more information. (Phone: 334-844-5966 or Email: IRBAdmin@auburn.edu)

4. **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

a. Subject Population (Describe, include age, special population characteristics, etc.)

Secondary Assistant Principals from the state of Alabama

b. Describe, step by step, all procedures and methods that will be used to consent participants.

- N/A (Existing data will be used)

participants provided consent under the original protocol (Auburn IRB #13-250EP1308)

- c. **Brief summary of project.** (Include the research question(s) and a brief description of the methodology, including recruitment and how data will be collected and protected.)

The data set being analyzed for this study was originally collected for a mixed methods study conducted between October, 2013, and April, 2014 in the State of Alabama, with approval from the Auburn University Institutional Review Board - Protocol # 13-259EP1308. An email was sent to superintendents across the state of Alabama to obtain permission to survey assistant principals from their district, and asking them to forward the solicitation email to assistant principals. Data were collected through a survey sent to Alabama elementary and secondary assistant principals through the web service www.surveymonkey.com and the data from participants have been de-identified. The research questions for this study are:

1. To what extent do elementary /secondary assistant principals report they are required to perform the four functions of instructional leadership?
2. To what extent do elementary / secondary assistant principals report they feel ready to serve as instructional leaders defined by the four functions of instructional leadership?
3. Which variable, age or years of experience, carries more weight in the perception of readiness of elementary /secondary assistant principals to assume the role of instructional leader?
4. For those who reported they were ready to assume the role of instructional leader, which mentoring activities were most effective in assisting their perception of readiness?
5. Which professional growth opportunities did elementary /secondary assistant principals participate in that led them to report readiness to serve as an instructional leader?
6. Did the number of professional growth opportunities participated in by elementary / secondary assistant principals affect their perceptions of readiness to serve as instructional leaders?

- d. **Waivers.** Check any waivers that apply and describe how the project meets the criteria for the waiver.

- Waiver of Consent (including existing de-identified data)
- Waiver of Documentation of Consent (Use of Information Letter)
- Waiver of Parental Permission (for college students)

This project will use an existing de-identified data set and a letter is attached to this protocol giving permission.

- e. **Attachments.** Please attach Informed Consents, Information Letters, data collection instrument(s), advertisements/recruiting materials, or permission letters/site authorizations as appropriate.

Signature of Investigator	Vohn David Enloe <small>Digitally signed by Vohn David Enloe DN: cn=Vohn David Enloe, email=venloe@auburn.edu</small>	Date	12/8/15
Signature of Faculty Advisor	Linda J. Searby <small>Digitally signed by Linda J. Searby DN: cn=Linda J. Searby, email=lsearby@auburn.edu</small>	Date	12/7/15
Signature of Department Head	Sherida Downer <small>Digitally signed by Sherida Downer DN: cn=Sherida Downer, email=sdowner@auburn.edu</small>	Date	12/8/2015

Appendix 3

Auburn University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Informed Consent Letter

Auburn University

Auburn University, Alabama 36849-5221

Educational Foundations
Leadership and Technology
4036 Haley Center

Telephone: (334) 844-4460
Fax: (334) 844-3072

Date: December 4, 2015
To: the Institutional Review Board at Auburn University
From: Dr. Linda Searby, EFLT
RE: Permission to Use Existing Data Base

I hereby grant Ph.D. Doctoral Candidates, Vohn Enloe and R. Bradley Hunter, to utilize data which I collected as the sole investigator in 2013-2014 under IRB approval from Auburn University (Protocol # 13-259EP1308). The candidates are in the Educational Leadership Ph.D. Program and I am serving as their dissertation chair.

This data is from a survey of assistant principals in Alabama, and has been de-identified and downloaded into SPSS. The data includes both statistical data and narrative data from open ended questions on the survey.

The individuals using the data will acknowledge the source of the data, which includes giving attribution to me as the original data collector.

If you have further questions, please contact me at 205-907-6285 or at ljs0007@auburn.edu