Assistant Principals: Facilitating Factors and Barriers in Fulfilling the Role of Instructional Leader

by

Brittney H. Duncan

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Approved by

Linda Searby, Chair, Associate Professor of Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Technology
Ellen Reames, Associate Professor of Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Technology
Lynne Patrick, Clinical Associate Professor of Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Technology
Paris Strom, Professor of Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Technology

Abstract

The purpose of this descriptive qualitative content analysis study was to identify not only how Alabama assistant principals define instructional leadership, but what facilitating factors and barriers they face in the role as an instructional leader. Data sources for this study included five focus group interviews among 39 Alabama assistant principals. In addressing how assistant principals define instructional leadership it was found that specific knowledge and skill sets as well as dispositions are needed. The specific knowledge sets needed were 1) knowledge of curriculum, 2) knowledge of instruction, 3) knowledge of data, and 4) knowledge of people. The specific skills sets were: 1) collaborates with faculty and staff, 2) recognizes teacher abilities, 3) builds relationships with stakeholders, 4) models instruction, 5) leads professional development, 6) delegates responsibilities, 7) provides growth opportunities, and 8) creates a vision. Lastly, the specific dispositions needed were: 1) being trustworthy, 2) having drive, 3) showing care, 4) being well balanced, and 5) being a role model. Assistant principals also faced facilitating factors and barriers in serving as an instructional leader. Four facilitating factors to instructional leadership were found in this research study. They were identified as: 1) strong support systems, 2) job experience, 3) required instructional leadership activities, and 4) new instructional leadership preparation program. Four barriers to instructional leadership were also identified in this study: 1) socialization to the role, 2) time, 3) limited leadership capacity building opportunities, and 4) assistant principal to principal relationship.

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Chapter I: Introduction

The role of assistant principal is a complex web of responsibilities, which has been overlooked through decades of research. Recently, researchers have begun to delve into the intricacies of the assistant principal role. Marshall and Mitchell (1991) alleged that, "the assistant principalship is the entry level line administrative position where new administrators learn rules in the administrative culture" (p. 6). According to Kaplan and Owning (1999), "The assistant principal can be a valuable asset to the principal's overall leadership in the school" (p. 80). With the role of assistant principal only becoming a sound position within the last 50 years, it is not surprising that the role is fraught with ambiguity and uncertainty (Glanz, 1994b).

The role of assistant principal has transformed over the years into a job that not only has retained its managerial/supervision responsibilities, but now includes components of instructional leadership. Niewenhuizen and Brooks (2013) synthesized previous studies noting a commonality of four tasks of the assistant principal; student management, management of school, instructional leadership, and community/public relations - as the major functions of the assistant principal.

According to Hausman, Nebeker, McCreary, and Donaldson (2002), "In an era of increasing accountability, many are calling for additional and stronger sources of instructional leadership" (p. 152). Leithwood and Seashore-Louis (2012) asserted to be an effective instructional leader running a successful school, administrators needed to participate in the following activities:

1. Setting Directions

2. Developing People

3. Focusing on Learning

4. Improving the Instructional Program

With new accountability such as the adoption of The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) standards that evaluates administrators as instructional leaders, it brings to the forefront the importance of continued assistant principal research (CCSSO, 2008). This study will provide insight into the facilitating factors and barriers assistant principals face when fulfilling the role of instructional leader.

Statement of the Problem

Beginning in the 1990's and coming to the forefront after the birth of *No Child Left Behind*, increased accountability through student achievement and teacher evaluation has caused school administrators to transform their job roles and responsibilities. Assistant principals in particular have felt the strain of this educational reform due to the retention of managerial tasks as well as the addition of instructional leadership responsibilities (Schlechty, 1990).

Dating back to the 1950's, the assistant principal has been known as the identity that gets handed the job responsibilities that the principal did not desire. Thus, according to Glanz (1994b) the assistant principal role has been dubbed the forgotten man. This has led to the assistant principal being one of the most under researched roles in education. There is even less research on how assistant principals fulfill the role of instructional leader within their school (Marshall and Mitchell, 1991).

Barnett, Shoho, and Oleszewski (2012) addressed the issues of the assistant principal job by saying, "the role of assistant principal must evolve from the traditional perspective of

disciplinarian and manager to a perspective in which enhancing the instructional program of a school is at the forefront" (p. 92).

Due to the lack of research on assistant principals as instructional leaders, this research serves to help shed light on this role specifically. It also serves to address the facilitating factors and barriers as well as the mentoring and professional development of assistant principals while in that position. The research will primarily answer: How do assistant principals define instructional leadership and what facilitating factors and barriers do they find in fulfilling the role of instructional leader?

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to appropriately identify how assistant principals define instructional leadership as well as delve into the facilitating factors and barriers they face when assuming the role of an instructional leader. The results of this study can provide further information regarding assistant principals assuming the instructional leadership role. The facilitating factors and challenges found in this study can better prepare current as well as aspiring assistant principals for the role of instructional leader. The responses from this study can better help college and university preparation programs provide quality instruction in the area of educational leadership. Also, results of this study can inform schools and school systems of how the role of instructional leader can affect the assistant principal. These results can help schools and school systems plan quality professional development as well as mentoring programs for assistant principals.

Operational Definition

In this age of accountability in education, school principals are charged with being instructional leaders. According to Leithwood and Seashore-Louis (2012) there are four domains

of instructional leadership to which the principal should be giving attention. These are: setting directions, developing people, focusing on learning, and improving the instructional program. These are demanding roles, and it is speculated that principal should consider sharing the instructional leadership role with the assistant principal (Leithwood & Seashore-Louis, 2012). However, there is limited research on how the assistant principal enacts the role of instructional leader. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to identify how assistant principals describe instructional leadership and the barriers and facilitating factors they experience in performing the role of instructional leader.

Research Questions

The focus of this research study was to answer the following central research question: How do assistant principals define instructional leadership and what are the facilitating factors and barriers in fulfilling the role as instructional leader?

Sub-Questions.

1. How do assistant principals define instructional leadership?
2. What are the facilitating factors for assistant principals in performing as instructional leaders?
3. What are the barriers for assistant principals in performing as instructional leaders?

These questions were answered through focus groups interviews. This data was collected in 2014 among Alabama assistant principals. A subset of data, removed from a larger two state study, was used for this study. The original study was conducted by Searby, Browne-Ferrigno, and Wang (2016).

Significance of Study

The findings to the research questions will contribute to the limited body of literature on assistant principals. Specifically, it will add more depth to the literature on the assistant principal's role of instructional leader. This study will also help in the preparation of aspiring principals through providing important information to university preparation program faculty. These findings may also be used by school districts to develop and refine professional development opportunities, mentoring programs, and support systems for assistant principals.

Limitations of Study

The researcher has identified possible limitations to this research study. First, the researcher was not in attendance during the focus group interviews with assistant principals. Additionally, the conditions in which the focus group interview was conducted may have had an impact on the participants' responses could be seen as a potential limitation. The sample size of this research was acceptable for focus groups and survey participants. The findings, however, may not be generalizable to all assistant principals in the state of Alabama or other locations.

Definition of Terms

- Assistant Principal: An assistant principal was defined as a person who serves directly underneath the principal (Marshall & Hooley, 2006).

- Instructional Leadership: An instructional leader refers to an individual who has a deep understanding of curriculum and can guide and support teachers in the content that is being delivered to students. These leaders are also well versed in the best practices of instruction. (Seashore-Louis, K., Leithwood, K., Wahlstrom, K. & Anderson, S. E., 2010).

- Mentoring: Mentoring is a form of support, guidance, and counsel from a more experienced individual to less experienced individual (Daresh, 2004).

- Professional Development: Professional development is the opportunity in which leaders can develop and refine strategies needed for school leadership (Conger & Benjamin, 1999).

- Socialization: The transition and orientation process into the role of assistant principal (Armstrong, 2010).

- EducateAlabama: The state of Alabama's formative teacher evaluation system (Alabama State Department of Education, 2017a).

- Response to Intervention (RtI): Multi-tiered research-based program that provides academic and/or behavioral support to students through intervention strategies (Alabama State Department of Education, 2017b).

- Professional Learning Community: A group of school members working together for school improvement (Dufour, 2004).

Organization of Research Study

Chapter one of this research study provides an overview of the central research question and sub-questions, purpose, and significance of the study. A review of literature related to the study is found in Chapter two. Chapter three provides the methodology of the study, which includes the participants, procedures, and research design. Analysis of the data obtained from assistant principals will be presented in Chapter four. Chapter five will discuss the researcher's findings, conclusions, implications, and recommendations from the study of assistant principals.

Summary

Today's assistant principal is more than just a school manager. As accountability has increased, assistant principals not only have retained their traditional managerial job roles, but also have gained the additional role of instructional leader. As an instructional leader, it is the

assistant principal's responsibility to lead and guide teachers in curriculum and instructional design.

Assistant principals play a critical role in improving and enhancing student achievement within their schools. It is imperative that assistant principals assume the role of instructional leader to effectively lead their school. Therefore, the goal of this study is to discover the facilitating factors and barriers in assuming the role of instructional leader.

Chapter II: Review of the Literature

"I do believe analyzing the past is crucial for understanding present conditions and future possibilities and, perhaps, might even help avoid some of the pitfalls of the past." – Glanz, 1991, p. 13).

Evolution of School Supervision and the Assistant Principal

The historical beginnings and evolution of school supervision, specifically involving the role of assistant principal, should be examined to give educators a greater understanding of the responsibilities and duties of school administrators as they have been perceived over time. Glanz (1990) stated, "The history of supervision is clearly a history of the interaction among people, their ideas, the institution of schooling, and the broad social and intellectual movements within American society" (p. 150). During the late 1800s, local school board members and city politicians dictated educational supervision. This regionalized control kept superintendents out of important policy formation and decision making, categorizing them as virtually obsolete in the day to day operations of a school.

As the century progressed through the early 1900s, according to Glanz (1990), there was a shift to a more centralized management system where reformers hoped to take politics out of education. By doing this, more pressure was exerted on the superintendents to take control of their local schools. Teachers were expected to perform with excellence while supervisors were expected to weed out the nonproficient teachers. Following this mentality, bureaucracy became the chief method for organization in schools. According to Katz (1971), "Bureaucracy emerged

as the dominant structure because it is the most practical method of keeping lower orders orderly and regulating social mobility" (p.1).

This top-down hierarchal approach of organization came with advantages as well as disadvantages. Bureaucratic systems were seen as being harsh, ineffective, and overbearing. Contrastingly, this system contributed to a better-organized, more efficient policy making organization. Educational supervision did not change again until around the beginning of the twentieth century (Glanz, 1990). Sullivan (1980) stated that, "supervisory emphasis shifted from "keeping school" to focus on the instructional program as professional educators rather than lay committees assumed the supervisory role and accompanying duties" (p. 3). For the first time, the role of the principal was added into school supervision (Glanz, 1990). The principal was considered to be the "head teacher" of the school and still retained teaching responsibilities (Glanz, 1990). Over time, this additional supervisory role grew to be indispensable in education. The addition of this role did not come without complications, however. Job responsibilities were stretched between managerial and instructional tasks. Criticism came from principals, who felt bureaucratic interests were being forced upon them. Due to increased criticism, the 1920s brought a more democratic model of school supervision (Glanz, 1990). This led to the number of principals tripling in American schools. Noted educational philosopher John Dewey validated the use of democratic supervisory practices. Supervisors began rating teachers on an efficiency scale in order to raise their status as professionals who could help develop and improve a teacher's instruction (Glanz, 1990). This democratic supervision became difficult for principals who were trying to keep a balance between managerial and instructional tasks and resulted in many supervisors resorting back to practicing authoritarian methods (Glanz, 1990).

To help with the increasing workload, schools employed a general supervisor, later to become known as the assistant principal. "The general supervisor would prepare attendance reports, collect data for evaluation purposes, and coordinate special school programs" (Glanz, 1990, p. 155). During this period, both the principal and assistant principal desired to be seen as valid professionals who contributed more to the field of education than just conducting managerial tasks.

Around mid-century, principals and assistant principals began to fully move to democratic practices and away from a common culture frame of mind (Glanz, 1998). These democratic practices helped gain recognition for the importance of the role a supervisor had in the creation of relationships between teachers and administrators (Glanz, 1990).

In 1965, significant changes came to education through the enactment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act as a response to President Johnson's, *War on Poverty* (Thomas & Brady, 2005). The policies provided additional federal assistance to schools that met specific criteria in the hopes of closing the achievement gap between high and low performing students. These federal funds, mostly coming from Title I portion of the Act, made school and district leaders more accountable in increasing student achievement within their schools. It also began the foundation for a national curriculum and national achievement benchmark test scores. This shift in educational accountability called for new approaches in school leadership (Thomas & Brady, 2005).

This push for more school accountability brought the notion that clinical supervision could be the answer to increasing student achievement and wane the lingering ambiguity and confusion surrounding the assistant principal role. Clinical supervision brought forth the need for stronger teacher and supervisor relationships. According to Glanz (1990), clinical supervision

could ensure that, "teaching could be improved by a prescribed, formal process of collaboration between teacher and supervisor" (p. 63). Clinical supervision gave the opportunity for principals, assistant principals, and teachers to collaborate with one another, with the supervisors giving direct feedback. Teachers would be evaluated, and through conversation and reflection on their instruction, they were expected to improve. This instructional improvement could be linked directly to student achievement.

During the early 1980s, President Reagan called for less federal government involvement in public education (Thomas & Brady, 2005). Funding previously provided through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 was reduced. Consequently, more pressure was put on local and state governments to improve student academic performance. In 1983 the Reagan administration published, *A Nation at Risk,* bringing global attention to the need of "higher academic standards, increased student course requirements, a longer school day, and significant changes in the training and retention of teachers" (Thomas & Brady, 2005, p.53). This report was significant because of changes required at the local and district level.

After *A Nation at Risk* was published, supervisory practices focused on teachers becoming more reflective practitioners with supervisors such as the assistant principal providing support and additional avenues of help to ensure goals were met (Siens & Ebmeier, 1996). Glickman (1981) wrote *Developmental Supervision* to emphasize to supervisors that one approach to supervision does not work for everyone. Glickman (1981) further noted that developmental supervision would help the "school leader think about supervision in a developmental manner and subsequently interact with his or her staff in a new and more effective way" (p.9). With developmental supervision, the goal is not to change teacher behavior but to have teachers practicing in a reflective manner (Siens & Ebmeier, 1996).

Lieberman (1988) also supported this sentiment by urging school leaders to expand their leadership team. This author noted that the 1980s brought about the restructuring of schools with the most noteworthy change being a shift from district to school site management. School leaders, students, parents, and teachers had more input regarding school funding, school goals, professional development needs and training, and general school decisions. Lieberman (1988) noted a series of activities that principals and assistant principals took part in to expand their leadership:

- Building trust and relationships

- Making organizational decisions

- Building knowledgeable base and confidence

- Utilizing resources

- Dealing with change

- Managing work

The 1980s also brought a call for more research to be conducted on the roles and responsibilities of the assistant principal. Greenfield (1984) urged researchers to look specifically at what duties assistant principals performed each day and the organizational context in which they completed these duties.

The 1990s gave way to educational reforms that called for more accountability, productivity, and overall success. Schlechty (1990) called for a restructuring of 21st century schools. This author defined restructuring as, "the altering systems of rules, roles, and relationships so that schools can serve existing purposes more effectively or serve new purposes altogether" (p. 14).

With George H. W. Bush as president, America began to focus on the importance of national academic standards and national testing of all students (NCLB, 2002). The initiative that called for this increase in rigor and accountability was named, *America 2000*. The Senate initially opposed this initiative for reform, however it became the foundation for Bill Clinton's goals in his *Goals 2000: Education America Act* (Thomas & Brady, 2005). This act contained four primary components: focus on student achievement levels, rigorous academic standards, application of standards to students, and reliance on student achievement scores as a way to monitor effectiveness (Thomas & Brady, 2005).

From the 1990s to the new millennium, assistant principals have seen an increase in their workload due to high stakes standardized testing, increased curriculum rigor, monitored instruction, and faculty development. With more teacher input regarding school-based decisions, committees were formed increasing the workload for administrators specifically the assistant principal who often oversaw these groups (Marshall & Hooley, 2006.)

The basis for this new millennial thought of increased accountability at the school developed from the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB, 2002), which was adopted by the federal government in 2001. NCLB (2002), stated in the federal policy document, "as America enters the 21st century full of hope and promise, too many of our neediest students are being left behind" (p.6). The policy's creation was founded in the need to, "increase accountability for student performance, focus on best teaching practices, reduce bureaucracy and increase flexibility, and empower parents" (p. 7). According to Thomas and Brady (2005), "*No Child Left Beh*ind takes the commitment to improving the educational experiences of historically disadvantaged populations a step further" (p. 55). It differed from the initiatives of years past by linking federal school funding to student academic performance.

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With increased expectations for school performance, the additional role of instructional leader was added to the list of responsibilities placed upon the assistant principal. These increased expectations for assistant principals did not cease with the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB, 2002). Most recently, the Obama Administration enacted the *Race to the Top* (RTTT) competitive grant program. This program differs from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act as well as other federal education programs because it focuses on states that have a track record of proven success and plans for continued improvement instead of on demographics or academic achievement gaps (McGuinn, 2011). States can apply for these grants by showing a record of proven success as well as a design for increasing the academic achievement of students. RTTT brought about two lingering questions through its inception. First, how can states that receive funding sustain their success? Secondly, how can states that do not receive funding be motivated? (McGuinn, 2011). These questions are still being pondered into present day. These initiatives have continued the stress and challenges felt by the assistant principal in assuming the role of instructional leader.

These educational policies have not been the only factors to affect the job role of both the principal and assistant principal. Beginning in 1996, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) began working to support educational leaders in their roles and responsibilities of improving schools (CCSSO, 2008). The CCSSO and the National Policy Board for Administration (NPBEA) designed and approved national standards for educational leaders. Many administrators refer to these as the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards; however, the latest version, approved in November of 2015, is now referred to as the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (2015). The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders are:

- Standard 1: Mission, Vision, and Core Values

- Standard 2: Ethics and Professional Norms

- Standard 3: Equity and Cultural Responsiveness

- Standard 4: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment

- Standard 5: Community Care and Support for Students

- Standard 6: Professional Capacity of School Personnel

- Standard 7: Professional Community for Teachers and Staff

- Standard 8: Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community

- Standard 9: Operations and Management

- Standard 10: School Improvement

These standards apply to both principals and assistant principals and show the complexity of their job roles (NPBEA, 2015). The government demands for school improvement and increased student achievement now puts the school administrators as those most responsible for change. These updated standards emphasize instructional leadership, while not negating the importance of traditional management roles of the leaders. The standards indicate that the traditional role of the assistant principal will change. The next section of the literature review will give an overview of how the role is changing.

Role and Responsibilities of the Assistant Principal

The role of assistant principal is a complex web of responsibilities, which has been overlooked through decades of research (Sun, 2011). Recently, researchers have begun to delve into the intricacies of the assistant principal role. Marshall and Mitchell (1991) define the role this way: "the assistant principalship is the entry level line administrative position where new administrators learn rules in the administrative culture" (p.6). According to Kaplan and Owning

(1999), "The assistant principal can be a valuable asset to the principal's overall leadership in the school" (p. 80).With the role of assistant principal only becoming a sound position within the last 50 years, it is not surprising that the role is fraught with ambiguity and uncertainty (Glanz, 1994b). In past decades, the role of an assistant principal was defined by the residing school principal (Marshall & Mitchell, 1991). The assistant principal was expected to follow the orders that the principal assigned (Marshall & Mitchell, 1991). According to Bates and Shank (1983) certain tasks and responsibilities were delegated to the assistant principal because the school principal did not desire them. These tasks and responsibilities were often managerial in nature (Glanz, 1998). The job responsibilities have often been referred to as the three big B's- "books, buses, and behinds" (Good, 2008, p. 46).

The role of assistant principal has transformed over the years into a job that not only has retained its managerial/supervision responsibilities, but also now includes components of instructional leadership. Niewenhuizen and Brooks (2013) synthesized previous studies noting a commonality of four tasks of the assistant principal student management, management of school, instructional leadership, and community/public relations. However, with three of the four being chiefly managerial, Marshall (1993) noted that it would be extremely difficult for assistant principals to grow and develop as instructional leaders due to other job responsibilities.

Student management. In a study conducted by Weller and Weller (2002), it was found that an assistant principal's most time-consuming responsibility was student discipline. Likewise, in a five-year study conducted by Hartzell (1995), assistant principals noted that they, "dread discipline because they know it involves almost continual confrontation and unpleasantness, but few expect it to be as technically complicated as it is" (p. 46). The multidimensional facets of discipline make it a difficult task (Hartzell, 1995).

Hartzell (1995) identified four elements that make the responsibility of attending to discipline difficult. One of the first aspects of discipline that assistant principals must attend to is making sure all policies and procedures are being followed. Due process and protocols must be explicitly upheld and well-detailed documentation kept. Discipline issues can be one of the most common reasons schools have lawsuits (Hartzell, 1995). Another complicated aspect of tending to discipline is its unpredictability. Assistant principals can begin to anticipate times and places where discipline infractions will occur, but these are subject to change at any given moment. The third complicating factor of discipline is its time consuming, complicated nature. Every situation is different, causing the assistant principal to launch an investigation into each individual incident. Not only does the assistant principal have to gather information, but also it is also necessary to create a plan on how they are going to handle the infraction. The handling of the discipline problem involves the fourth difficult element of discipline: dealing with the classroom the teacher's expectations. Assistant principals interviewed in the Hartzell (1995) study noted the dissatisfaction that teachers often felt about the way the assistant principal handled student discipline misbehaviors (Hartzell, 1995).

Management of relationships. In a study conducted by Hausman et al. (2002), it was found that assistant principals primarily deal with the management of people. Supporting this thought, Marshall (1993) conducted a study around the daily tasks of career assistant principals. This study highlighted that it was "people who make the assistant principal's office come alive" with much emphasis being placed on the student (p. 8). Marshall noted that the assistant principal's office was a public place where a steady flow of individuals would be seen each day (1993). One assistant principal interviewed in this study urged others to close their door in order to get all tasks completed. However, building and maintaining relationships with students,

parents, and teachers was stated as crucial to being successful in the assistant principal's role (Harzell, 1995). Hartzell (1995) said,

> Assistant principals can maintain positive relations with the majority of students in the
> school if they are willing to work at it by mixing in with them in the hallways and at
> lunch, taking time to talk with them informally at activities, and going out of their way to
> praise and support students who have gotten into trouble and then straightened out. (p.
> 62)

In a survey conducted by Glanz (1994a) 164 assistant principal respondents said they felt teacher and staff development as well as curriculum development were the most vital areas in which they should spend their time. However, it was found that these participants overwhelmingly spent more time on student discipline issues, lunch duty, and the school schedule. Kwan and Walker (2012) conducted a research study on the actual versus the ideal job responsibilities of assistant principals. They found that assistant principals spent more time in staff management than what they initially thought would be the case before taking the role. The assumption from the study was that assistant principals were inexperienced and needed more development in how to handle the human relations aspect of the job. The study also revealed that assistant principals wished to spend more time in teacher development, curriculum improvement, and resource management. Overall, it can be understood that there were discrepancies in the assistant principals' ideal and actual roles. The management responsibilities may often overshadow the responsibilities of curriculum and instructional support.

Another interesting finding from research highlights gender differences in the assistant principal role. The research of Hausman et al. (2002) provided information regarding gender differences in the amount of time spent on certain responsibilities by the assistant principal.

Females were found to spend more time on instructional leadership tasks in highly visible areas while males were more secluded from visibility working on managerial tasks. The researchers concluded that there was disconnect in assistant principal formal training and professional development, thus leading to the ambiguity surrounding the role.

Michel (1996) measured assistant principal success by the development of group activities. The development of group activities (specifically working with teachers) according to this author happens in the following stages:

- Starting attempts to use group decision making

- Creating groups to advance the climate of the school

- Using groups to produce new solutions to problems recognized collaboratively by the assistant principal and teachers

In conjunction with group decision-making, "The assistant principal functions to make the school supportive, contributing to teachers' and students' sense of personal worth" (Michel, 1996, p. 8). Assistant principals need to use interpersonal relationships to foster a sense of understanding among all stakeholders. These relationships can create a team that works to the betterment of the school community. With rapport established, the assistant principal must be well versed in how to share decision-making among teachers, parents, students, and community. This encouragement of broad participation can work towards a productive and successful school.

The changing role. Barnett et al. (2012) addressed the issues of the assistant principal job by saying, "the role of assistant principal must evolve from the traditional perspective of disciplinarian and manager to a perspective in which enhancing the instructional program of a school is at the forefront" (p. 92). These researchers found through their study of 37 novice and 66 experienced assistant principals that three factors that affect how assistant principals

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accomplish their job role. These researchers discovered that assistant principals need to be

recognized as trustworthy and credible. This can be accomplished by managing their time wisely

as well as setting performance standards for themselves and others. The second factor that is

crucial to the success of assistant principals as the instructional leader is the ability to create and

maintain relationships among the school community. Lastly, assistant principals must have a

deep understanding of the curriculum and instruction taking place in their school (Barnett et al.,

2012).

Muijs and Harris (2003) also suggested the assistant principal needed to move from a

traditional role to a more emergent one. The researchers suggested the following items as an

assistant principal's emergent role responsibilities:

- Designing curriculum and instructional methods

- Supporting and promoting school goals

- Creating a shared vision

- Working as a transformational leader

- Developing an extensive knowledge base

- Evaluating and mentoring teaching staff

- Creating relationships with the teaching staff

- Retaining traditional managerial duties

These responsibilities, as suggested by the researchers, will require extensive professional

development and training, as they deviate significantly from the traditional managerial roles of

assistant principals.

Research conducted by Hunter (2016) suggested that the role of the assistant principal

has dramatically changed over time. This study revealed that almost 60% of participants reported

that their job role was made up of at least 50% instructional tasks. This finding suggests that the assistant principal role is no longer just made up of managerial duties (Hunter, 2016). This result is significantly different than studies conducted on the assistant principals' role presented earlier in this literature review.

Challenges. According to Marshall and Davidson (2016) assistant principals will often face challenges before, during, and after their selection into the position. Aspiring assistant principals will often ask themselves a plethora of questions before applying for the position. Some of these questions include:

1. What kinds of people are in administrative positions and could I fit in?

2. Are there opportunities to learn the tasks, and will there be mentors giving feedback on how well I manage the gamut of daunting AP tasks?

3. Along my potential career path, will I be able to identify sponsors with power and connections, who might see me as their protégé and might help me manage, giving me visibility for promotions up the career ladder?

4. Will I be seen as having the "right look" when schools are considering whether they need to balance the race, gender, and ethnicities on this administrative teams?

5. What compromises must I face?

Once obtaining the position more questions will arise often times surrounding the ambiguous nature of the role (Marshall & Davidson, 2016). These researchers recognized some of the unwritten rules of the assistant principal role that could be challenging. Several examples of these rules are: do not take risks, make changes quietly, and let higher-ups make big decisions, and complete all assigned tasks. These unwritten rules often test an assistant principal's core values, and beliefs, making the position a challenge.

Similarly, Marshall and Mitchell (1991) identified several assumptive worlds of assistant principals. This study noted four domains of assumptive worlds that infiltrate an assistant principal's job. It is suggested that assistant principals will not be as productive or successful if they operate outside of these domains. The assumptive worlds were broken down into sub-categories for a more detailed explanation.

1. The Right and Responsibility to Initiate

    a. Limit Risk Taking

    b. Re-make Policy Quietly

2. Acceptable and Unacceptable Values

    a. Transfer to Avoid Moral Dilemmas

    b. Divergent Values and Actions Will be Sanctioned

3. Violating the Patterns of Expected Behavior

    a. Aloofness Cannot Be Maintained

    b. Don't Get Labeled as a Trouble Maker

    c. Keep Disputes Quite

    d. Cover All Bases

4. School Site Conditions That Affect Political Relationships

    a. Build Administrator Trust

    b. Align Turf

It was Marshall and Mitchell's (1991) finding that these assumptive worlds "constrain initiative and value choices" among assistant principals. It is suggested that assistant principals pay close attention to the school environment in which they perform their duties and adjust

themselves accordingly. However, even with having a deep understanding of the school environment assistant principals can still face many challenges and stresses.

As Marshall and Davidson (2016) pointed out challenges can be felt during the assistant principal's tenure as an educational leader. Hartzell, Williams, and Nelson (1994) discovered several challenges assistant principals face in their role as an organizational leader. First, the assistant principal realizes that the position is secondary to the principal. The assistant principal completes tasks that are given by the principal. Assistant principals must also learn to navigate the delicate relationships that exist between teachers and administrators. They must also deal with the socialization process that is needed to acclimate to a new work environment. As a result, they must be able to define their role early on. Hartzell et al. (1994) also voiced that the assistant principal experience would be one filled with both positives and negatives and will vary from person to person. The researchers noted that, "everyone becoming an assistant principal will in some way be surprised at the differences between what they expected and they found" (p. 14).

A study conducted by Petrides, Jimes, and Karaglani (2014) extended upon Hartsell et al.'s (1994) findings by asserting that assistant principals often intended their role to be devoted to instructional tasks, but found they were impeded by oppositional views and outdated school policies. The study called attention to an assistant principals' need for tailored PD (professional development) programs that would be centered on what they needed in regard to their level of experience and school context. Even with these challenges, Chen, Blendinger, and McGrath (2000) found that assistant principals viewed their jobs as either satisfying or very satisfying despite the stressors and challenges. The only area in which participants expressed dissatisfaction was about their salary as it related to their years of experience.

Additionally, in a study conducted by Ricciardi and Petrosko (2000) of first-year administrators in Kentucky, anecdotal reports showed that assistant principals specifically had trouble meeting university instructional leadership standards. This study recommended that assistant principals need more balanced work responsibilities if they are to handle new accountability and achievement goals.

Fields (2005) measured specific stressors among 49 first-year principals and assistant principals in southern Florida. Both principals and assistant principals indicated similar stresses of:

- Uncontrollable job demands

- Multitude of daily tasks

- Faculty and staff relationships

However, unique to first year assistant principals were stressors over bus duties, discipline issues, and parent interactions, and principals highlighted being stressed over school and district policies and procedures. Fields (2005) concluded that assistant principals did not feel the same stress of principals due to their lack of involvement with school politics. However, it does suggest that assistant principals do feel stressors around their particular roles and responsibilities.

Marshall (1993) helped in identifying ways in which job stressors could be lessened or eliminated. This author found that many career assistant principals felt like there would be fewer challenges with their role if there were more consistency from the district level. They also noted the need to be left alone to do their job so it could be completed in a timely manner. One participant in the study spoke on the importance of joining professional organizations in order to attend professional development workshops. This was needed to stay current with educational

trends and served as a way to network with other assistant principals. Assistant principals in this study also wanted to be recognized for their daily contributions and to feel appreciated (Marshall, 1993).

Some assistant principals unfortunately find themselves unsatisfied with the job role and responsibilities. Others find themselves stalled in the position with no chance of being promoted. Those who are leaving the field tend to be young and less experienced. These professionals are looking for more rewarding careers which are often outside of the education field (Marshall & Davidson, 2016). These researchers suggest that assistant principals need more mentoring, coaching, and sponsoring. Through these avenues assistant principals can become aware of the challenges surrounding the role and then work on strategies on how to better deal with them (Marshall & Davidson, 2016).

Kaplan and Ownings (1999) offered several recommendations on how assistant principals can accept and work through the multiple stressors they face in their role. These researchers stated, "APs must be aware of these stressors and learn how to deal effectively with them" (p. 87). Assistant principals may find more stress factors by assuming the role of instructional leader. Kaplan and Ownings (1999) identified several factors that increase the stress an assistant principal will face when assuming the role of an instructional leader:

- Different and wider responsibility
- More planning, organizing, and coordinating
- More time needed for the job
- More "Balls in the air"
- More problem solving
- More involvement with adults

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- More professional writing and public speaking

- More professional learning

- Expertise and preparation for the principalship

These potential areas of stress can be alleviated through developing a deeper understanding of instructional leadership. Kaplan and Ownings (1999) suggested that assistant principals should identify and attach their own personal meaning to the job role. The identification of professional and personal goals as well as constant reflection can help assistant principals in the completion of their daily tasks. These researchers suggest mentoring as a powerful way an assistant principal can attach meaning to the job role. Expert mentors can guide and support an assistant principal through especially difficult or challenging situations. Kaplan and Ownings (1999) also suggest that the assistant principal needs to become the leading expert of school improvement. By taking part in professional organizations, graduate level university courses, and mentoring relationships, assistant principals can become experts in their field. The next recommendation that Kaplan and Ownings (1999) suggest is that assistant principals combine their expert knowledge and personal values. Through this powerful combination, assistant principals should be able to experiment and test out new ideas and methods that promote school improvement. Practical tinkering "allows [assistant principals] to apply what they learned to see how it works in the real world" (Kaplan & Ownings, 1999, p. 91). Being able to experiment and test ideas takes the assistant principal's job role to a new level of complexity and demand. The last recommendation requires the assistant principal to extend and refine what is taking place in the school by reflecting and evaluating current happenings. By following these recommendations, assistant principals can expect to relieve themselves of many of the stressors that impede the job role (Kaplan & Ownings, 1999).

The assistant principal job role is riddled with challenges, setbacks, and disappointments. However, through acceptance and recognition of the challenges, the assistant principal can overcome and these potential challenges and stressors.

Socialization of the Assistant Principal. Entering the assistant principal role is a major career transition for most individuals. Catherine Marshall (1992) identified that, "the assistant principalship is the beginning of a career socialization process" (p. viii). According to the author, the end of the socialization process should lead to a principalship or superintendency position. Socialization requires individuals to reflect on personal and professional values and beliefs causing a redefinition of assumptions about themselves. Armstrong (2010) conducted a study to look at the socialization process that characterizes the transition from teaching to administration. The author stated that the socialization process begins the moment the assistant principal steps over the boundary from teaching to administration. She claimed that, "roles and rituals" were adopted to socialize the new assistant principals into the current school culture forcing upon them managerial tasks and responsibilities. Over time, these assistant principals lost their instructional frame of mind and moved to a more managerial mindset. She claimed that for the assistant principal role, "there must be a clear definition of its parameters, a reduction in the focus on management and disciplinary tasks, and an increase in leadership activities" (Armstrong, 2010, p. 710). Through the study, Armstrong identified four phases of the assistant principal role:

1. Entry-Exit
2. Immersion-Emersion
3. Disintegration-Reintegration
4. Transformation-Restabilization

Armstrong (2010) noted that these phases are experienced in any order and at random times. She says, "each phase of the [assistant principal's] trajectory builds on three previous cycles, and different rites of passage occur within each phase" (p. 697). The entry-exit phase depicts the assistant principal as aspiring and still viewing the administration position through a teacher's lens. Rites experienced at this level may have been informal such as assuming more school leadership positions, attending additional professional development, and volunteering for more school events. Formal rites might include attending an administrative certification program. The immersion-emersion phases relates to the shift from aspiring to practicing novice assistant principal. This phase highlights the shift from traditional teacher duties to administrative duties and was noted to be a "sink or swim" and "baptism by fire" process (Armstrong, 2010, p. 703).

The assistant principal can attempt to circumvent these challenges; however, frustrations will still remain. The third phase, disintegration-reintegration, takes place late in the assistant principal's first year of service. This phase focuses on the assistant principal's attempt to navigate the multitude of challenges and stressors associated with the role. This attempt, however, is often times met with disappointment and failure. This phase calls for the acceptance of challenges in the assistant principal role through the infusion of personal values and beliefs when confronting them. The last phase of transformation-restabilization refers to the total inclusion of the assistant principal into the school community. Although still being subjected to role challenges, assistant principals reaching this phase have learned how to navigate the potential problem areas of the role. They have begun to rely on the collaborative relationship formed with school personnel and increased their trustworthiness by doing so. The fourth phase in Armstrong's (2010) model represents the highest level in the socialization process.

Michel (1996) reported that there are continuing questions surrounding the socialization of assistant principals. Specifically, Michel (1996) claimed, "the relationships between how the assistant principal is oriented to the position and the duties of the post are in doubt" (p. 3). The author claimed that to transition smoothly, an assistant principal will need a clear definition of the role and responsibilities of the position, ability to resolve conflict, and knowledge of the school culture and influencing factors.

Greenfield (1984) supported this notion by analyzing research associated with the socialization process of school administrators. His work provided recommendations on how to suitably socialize principals and assistant principals to their roles. These recommendations for role socialization included:

- Creating a professional learning program which is developed by school leaders and university personnel that graduate qualified applicants

- Providing an internship to all aspiring administrators that is well organized and structured

- Announcing all administrator openings publically and aggressively pursuing qualified candidates

- Establishing professional development workshops to reenergize experienced administrators

- Rewarding continuing education practices

- Increasing the assistant principal responsibilities to include instructional leadership tasks

- Increasing the principal's abilities to evaluate staff and school programs to help the school improve

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Greenfield (1984) points out that ultimately, "fundamental changes in professional pre-service training programs and career socialization process must occur if the long-range challenges are to be met" (p. 40). Additionally, to meet the increased challenges in assuming the assistant principal role, Kaplan and Ownings (1999) suggest that assistant principals take part in formal learning opportunities such as university courses or reading professional literature that can provide helpful information on how to improve the school organization as a whole (Kaplan & Ownings, 1999).

Grodzki (2011) explored the influences of organizational socialization and the impact it has upon school administrators. This study, conducted in one Canadian school district, found that socialization of administrators was an issue as highlighted by the low retention rate of school administrators. What the researchers uncovered was that the administrators perceived barriers to the socialization process. One notable issue that affected the socialization process of administrators was a lack of a clear definition of job responsibilities. Participants often commented on feeling confused about their managerial and instructional duties because their job role was not clearly defined. These administrators also felt a sense of identity crisis in the abrupt transition from teacher to leader. This transition, as noted by some, caused them to lose confidence in themselves because of the relationship changes they experienced and the new knowledge and skills they needed in their new position. To help in the socialization process, the District began a Leadership Academy in hopes of developing competent leaders. It initially began as an academy open to all types of administrators. However, its focus narrowed to developing the skills of aspiring assistant principals. This academy introduced the aspiring assistant principals to the job responsibilities with emphasis placed on instructional leadership. Grodski (2011) explained, "Participants in this study reported that having the opportunity to gain

knowledge of processes, procedures, policies, and expectations contributed to their effectiveness in their roles and lowered anxiety" (p. 14).

Mertz (2007) identified how socialization occurs among assistant principals, how the socialization process affects them, and how norms and expectations are translated to the practicing assistant principal. According to Mertz (2007) socialization of assistant principals can happen in three ways.

1. Learning what is lived

2. Learning by example

3. Learning what is and is not reinforced

These three processes are supported by earlier research presented in this section. It can be concluded that for successful socialization to occur, assistant principals need to learn the values and norms of the school in which they work. Assistant principals also need to seek out the expertise of the residing school principal to fully assimilate to the environment in which they work. The socialization process will also require assistant principals to learn what is considered appropriate and helpful according to the principal. This often times calls for the assistant principal to put away his or her own ideas and views (Mertz, 2007).

Instructional Leadership

Beginning in the 1980's, school leaders were expected to focus not only on the management, but the instruction taking place in their school. Hallinger (1992) stated that the school leader "was expected to be knowledgeable about curriculum and instruction and able to intervene directly with teachers in making instructional improvements" (p. 2). In a synthesis of literature Hallinger (2005) described instructional leaders as:

- Strong, directive leaders

- Culture builders

- Goal-oriented leaders

Hallinger and Murphy (1987) introduced one of the first detailed descriptions of what instructional leaders' job roles are comprised of. These researchers grouped them into three broad dimensions.

1. Defining the school mission

2. Managing the instructional program

3. Promoting a positive climate

These three dimensions have continued relevance to today's instructional leader's activities as noted by Hallinger (2005). Hallinger (2005) has extended this three dimensional model to include a detailed breakdown of functions of an instructional leader.

Defining the school mission. The first dimension focuses on the importance of defining the school mission. This is achieved by confirming, "The school has clear, measureable, time-based goals focused on the academic progress of students" (Hallinger, 2005, p. 225). Strong communication should be practiced with stakeholders, as goals are being developed to ensure ongoing support and feedback. Mission statements are created through a collaborative process and are indicative of the school population's needs. This mission is adopted by the school staff and implemented in daily routine. Above all, the mission statement is exhibited and promoted by the instructional leader(s) of the school (Hallinger, 2005).

Managing the instructional program. The second dimension of Hallinger's (2005) model focuses on the managerial aspect of the instructional leader's job. These job roles are:

- Supervising and evaluating instruction

- Coordinating the curriculum

- Monitoring student progress

These three job roles include the actions of supervising, evaluating, coordinating, and monitoring which calls for instructional leaders to be deeply engaged and aware of what is going on instructionally in their schools. These leaders must have a deep understanding of the school curriculum, evaluation process, and ways in which student growth is monitored (Hallinger, 2005).

Promoting a positive school learning climate. The third dimension according to Hallinger (2005) is "broader in scope and purpose than the other two" (p. 226). Instructional leaders employ the creation of a set of high expectations and standards for students and teachers. These will help in the development of a school culture that is driven by purpose and those who work in the school continue to evaluate and reflect on how to improve the school. Through the instructional leader's support, guidance, and modeling, the school culture can improve.

Similarly, Leithwood and Seashore-Louis (2012) asserted to be an effective instructional leader running a successful school, administrators needed to participate in the following activities:

1. Setting Directions
2. Developing People
3. Focusing on Learning
4. Improving the Instructional Program

These researchers noted that setting direction should clarify the goals of the school and include collaboration from all school stakeholders. Upon solidifying the school's goals the development of the staff should promote capacity building through continual motivation and support. The instructional leader is a vital role in developing the people so that the support

systems are in place when change is needed. Lastly, Leithwood and Seashore-Louis (2012) suggest instructional leaders effectively support and improve the instruction taking place within the classrooms of their school. Utilizing necessary resources, offering support, and monitoring teacher instruction can help an assistant principal effectively improve the instructional programs.

According to Hausman et al. (2002), "in an era of increasing accountability, many are calling for additional and stronger sources of instructional leadership" (p. 152). In the study conducted by Hausman and his team, they found that despite the increased need for instructional leadership there was less clarity of that role than in the traditional managerial responsibilities of the assistant principal role. This notion was also supported in the work conducted by Oleszweski, Shoho, and Barnett (2012) who cited that that, "the job description is becoming more complex as assistant principals strive to be an integral part of the instructional program to transform twenty-first century schools" (p. 265).

Kaplan and Ownings (1999) recommend shared leadership responsibilities between the principal and assistant principal. These researchers state,

> The need to increase all students' achievement, manage emerging crisis, and keep up with the legal, financial, and political requirements of running a successful public school require principals to share power and create an instructional leadership team (Kaplan & Ownings, 1999, p. 92).

The assistant principal plays a vital role in creating a learning organization that fosters student and teacher success.

Despite these recommendations, Kwan and Walker (2012) found through their research that assistant principals in Hong Kong spent very little time on instructional tasks such as staff and curriculum development. Sun (2011) conducted a study based on researcher Jeffery Glanz's

work in 1994b having assistant principals rank their actual responsibilities versus the responsibilities that they thought they should have. Assistant principals ranked student discipline as the number one duty they took part in with instructional leadership being number six. Assistant principals believed instructional leadership should be their most important focus followed by teacher evaluation. Sun's (2011) study indicated that assistant principal's job role in 2010 showed more correlation between actual and ideal responsibilities than in 1994 (Sun, 2011).

Similarly, Barnett, et al. (2012) conducted a study with 103 assistant principals and found that, "assistant principals may be expected to deal with curricular and instructional issues and may often feel inadequately prepared to do so, time and conflict management tend to over shadow these instructional leadership responsibilities" (p. 118). These new policies and standards have required assistant principals to broaden and shift their knowledge on how to improve teaching and learning within their school communities. The neglect of time spent on instructional leadership found in this study greatly affected the assistant principal's self-confidence and success (Barnett et al., 2012).

Instructional leadership and school improvement were two reasons Armstrong (2005) found in her study as to why teachers became assistant principals. But, much like other studies, Armstrong found that there were differences between the role people imagined and the actual role associated with assistant principal.

Chan, Webb, and Bowen (2003) conducted a quantitative study on the perceptions of the assistant principal in their quest to obtain a principalship. It also focused on how assistant principals prepared themselves for the transition into the principal position. These researchers concluded that it is as important for assistant principals to understand their role as it is for them

to understand the principal's role. When asked about the principal's role versus the assistant principal's role, participants had almost identical answers, with the number one responsibility being providing instructional support. Contrastingly, participants answered that a lack of experience was the biggest hindrance to being adequately prepared to deliver this instructional support (Chan et al., 2003).

With research indicating that assistant principals have limited instructional leadership time, Celikten (2000) found several factors that restricted the instructional leadership activities that assistant principals participated in. The greatest inhibiting factor found was the lack of a description for the job role, and secondly was not being able to attend professional development workshops due to a shortage of time and resources. Also found on the list were factors such as: unwritten duties, rapid student population growth, changes and/or unawareness of school law, school politics, and lack of parental support all keeping the assistant principal from being involved in instructional leadership activities. Furthermore, these assistant principals noted the principal's encouragement and support, attending professional development workshops, learning the school community, and having strong communication skills all helped facilitate instructional leadership activities. Kaplan and Ownings (1999) stated that, "New instructional leadership responsibilities continue to be added to other administrative duties, but none are removed" (p. 80). Both researchers suggested that assistant principals needed to assume a shared leadership position with the principal to improve curriculum and instruction to help increase student growth and overall performance. They cautioned it would be "difficult and important" to share this power. Together, the principal and assistant principal can develop their vision for increasing student achievement, instruction improvement, parental involvement, and teacher effectiveness. By doing this, Kaplan and Ownings (1999) suggested that assistant principals take their role

from a "reactive here-and-now focus on discipline and management to a future-oriented perspective" (p. 83).

Gerke (2004) and Good (2008) both made further suggestions on how assistant principals could establish themselves as instructional leaders. Importance should be placed on the assistant principal becoming an active participant in professional learning communities within the school. It was also suggested that assistant principals place priority on staying current with educational practice and policy. Lastly, it is important that assistant principals be visible in their schools actively participating in classroom instruction.

Dedicating time to instructional leadership has been linked to greater student achievement and success (Hausman et al., 2002). Similarly, Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) found from a meta-analysis of educational leadership literature, that there was a significant correlation between school leadership and student achievement. The researchers proposed that a balanced leadership model combined with other leadership approaches would yield greater results for student achievement than instructional leadership alone. Recommendations for balanced leadership included the use of the McRELs framework that combines knowledge and skills. These researchers identified twenty-one leadership characteristics that directly impact student achievement. These characteristics were:

- Culture
- Order
- Discipline
- Resources
- Curriculum, instruction, assessment
- Focus

- Knowledge of curriculum, instruction assessment

- Visibility

- Contingent rewards

- Communication

- Outreach

- Input

- Affirmation

- Relationship

- Change agent

- Optimizer

- Ideals/beliefs

- Monitors/evaluates

- Flexibility

- Situational awareness

- Intellectual simulation (p. 6)

Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson, Wahlstrom (2004) state "effective education leadership makes a difference in improving learning" (p. 1). These researchers reviewed evidence and found three substantial leadership influences on student achievement.

1. Leaders affect student learning indirectly by influencing people or features of their organization

2. It is important who and what educational leaders pay attention to

3. Additional research is needed about what leaders do so close attention can be put on important organizational issues

Much emphasis is placed on increasing student learning by investing in relationships. These authors suggest that, "Leaders' contributions to student learning, then, depend a great deal on their judicious choice of what parts of their organization to spend time and attention on" (Leithwood et al., 2004, p. 11). When working towards increased student learning, teachers are where principals should make the key investment of time. However, to grasp the influence of these practices more research needs to be conducted on these. Extending upon prior research on how instructional leadership impacts student achievement, Seashore-Louis, Dretzke, and Wahlstrom (2010) found that instructional leadership alone did not prove to increase student learning. Instructional leadership when coupled with shared leadership and trust in the principal seemingly increased student learning. However, these researchers call for additional research to be conducted on the instructional leader's effect on student learning. Ross and Gray (2006) agreed that instructional leadership does not directly affect student achievement. Ross and Gray (2006) asserted that "principals influence achievement indirectly by creating the organizational conditions through which improved teaching and learning occur" (p. 813). By creating an atmosphere of high expectations for students and teachers, as well as providing teachers with the support and guidance school leaders can become more effective in increasing student achievement.

Professional Development for Assistant Principals

Easton (2008) suggests that throughout the years, professional development has been a training that is done *to* someone. This author noted that, while imperative to the success of school leaders, the concept of professional development needed to shift to the concept of professional learning. Taking part in traditional development activities and tasks is vital;

however, leaders need to be able to adapt, change, self-monitor, and have a strong knowledge base.

Conger and Benjamin (1999) conducted a study identifying that professional development programs provide opportunities for leaders to develop and refine skills and strategies needed for school leadership. The authors recommended four main objectives for leadership education:

1. Developing leadership effectiveness
2. Improving career transitions into leadership roles
3. Instilling the vision, mission, and beliefs of the organization
4. Creating the skills and knowledge needed to attain long-term goals

According to Conger and Benjamin (1999), these objectives translate well into professional development programs.

An additional study, conducted by Oliver (2005), supported these claims by researching the professional development opportunities of elementary, middle, and secondary assistant principals in Orange County, California. The majority of assistant principals surveyed by the author said they did receive professional development from the district level office. These development opportunities were overwhelmingly founded in management activities. A large number of assistant principal participants wished they had received more professional development on curriculum and instruction. These assistant principals desired more professional development at the middle and high school level, more input on the way it was delivered in, as well as about the time and place of the trainings. The author of this study recommended the need for a comprehensive professional development program for assistant principals. This program would place greater emphasis and priority on instructional leadership skills rather than

management. Additionally, he recommended that assistant principals receive professional development on a continuous basis (Oliver, 2005).

In a review of assistant principal literature, Oleszewski et al. (2012) further agree with Oliver's (2005) assertion that professional development of assistant principals has two primary purposes: skill development and career advancement. These researchers suggested that assistant principals need to expand their knowledge base and skill sets in order to be effective in their school. This synthesized body of research indicated that assistant principals would like more training in instructional leadership, managing daily tasks, discipline management, and legal issues. Oleszewski et al. (2012) found commonalities between several studies in that many professional development opportunities given to assistant principals were to help prepare them to become principals. It was found that assistant principals were more prepared to assume the role of principal after participating in programs meant to develop the skills and competencies needed for the principalship.

Although professional development can be beneficial for the assistant principal, it cannot be useful in isolation, according to Hunter (2016). This researcher found that, according to assistant principal participants, isolated professional learning opportunities made no impact on their ability to successfully assume the role of an instructional leader. Brown-Ferrigno and Muth (2004) support this finding by stating, "Professional development involves the social construction of professional-practice expectations through mentoring, peer sharing and critique, and systematic induction" (p. 471). These researchers asserted that by instituting a carefully designed mentoring program, assistant principals and principals can mutually benefit from this type of professional development experience. The collaboration between the assistant principal and principal is essential to the successful function of the school.

Mentoring for Assistant Principals

The concept of mentoring has been around for thousands of years. According to Mertz (2004), mentoring is the art of a more experienced individual (mentor) guiding a less experienced individual (mentee/protégé) as they traverse their career. Mentoring dates back to the classic tale of Homer's *Odyssey*. The young son of Odysseus, Telemachus, is tutored by a trusted friend, Mentor. This story was the beginning of the concept of mentoring as a form of support, guidance, and counsel for a less experienced individual (Daresh, 2004).

Overtime there have been many definitions given to the word mentoring. The American Psychological Association (APA) (2006) defines a mentor as, "an individual with expertise who can help develop the career of a mentee" (p. 5). The mentor performs two major functions in the mentoring relationship with the mentee. First, the mentor provides feedback and guidance on professional performance and development that will help the mentee grow in his or her career. Second, the mentor will be a support system, as well as role model, for the mentee. This often translates to helping the mentee find a balance between his or her personal and professional life. According to APA (2006), those who have been in a mentoring relationship, "earn higher performance evaluations, higher salaries, and have faster career progress than non-mentored individuals" (p. 5).

Assistant principals, as novices to administration, are uniquely positioned to benefit from mentoring. Liange and Augustine-Shaw (2016), explained that "high-quality mentoring and induction for assistant principals is vital" (p. 235). Their study highlighted the importance of guidance and support in helping assistant principals identify ways to succeed within the position. This study, conducted in Kansas maintained the importance of a mentoring relationship in helping novice assistant principals "bridge the gap between preparation and professional growth"

(p. 235). Mentees surveyed acknowledged several qualities of the mentoring relationship that proved to be the most beneficial. One aspect highly valued by mentees was the feedback provided by mentors on their performance, attendance at professional workshops, and completion of mentoring goals. Mentees also expressed that having mentors embed leadership standards and practices into their interactions was critical in their success. Overall, mentees appreciated the structured, goal driven process of the mentoring program (Liang & Augustine-Shaw, 2016).

Daresh (2004) suggested mentoring has "at least two potential applications to improve the ways in which people become effective school administrators" (p. 502). He explained the importance of choosing a mentor who would act as a proper role model. This mentor should be aware of current practices and policies and should be someone who could provide valuable feedback to the mentee. Secondly, mentoring should be a time of personal and professional reflection that can confirm or challenge one's set of values and beliefs. Daresh (2004) also pointed out that, "Mentoring is an absolutely essential part of socialization and professional formation, whether at the pre-service, induction, or in-service phases of the professional development of school administrators" (p.502).

Lochmiller and Karnopp (2016) furthered this research by delving into the success found in leadership coaching. Leadership coaching is a mentoring model that is led by a mentor (principal) who supports a mentee (assistant principal) in a safe environment. The principal moves the assistant principal towards a highlighted goal, whether it be personal, professional, or institutional. This study was conducted with 100 school administrators over a five-year span. One major theme that arose from the mentoring relationships examined was the constant adjustment to the political conditions surrounding the principal's role. Sense making was used as

a strategy to help the mentors understand the impact that the political conditions had on the coaching relationship. It is important both the assistant principal and principal understand the constructs in whether the other works, and highlights the importance of relationships. It was determined that these political conditions affected the way principals coached their assistant principals, thus having an effect on the overall relationship (Lochmiller & Karnopp, 2016). Hopkins-Thompson (2000) also supported the use of coaching as a colleague-supporting model. She stated, "The process of mentoring and coaching can provide a compass………a right direction for protégés" (p. 30). Principals from North Carolina and Mississippi commented on how the mentoring /coaching relationship was mutually beneficial providing both parties necessary time to reflect on personal performance. For both participants, it brought a shared sense of increased self-esteem and confidence.

Similarly, Service, Dalgic, and Thorton, (2016) found the Master of Secondary School Leadership (MSSL) program in New Zealand was born out of the need for aspiring principals to be better prepared for the principal role. Aspiring principals enrolled in this program with the understanding that it differed from traditional leadership programs in that it contained required mentoring components. Participants shadowed and were mentored by experienced practicing principals. The combination of mentoring and shadowing provided the aspiring principals with support in becoming more socialized into the role of principal. Aspiring principals from this study noted that they chose to enroll in the program due to the on the job training offered by the shadowing component. They were able to take an active role in the day-to-day leadership and management roles of a practicing principal. The aspiring principals also enjoyed the debriefing sessions offered by the principals where they were able to link their actions to their personal values and beliefs (Service et. al, 2016).

These studies point to the importance of formal as well as informal mentoring

relationships for assistant principals. APA (2006) said, "the mentoring relationship is inherently

flexible and can vary tremendously in its form and function" (p. 7). The needs exhibited by the

mentee will determine the nature of the mentoring relationship. Informal mentoring relationships

happen without planning and are rooted in natural interactions. It is common to see these

relationships form out of a need for advice or guidance. Formal mentoring relationships form out

of a structured planning process often time created by the organization. These relationships are

often objective-based and for a targeted population of people. The program often includes

specific trainings, goals, and guidelines in its structure.

Hopkins-Thompson (2000) lists important criteria found in successful formal school

mentoring programs.

- Organizational Support

- Clearly Defined Outcomes

- Screening, Selection, and Pairing

- Training Mentors and Mentees

- A Learning-Centered Focus

- Continual Monitoring

This research notes the importance of support beginning with the school district

superintendent. If value if placed on the mentoring program then more employees will be apt to

buy-in. Secondly, goals need to be set in order to define what will be attained during the

mentoring relationship. Next, it is important to recruit the best mentors to work with mentees,

and it is equally as important to pair mentors and mentees based on common personality traits

and interests. Also, mentors and mentees should be trained on program expectations as well as

anticipated outcomes of participation. Lastly, the mentoring process should be completely

focused on the mentees learning and should be evaluated as needed (Hopkins-Thompson, 2000).

Hunter (2016) found that Alabama elementary assistant principals attributed many of

their accomplishments as instructional leaders to the mentoring relationships established between

themselves and the current principal. The mentoring relationship was found to be more

meaningful and valuable when initiated by the assistant principal. Initiation from the assistant

principal as the protégé (mentee) is also addressed in Zachary's (2000) book, *The Mentee Guide:*

Facilitating Effective Learning Relationships. By the assistant principal initiating the mentoring

relationship, he or she can express specific needs which can help to provide focus and direction

for the relationship. This supports the notion that the senior principal is truly a fundamental part

of an assistant principal's success. Along with this finding, Hunter (2016) noted two activities

linked to instructional leadership readiness. Those activities were: mentoring received from the

residing school principal and informal meetings held between administrators.

According to Searby (2014) for protégés participating in a mentoring relationship, certain

mindsets have been identified as beneficial. Those positive behaviors needed by protégés were:

1. Takes initiative

2. Learning orientation

3. Goal orientation

4. Relational

5. Reflective

Mentoring is essential in the assistant principal socialization process as noted by Searby (2014)

and Hunter (2016). However, to truly gain the most from the experience, an open mindset is

needed by assistant principals to gain the most out of the relationship. Searby (2014) calls for

more university preparation programs to accentuate the importance of mentoring relationships by training aspiring leaders in the expectations and procedures involved in a mentoring relationship. However, Hartzell et al. (1994) claimed that, "Universities prepare aspiring administrators to become principals, not assistant principals" (p. 16). Due to this, Hartzell, et al. (1994) said that novice assistant principals are shocked by the differences in their preparation versus their actual job role and responsibilities. These researchers suggest that universities need to train aspiring administrators for potential job challenges faced in the assistant principal role. A key component of that preparation needs to be that aspiring assistant principals learn how to seek a mentor for themselves (Searby, 2014).

Instructional Leadership Activities of Assistant Principals in Alabama

Assistant principals in the state of Alabama participate in several instructional activities due to federal, state, and/or local guidelines. Assistant principals have experience with instructional activities such as the state's teacher evaluation system, EducateAlabama (ALSDE, 2017a), the state government and federally encouraged Response to Intervention program, as well as being a contributing member and often time's leader of many localized Professional Learning Communities. These are just three of many instructional activities required of assistant principals in the state of Alabama.

EducateAlabama (ALSDE, 2017a) was adopted by the state of Alabama as a new teacher evaluation system in reaction to the implementation of the Alabama Quality Teaching Standards for teachers. These standards provided the state with a base for addressing teacher professional growth. EducateAlabama was designed as a formative evaluation that identified teachers' current competencies and allowed them to identify areas of personal instructional needs. EducateAlabama (ALSDE, 2017a) requires school leaders to conduct at least two unannounced

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and complete pre-and post-conferences with teachers. This evaluation system requires school leaders to be knowledgeable in school curriculum and instruction as well as data analysis. School leaders help teachers improve upon on their area of needs by providing support and guidance through professional development (ALSDE, 2017a).

In the late 2000's, The Alabama State Department of Education adopted the tiered instructional model of Response to Intervention (ALSDE, 2017b) to help aid and support students with behavior and/or academic needs. These needs are met through strategic interventions that are research-based. Students are monitored for progress and changes to interventions are made based on progress monitoring. Although not federally mandated the, the Individuals with Disability Act does support the RtI model in providing students with appropriate research based intervention strategies. RtI requires teachers and leaders to collaborate about student needs through data meetings to determine intervention strategies. The tiered model of RtI provides students with differentiated instruction (ALSDE, 2017b).

The idea of a group of school staff coming together to improve teaching and learning isn't a new concept. Often the term Professional Learning Community (PLC) is designated to describe these types of improvement meetings. Dufour (2004) suggested, "To create a professional learning community, focus on learning rather than teaching, work collaboratively, and hold yourself accountable for the results (p.6)." School leaders such as the principal and assistant principal are many times the facilitators of these PLC's within schools. Being a facilitator of a PLC requires leaders to collaborate with faculty members and have a knowledge of school need. There is a cohesiveness needed among faculty members and school leaders to be true learners in the PLC process. School leaders help in guiding the PLC through goal setting, learner outcomes, and evaluation (Dufour, 2004).

Chapter III: Methods

With little focus being placed on the assistant principal role in scholarly research, it is necessary additional research be conducted. The data from this research study was extracted from a larger two state assistant principal study consisting of quantitative and qualitative data. This research study focused on data from the five focus groups conducted among assistant principals in Alabama. These assistant principals shared their perceptions about instructional leadership. The researcher analyzed this qualitative data source from this large study, and sought to answer the following central research question: How do assistant principals define instructional leadership and what are the facilitating factors and barriers in fulfilling the role as instructional leader? This over-arching question was divided into three sub-questions:

1. How do assistant principals describe instructional leadership?

2. What are the facilitating factors for assistant principals in performing as instructional leaders?

3. What are the barriers for assistant principals in performing as instructional leaders?

Purpose of the Study

In this age of accountability in education, school principals are charged with being instructional leaders. According to Leithwood and Seashore-Louis (2012), there are four domains of instructional leadership to which the principal should be giving attention. These are: setting directions, developing people, focusing on learning, and improving the instructional program. These are demanding roles, and it is speculated that principal should consider sharing

the instructional leadership role with the assistant principal (Leithwood and Seashore-Louis, 2012). However, there is limited research on how the assistant principal enacts the role of instructional leader. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to identify how assistant principals describe instructional leadership and the barriers and facilitating factors they experience in performing the role of instructional leader.

Significance of the Study

The findings to the research questions will contribute to the thin body of literature on assistant principals. Specifically, it will add more depth to the literature on the assistant principal's role of instructional leader. This study will also help in the preparation of aspiring principals through providing important information to university preparation program faculty. These findings may also be used by school districts to develop and refine professional development opportunities, mentoring programs, and support systems for assistant principals.

Researcher Positionality

The researcher for this study was not the individual who collected the data for the investigation. Rather, the researcher analyzed an existing set of qualitative data that was generated from a large research project conducted in 2014 by a professor at Auburn University. The role of the researcher in this study was to analyze existing qualitative data to identify how participating assistant principals described instructional leadership and the facilitating factors and barriers they experienced in fulfilling the role of an instructional leader.

The researcher has seven years of elementary classroom experience. More specifically, the researcher has been a 3rd, 4th, and most currently Title One teacher. All seven years of experience have been gained in the same elementary school. It can be seen as a limitation that the researcher has no experience as an assistant principal.

The fact that another researcher created and conducted the focus group interviews can be viewed as a potential limitation to the study. However, the researcher used the same basic qualitative methods of data analysis that would have been used by the study originator.

Research Design

The researcher used general qualitative methods to conduct a thematic analysis of qualitative data from existing data sets to identify how assistant principals in the state of Alabama define instructional leadership as well as the facilitating factors and barriers in fulfilling the role of an instructional leader.

The data sets used for this study were originally collected by Dr. Linda Searby from Auburn University over a six-month span between October 2013 and April 2014 in the State of Alabama. The Auburn University of Institutional Review Board approved the original study, as well as this dissertation study that analyzed the existing qualitative data. In this chapter, the term "researcher" refers to the doctoral candidate who analyzed the existing data from the original study. The original study was conducted by Searby, Browne-Ferrigno, and Wang (2016).

Participants

For this study, there was one source of data, with different groups of assistant principals providing qualitative data. The source of qualitative data was from five focus groups conducted with assistant principals in different regions of Alabama. The focus group interviews were conducted in late 2013 and early 2014. The focus groups, which had a range of four to fourteen participants, included elementary and secondary assistant principals from the state of Alabama. Specifically, the focus groups included a total 39 assistant principals. Table 1 depicts the participants' gender. Table 2 depicts whether the assistant principal was at the elementary,

middle, or high school level. It is noted that one assistant principal served at a Kindergarten-12th

grade school.

Table 1

Assistant Principal Participant Gender

Level	Number in Focus Group	Percentage
Male	16	41%
Female	23	59%
Total	39	100%

Table 2

Assistant Principal Participant Building Level

Level	Number in Focus Group	Percentage
Elementary	14	37%
Middle	13	34%
High	11	29%
Total	39	100%

Note: 1 participant was an assistant principal at a K-12 school and is noted in the total

It should be noted that gender is not a factor of interest studied in this research. It simply

serves as a more in-depth glance at the assistant principal participants.

Data Collection Procedures

For the purposes of this qualitative study, data was collected from one source.

The one source of data came from five face to face focus groups conducted with assistant

principals in various regions of Alabama to represent urban, suburban, and rural areas. The

interviewer was Dr. Linda Searby, principal investigator of the original study. For the most part,

the focus groups were held in school district central offices or professional development centers,

with one being held in a church conference room. The smallest group consisted of four

participants, and the largest group had fourteen participants. In all 39 assistant principals from

the state of Alabama participated in the focus group interviews. Participants were given an

overview of the study and were asked to sign an informed consent document, outlining the safeguards that were put in place to protect their confidentiality and keep their identity private, as well as inform them that their participation was voluntary. Each focus group interview, which lasted from sixty to ninety minutes, was audio-recorded and transcribed by a professional transcription service.

Instrument Reliability and Validity

The interview questions for the assistant principal focus groups were collaboratively designed by Dr. Tricia Browne-Ferrigno from the University of Kentucky, and Dr. Linda Searby, from Auburn University. Both Dr. Browne-Ferrigno and Dr. Searby are practiced researchers and knowledgeable professors who are proficient in the areas of formal and informal mentoring, preparatory programs for aspiring leaders, and professional development programs for leaders. The interview questions were based on research of Leithwood and Seashore-Louis (2012) four domains of instructional leadership.

Lastly, the focus group interview questions were approved by the Institutional Review Board at Auburn University.

Data Analysis

To analyze the responses to the focus group interviews, the researcher employed coding and theming techniques. This process included analyzing data for similarities of the information reported and compiling them into manageable segments (Schwandt, 2007). In hand-coding the data, the researcher implemented processes recommended by Saldana (2013) for analyzing qualitative data.

For the focus group interviews, the researcher thoroughly read all five transcribed interviews twice before assigning any codes. Next, each transcript was analyzed again, this time

employing eclectic coding (Saldana, 2013). Eclectic coding is a first-cycle coding method in which the researcher assigns words or phrases to lines or segments of the transcript. The codes may be of different types, such as noting emotions, noting processes, highlighting exact quotes (in-vivo coding), or other analytic memos in the margins (Saldana, 2013). Next, holistic coding was employed, in which the researcher applied a single code to a large unit of transcribed data, and a master code list was kept. From the holistic codes, the researcher looked for similarities across the five transcripts in order to develop some common themes, with the research questions always in mind. In this step, the researcher kept a running list of illustrative quotes as examples of each theme. Creswell (2013) stated, "Themes in qualitative research are broad units of information that consists of several codes aggregated to form a common idea" (p. 185). Themes, patterns, and categories were identified to align with the research questions in the fourth step. These themes were organized in order for the researcher to create a "conceptual schema" instead of having only a list of themes (Schreier, 2012). In the last step for analyzing the interview data, the researcher reviewed all transcripts again to ensure that primary themes and patterns corroborated with the data obtained from the interviews. This was done to establish validity of the data.

Lastly, the researcher aligned all collective themes under the appropriate research sub-question in order to be able to answer the overall central question: How do assistant principals define instructional leadership and what are the facilitating factors and barriers in fulfilling the role as instructional leader?

Summary

Chapter III serves to provide a summary of the methods that have been used to conduct this study. It provides a detailed account of the instrumentation, validity and reliability, and focus

group interviews conducted among assistant principals. Using the focus group interviews, the

researcher chose a qualitative research design to help explain the perceived barriers and

facilitating factors assistant principals face in fulfilling role of instructional leader.

Five focus groups were also conducted among 39 elementary and secondary assistant

principals from urban, suburban, and rural Alabama. The focus group interviews were taped as

well as transcribe for data analysis. Chapter IV discusses the findings of this study.

Chapter IV: Results

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to appropriately identify how assistant principals define instructional leadership as well as delve into the facilitating factors and barriers they face when assuming the role of an instructional leader. With limited existing literature on assistant principals and specifically on assistant principals as instructional leaders this study proves to be necessary on shedding much need light on this position.

Operational Definition

According to Leithwood and Seashore-Louis (2012), there are four domains of instructional leadership to which the principal should be giving attention. These are: setting directions, developing people, focusing on learning, and improving the instructional program. These are demanding roles, and it is speculated that principal should consider sharing the instructional leadership role with the assistant principal (Leithwood & Seashore-Louis, 2012).

Research Questions

The focus of this research study was to answer the following central research question: How do assistant principals define instructional leadership and what are the facilitating factors and barriers in fulfilling the role as instructional leader?

    Research Sub-Questions.

1. How do assistant principals define instructional leadership?

2. What are the facilitating factors for assistant principals in performing as instructional leaders?

3. What are the barriers for assistant principals in performing as instructional leaders?

These questions were answered through focus groups interviews. This data was collected in 2014 among Alabama assistant principals in five regional focus groups.

Methodology

The researcher used general qualitative methods to conduct a thematic analysis of qualitative data from existing data sets to identify how assistant principals in the state of Alabama define instructional leadership as well as identifying the facilitating factors and barriers in fulfilling the role of an instructional leader.

For this study, the source of qualitative data was from five focus groups conducted with assistant principals in different regions of Alabama. The focus group interviews were conducted in late 2013 and early 2014. The focus groups, which had a range of four to fourteen participants, included elementary and secondary assistant principals from urban, suburban, and rural parts of the state. Specifically, the focus groups included a total 39 assistant principals.

Data analysis. An open-coding approach was used as the entry-level data analysis process in this research. Employing this approach, allowed the researcher to identify reoccurring concepts and ideas throughout the five focus group interview transcripts. As these emerging concepts and ideas were color-coded and highlighted throughout the data transcripts, the researcher also kept a log of analytical as well as reflective notes to be used later in the interpretation and meaning phase of the analysis. The open-codes were categorized and themed based on the researcher's interpretation of meaning. Codes, categories, and themes were depicted in a table to promote a better visual understanding of the data analysis.

Research Findings

  Research sub-question 1 – how do assistant principals define instructional leadership? Three overarching themes were identified through the data analysis process that provided an answer to sub-question 1 – How do assistant principals define instructional leadership? These overarching themes were: 1. Knowledge; 2. Skills; and 3. Dispositions. The assistant principal participants in this study overwhelmingly defined an instructional leader as someone who possessed particular knowledge, skills, and dispositions. These three themes were mainly derived from the codes that were found under the participants' responses to focus group interview question number 1, what's your vision of an instructional leader? Due to the wording of this question, assistant principal participants spoke about leaders whom which they had worked with or what they envisioned an instructional leader to be. These three themes will be discussed in the next sections of Chapter Four.
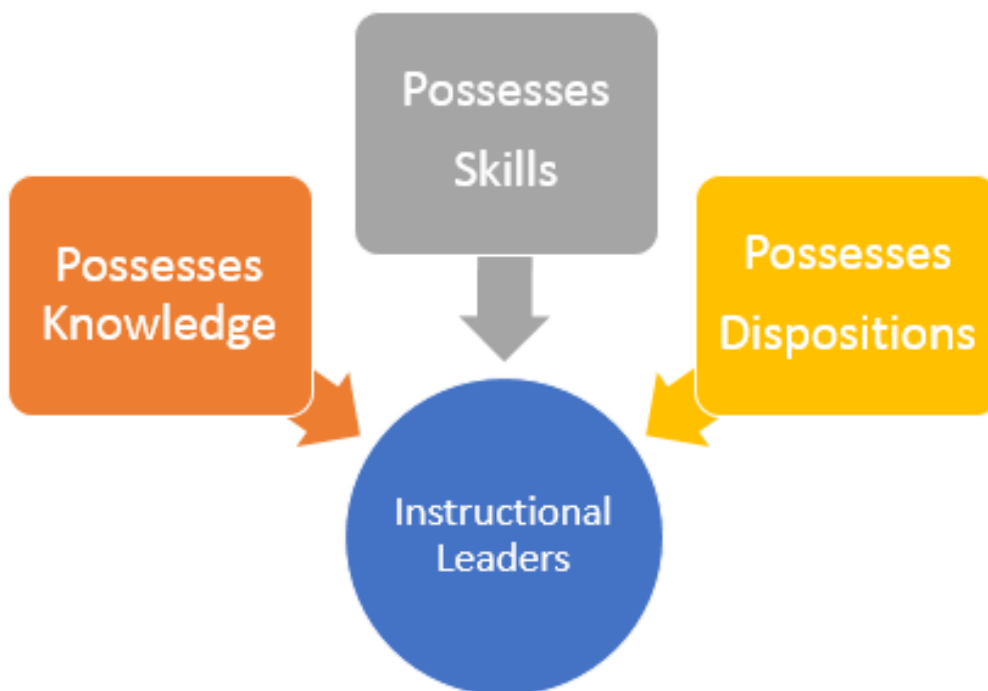
Figure 1. Instructional Leadership Definition Themes

Theme 1: The Instructional Leader Possesses Specific Knowledge. From the open-coding approach many concepts came together from the focus group interviews to form the idea that an instructional leader is someone who possesses important and specific knowledge sets. Four emerging needed knowledge sets came out of the focus group interviews. These four knowledge sets were: knowledge of curriculum, knowledge of instruction, knowledge of people, and knowledge of data. Knowledge can be defined as, "the fact or condition of knowing something with familiarity gained through experience," according to Merriam-Webster Dictionary (Knowledge, n.d.).
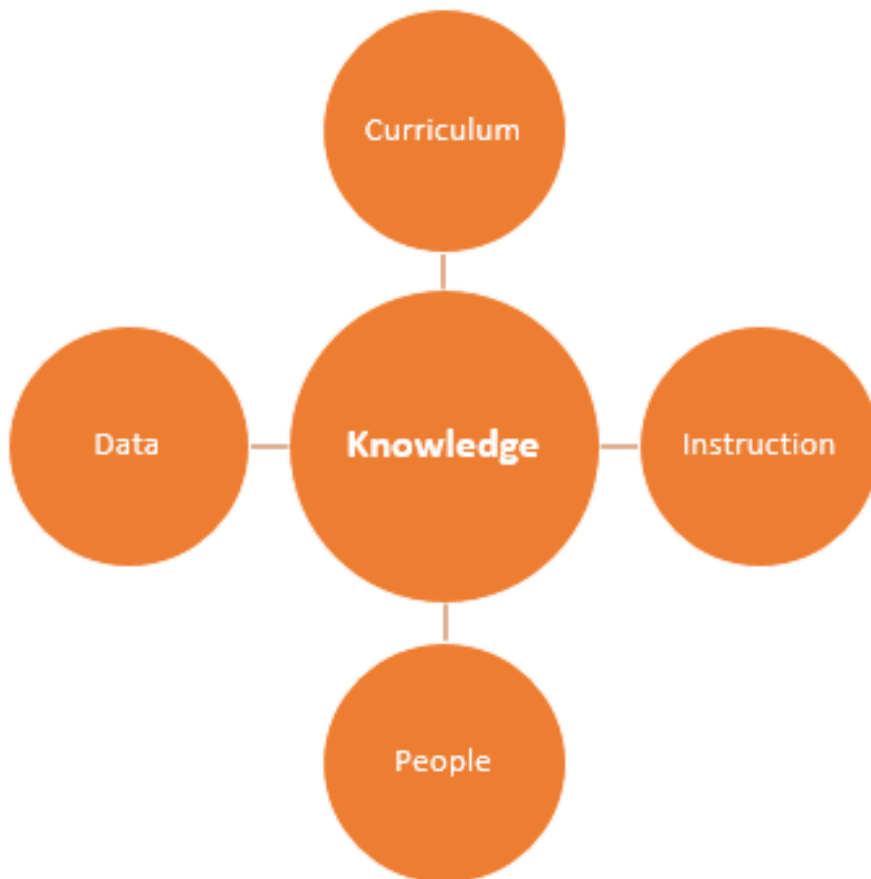
Figure 2. Instructional Leadership Knowledge Sets

Knowledge of curriculum. Many participants discussed that an important quality of an instructional leader was having an extensive knowledge of curriculum. This was illustrated

through many participants' quotes in many of the focus group interviews. For example, a participant from one focus group said, "I believe that it's also vital for an instructional leader to have a grasp of the curriculum that's going on in the building……" While a participant from a different focus group stated, "Looking at someone who's knowledgeable about the curriculum and they're able to show what they expect." Another example of this was when a participant said, "If you're an instructional leader, you should be the master of, or an expert at, that content, that curriculum, those expectations."

Knowledge of instruction. Assistant principals in this study spoke to the depth of knowledge needed in instruction to be an effective instructional leader. The following quotes are examples of the needed knowledge of instruction to be an instructional leader,

- Example 1 – "It's somebody that takes instruction in their school very seriously. It takes top priority."
- Example 2 – "My vision of an instructional leader is just that…its someone to pioneer instruction that's going on in school."

Along with the having basic knowledge of the instructional taking place in the school setting it was equally noted that instructional leaders have a knowledge of the instruction and therefore protect the time dedicated to that instruction. One participant illustrated this when they said, "I think an instructional leader protects instruction time. They view it as a priority."

Knowledge of people. "An instructional leader should know their students, their teachers, and their data," stated one participant. According to many of the participants in this study having a knowledge of the people within the school organization was a vital attribute to being an instructional leader. Another participant illustrated the importance of having a knowledge of people not only inside but outside of the school by saying,

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They know their people, not at school, but outside school. They know their parents. An

instructional leader's someone that the parents can identify with. That's my child's

principal. That someone's really invested in the school. They know their children. I think

that's much more so than just what only goes in the classroom, but what's going outside

the school, too.

Lastly, another example was when a participant said, "You got to know your people. You

go to have your hand on the pulse of every classroom, know what's going on, and develop that

core with those people, including students."

Knowledge of data. Participants in this study spoke to the need of instructional leaders

having knowledge of data. Although specifics on what kind of data they were speaking to was

not mentioned, it can be assumed data is meant to cover student achievement, discipline,

attendance, etc. "My vision for an instructional leader is a person who works with the data, very

fluid with data," stated one focus group participant. This illustrated the importance that

knowledge of data plays in the role of instructional leader. Other examples of this theme were

the following statements: "An instructional leader should know their students, their teachers, and

their data," as well as when another participant said, "Their someone out front on instruction and

want to make sure they're on top of the data…."

Summary of knowledge sets. Four knowledge sets were identified by assistant principal

participants as necessary for an instructional leader to possess. Instructional leaders need to have

an extensive knowledge of curriculum, instruction, people, and data. Having these knowledge

sets allows an instructional leader to display competence in guiding school improvements.

Theme 2: The Instructional Leader Possesses Specific Skills. From the open-coding

approach employed, key concepts merged together from the focus group interviews to form the

idea that an instructional leader is someone who possesses certain skill sets. Gleaned from the

five interviews were eight distinct skill sets needed to be an instructional leader. These eight

distinct skills sets needed by an instructional leader were: collaborates with faculty and staff,

recognizes teacher abilities, builds relationships with stakeholders, models instruction, leads

professional development, delegates responsibilities, provides growth opportunities, and creates

a vision. According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary skills can be defined as, "a learned power of

doing something competently" (Skills, n.d.).

Figure 3. Instructional Leadership Skill Sets

Collaborates with faculty and staff. One skill identified by participants that instructional leaders needed to possess was the ability to collaborate with faculty and staff members. This was shown by a participant's statement, "The instructional leader that comes to mind, for me, is one that always made me feel that my opinion was important, that there was validity behind it, that it was a group undertaking instead of top down type of administrator. It was definitely collaborative." This was also supported when another participant described, "I think the collaborative element that pulls from this, when you're bringing in different professionals, and setting a vision based on information that comes from a variety of sources."

Recognizes teacher abilities. Instructional leaders need the particular skill of recognizing teacher abilities. "An instructional leader would be someone who allows their teachers to be very individualized, to be able to approach it from different levels, different abilities, and to capitalize on that teacher's strengths," expressed one focus group participant. When reflecting on her own instructional leadership activities one assistant principal stated, "Relationships with teachers, they're critical. I feel like I do a good job at that and stressing the strengths of my staff and trying to help them to strengthen what they're good at, trying to point them in a direction of…I want to encourage them." Recognizing teacher abilities can help build leadership capacity within a school building. It helps the instructional leader gain the trust and respect of teachers.

Builds relationships with stakeholders. Participants consistently mentioned the importance of building relationships with key stakeholders as a crucial skill needed as an instructional leader. This is best presented through a variety of participant quotes.

- Example 1 –"In my growth as an instructional leader, building relationships with people to me is number one because if you can get those people to do what you want them to do, because they're talented, they're smart…The teachers we have

at our school are very talented and smart. If you get them to buy in to what you

want them to do, then that takes a lot of the burden off of you. That goes back to

parents too. If the parents are not brought into what that teacher's doing. It's all

about that relationship. All about that relationship."

- Example 2 – "It's about building those relationships. It's more than just a process.

   It's more than just an analysis, It's about having those quality relationships that

   when those parents or stakeholders come in, they know that you're just as vested

   in their child as they are."

- Example 3 – "A lot of times, I had to win that teacher's trust. Why would a

   physics teacher want to listen to me when I taught fifth grade. You had to build

   those relationships."

One conversation between participants also illustrated the importance of building relationships.

Male Participant: "A true leader has to be a people person. A manager can get away with

not being a people person, but a true leader, you have to be a people person. You have to

confront people at times and know how to talk to people and get them to do what needs to

be done."

Female Participant: "Being a relationship person."

Male Participant: "Relationship person, that's right."

Models instruction. The ability to model instruction as an instructional leader was an

important skill to possess as indicated by participant responses.

- Example 1 – "I think, when I envision an instructional leader, I see as someone

   that models what they want to teach us to do in the classrooms, someone that's

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going to model it from day to day, how they want us to teach to carry out activity throughout their own building."

- Example 2 – "I also think that an instructional leader first must've been very passionate about his area of focus, whether it be math, PE, history, whatever, and I think that your better instructional leaders are going to be able to portray that and model that for their teachers."

Participants expressed that instructional leaders model the instruction they wish to see performed in the classroom. By building their knowledgeable of curriculum and instruction, they are able to guide and support the teachers within their school.

Leads professional development. Another skill that emerged as important was the ability to lead professional development. "An instructional leader to me is an instructional coach, someone who puts teachers in opportunities to be successful. Provides training and professional development for those who need it," quoted one participant. Leading professional development and training was an important topic brought up by participants through the interview process. Another assistant principal said, "I pretty much…I can provide some professional development for a teacher." As well as one participant stated,

Professional development meetings, which are our grade-level meetings where we're always trying to-It's not just a matter of just this grade level sitting down. We're really looking at data evidence, what is effective, what's not effective, bouncing ideas off each other, trying to drive and change instruction through those meetings. That's why they're professional development.

These are examples of participants defining leading professional development as an important skill to an instructional leader.

Delegates responsibilities. Several participants spoke of the importance of delegating job responsibilities to others within the school organization to ease the everyday pressures and stresses. One participant spoke to its importance by saying,

There's so many hats that you have to wear in the process of running a school that can become overwhelming to you as far as a person, and your family, and all these other things that if you do not delegate and get strong people to help you, then not only will the school suffer, you'll suffer, and that's important.

Another assistant principal said,

We're heading off the nut cases that come through the front door, it's important that we have ahead of time where we have divvied out those responsibilities to our other people who are important in those areas so that they can step in and step up and take on some of that responsibility when we can't be in every part of the building we need to be in.

One participant spoke to identifying others' strengths so that they could be utilized in job delegation. This participant said,

It's knowing you own strengths and then surrounding yourself with people that know more than you do, because effective instructional leaders know what their weakness is and know how find the people that are strong in those area and pull them into the fold.

However, along with delegating responsibilities one participant pointed out,

You have to be careful to not lean on them so much that you overwhelm them also, because you get in the habit of people that do a good job, and they really put a lot of

effort in it, and then next thing you know, you've burnt them out because you just keep

sticking things to them.

Delegating responsibilities can be deemed a challenging task for instructional leaders, but also

one of necessity. By delegating responsibilities, it allows the assistant principal to participate in

more instructional leadership activities.

Provides growth opportunities. Another skill that was found through the data analysis

process was that instructional leaders provide growth opportunities to faculty and staff members.

Participants had several comments on providing growth opportunities.

- Quote 1 – "I think it's important as administrators, too, for those individuals

  getting, or aspiring, to be, that we allow them opportunities to continue to grow,

  and, that they ask us for opportunities so that we're aware that they're interested."

- Quote 2 – "An instructional leader who I admire is one who I worked with about

  six years ago. She was very approachable, very knowledgeable, and she also

  provided opportunities for teacher leaders to grow. "

- Quote 3 – "You got to try to develop your people."

- Quote 4 – "To me, that is, like you're saying, that is the ultimate goal, to have

  every teacher as their instructional leader of their classroom, to grow them to that

  point."

By providing growth opportunities for teachers, leadership capacity is increased in the school

building. This will help garner trust and respect from the faculty and staff.

Creates a vision. Focus group participants envisioned instructional leaders as being

skilled in creating a vision for their school. This was projected in the following quotes:

- Example 1: "It's creating a vision. It's putting the right people in position to fulfill that vision in planning it and reading data and then constantly getting better and tweaking your system or your vision."

- Example 2: "You want them to have a vision. They reflect that vision. Everybody knows what that is."

- Example 3: "The instructional leader that I admire brings in lots of different people for input and really tries to get a scope of everything before a direction, or a vision is given."

Participants regarded creating a vision as an important skill to being an instructional leader. Creating a vision involved multiple stakeholders and recognizing each individual's strength. Instructional leaders also seek to understand the school organization before creating a vision.

Summary of skill sets. Assistant principals in this study identified eight skill sets needed to perform as an instructional leader. Instructional leaders need to be strong communicators and make efforts to collaborate with faculty and staff. Recognizing teacher abilities was noted as beneficial helping grow teachers as leaders. Building relationships with stakeholders was identified as a skill set necessary to performing the job role of instructional leader. Also, an instructional leader needs to be able to model instruction, lead professional development, and provide growth opportunities for the teachers within their school. It is also important for instructional leader to be able to delegate responsibilities so they may build leadership capacity within their school building. Lastly. Instructional leaders create a shared vision among all school stakeholders.

Theme 3: The Instructional Leader Demonstrates Specific Dispositions. From the focus group interviews it can be determined that instructional leaders demonstrate certain dispositions. According to the participants these dispositions make instructional leaders effective and successful in their job role. The participants provided specific insight into five dispositions that instructional leaders possess. These five dispositions were: being trustworthy, having drive, showing care, being well balanced, and being a role model. Disposition can be defined as, "a temperamental makeup," as noted in Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary (Disposition, n.d.).

Figure 4. Instructional Leadership Dispositions

Being trustworthy. A theme of trustworthiness as disposition of instructional leadership can be found throughout the focus group interviews. One participant said, "It's so important, the trust factor, there, to be an effective support to our parents that, maybe, are not familiar with procedures in school. They know trust, and know that they're doing what's best for kids." This explains the necessity in facilitating trust among all school stakeholders. Another example was when a participant stated, "I think that, and coming from as a coach, you have to involve yourself with parents and stuff, so the relationships and building trust, I think that's a strength." Also, a conversation between participants highlighted the importance of trustworthiness.

Male Participant: "For most people, it's trust,"

Female Participant: "Yes."

Male Participant: "That's the big thing, is trust. You got to make sure that you can build and"

Male Participant: "They're going to get it done."

Having drive. Participants of the focus group interviews noted that instructional leaders were very driven and had a high level of expectation for themselves. Two examples of self-drive were:

- Example 1 – "I think you have to be very driven to be in this job. If you're not willing to get down and work, nobody's going to not necessarily hold your hand, and I think that's one thing I think everybody can attest to."

- Example 2 – "We didn't correlate that's what we're doing, but if you keep that in mind, of modeling and showing, just like you did those high expectations, what we expect of them, we expect even more from ourselves an instructional leader."

For participants many instructional activities were completed due to personal ambition and drive. The assistant principal took on these activities through personal ambition and not through delegation.

Showing care. Instructional leaders show care according to focus group participants. Care was noted being shown for people within the organization as well as in decision making by the instructional leader. For example, one participant said, "She cared about people as well." While another noted the value in showing people that you care, "The instructional leader who I admire is one who that always was collaborative…guess I should say…always made me feel that my opinion was important, there was validity behind it…" The importance of showing care to school stakeholders is important to gaining respect and trust.

Being well-balanced. Being well balanced in an instructional leadership position is essential according to focus group participants. It was found that an instructional leader needed balance in his/her personal and professional life. "She was able to balance everything really well, and in lightning speed really," noted one focus group participant pointing out the importance of keeping balance in life. Another participant illustrated the importance of principal and assistant principal balance. "You have to know, leadership styles of yourself and your principal and then you have to be able to balance each other because I'm very…He's very…I don't think I am as approachable as him. " Lastly, one participant spoke to having a balance in the socialization process as an instructional leader. "You don't have time, always, to develop your skills, because you're having to balance the learning process…"

Being a role model. Being a role model in the instructional leadership position was noted as invaluable as group participants reflected on what they envisioned an instructional leader to look like. This idea of being a role model not only extended to faculty and staff members but

students as well. "I think an instructional leader should lead by example," quoted one participant. While another participant said, "I think, when I envision an instructional leader, I see as someone that models what they want to teach us to do in the classrooms." Another participant stated, **"**To be that leader, to offer those innovative ideas." The notion that instructional leaders are role models for faculty and students is illustrated through this interview response, "Modeling for everybody, for our teacher, what we expected the same way our teachers model for students."

Summary of dispositions. Instructional leaders, as defined by assistant principal participants, possess certain personal dispositions. Being viewed as trustworthy was an important disposition to have when being an instructional leader. Having a drive and ambition to take on instructional activities is seen as a disposition of instructional leaders. Instructional leaders also need to have balance in their personal and professional lives to adequately complete their responsibilities. Instructional leaders who show care for those in their school community was noted as being a positive trait. Lastly, it was identified as imperative that instructional leaders be a role model for others whether in their professional or personal lives.

Summary of Research Sub Question 1. It was identified that assistant principals define instructional leadership through specific knowledge and skills sets as well as demonstrating certain dispositions. Having a strong knowledge base in curriculum, instruction, data, and people are necessities in serving as an instructional leader. Being an instructional leader according to participants involves the skill sets of: collaborates with faculty and staff, recognizes teacher abilities, builds relationships with stakeholders, models instruction, leads professional development, delegate responsibilities, provides growth opportunities, and creates a vision. Instructional leaders also need to demonstrate certain dispositions such as being trustworthy, having drive and care, being well balanced, and be a role model. These knowledges, skills, and

dispositions help in answering research sub-question #1: How do assistant principals define

instructional leadership?

Table 3

Definitions of an Instructional Leader Summary

Knowledge Set	Supporting Quotes
Curriculum	1. I believe that it's also vital for an instructional leader to have a grasp of the curriculum that's going on in the building……" 2. "Looking at someone who's knowledgeable about the curriculum and they're able to show what they expect." 3. "If you're an instructional leader, you should be the master of, or an expert at, that content, that curriculum, those expectations."
Instruction	1. "It's somebody that takes instruction in their school very seriously. It takes top priority." 2. "My vision of an instructional leader is just that…it's someone to pioneer instruction that's going on in school." 3. "I think an instructional leader protects instruction time. They view it as a priority."
Data	1. "My vision for an instructional leader is a person who works with the data, very fluid with data," 2. "An instructional leader should know their students, their teachers, and their data." 3. "They're someone out front on instruction and want to make sure they're on top of the data….."
People	1. "An instructional leader should know their students, their teachers, and their data." 2. "They know their people, not at school, but outside school. They know their parents. An instructional leader's someone that the parents can identify with. That's my child's principal. That someone's really invested in the school. They know their children. I think that's much more so than just what only goes in the classroom, but what's going outside the school, too." 3. "You got to know your people. You go to have your hand on the pulse of every classroom, know what's going on, and develop that core with those people, including students. "
Skill Sets	Supporting Quotes
Collaborates with Faulty and Staff	1. "The instructional leader that comes to mind, for me, is one that always made me feel that my opinion was important, that there was validity behind it, that it was a group undertaking instead of top down type of administrator. It was definitely collaborative." 2. "I think the collaborative element that pulls from this, when you're bringing in different professionals, and setting a vision based on information that comes from a variety of sources."
Recognizes Teacher Abilities	1. "An instructional leader would be someone who allows their teachers to be very individualized, to be able to approach it from different levels, different abilities, and to capitalize on that teacher's strengths." 2. "Relationships with teachers, they're critical. I feel like I do a good job at that and stressing the strengths of my staff and trying to help them to strengthen what they're good at, trying to point them in a direction of…I want to encourage them."
Builds Relationships with Stakeholders	1. "In my growth as an instructional leader, building relationships with people to me is number one because if you can get those people to do what you want them to do, because they're talented, they're smart…The teachers we go at our school are very talented and smart. If you get them to buy in to what you want them to do, then that takes a lot of the burden off of you. That goes back to parents too. If the parents are not brought into what that teacher's doing. It's all about that relationship. All about that relationship." 2. "It's about building those relationships. It's more than just a process. It's more than just an analysis, It's about having those quality relationships that when those parents or

	3.	"A lot of times, I had to win that teacher's trust. Why would a physics teacher want to listen to me when I taught fifth grade. You had to build those relationships."
	4.	"A true leader has to be a people person. A manager can get away with not being a people person, but a true leader, you go to be a people person. You go to confront people at times and know how to talk to people and get them to do what needs to be done."
	5.	"Being a relationship person."
	6.	"Relationship person, that's right."
Models Instruction	1.	"I think, when I envision an instructional leader, I see as someone that models what they wanting to teach us to do in the classrooms, someone that's going to model it from day to day, how they want us that teaches to carry out activity throughout their own building."
	2.	"I also think that an instructional leader first must've been very passionate about his area of focus, whether it be math, PE, history, whatever, and I think that your better instructional leaders are going to be able to portray that and model that for their teachers."
Leads Professional Development	1.	"An instructional leader to me is an instructional coach, someone who puts teachers in opportunities to be successful. Provides training and professional development for those who need it,"
	2.	"I pretty much…I can provide some professional development for a teacher,"
	3.	"Professional development meetings, which are our grade-level meetings where we're always trying to-It's not just a matter of just this grade level sitting down. We're really looking at data evidence, what is effective, what's not effective, bouncing ideas off each other, trying to drive and change instruction through those meetings. That's why they're professional development,"
Delegates Responsibilities	1.	"There's so many hats that you have to wear in the process of running a school that can become overwhelming to you as far as a person, and your family, and all these other things that if you do not delegate and get strong people to help you, then not only will the school suffer, you'll suffer, and that's important."
	2.	"We're heading off the nut cases that come through the front door, it's important that we have ahead of time where we have divvied out those responsibilities to our other people who are important in those areas so that they can step in and step up and take on some of that responsibility when we can't be in every part of the building we need to be in."
	3.	"It's knowing you own strengths and then surrounding yourself with people that know more than you do, because effective instructional leaders know what their weakness is and know how find the people that are strong in those area and pull them into the fold."
	4.	"You have to be careful to not lean on them so much that you overwhelm them also, because you get in the habit of people that do a good job, and they really put a lot of effort in it, and then next thing you know, you've burnt them out because you just keep sticking things to them."
Provides Growth Opportunities	1.	"I think it's important as administrators, too, for those individuals getting, or aspiring, to be, that we allow them opportunities to continue to grow, and, that they ask us for opportunities so that we're aware that they're interested."
	2.	"An instructional leader who I admire is one who I worked with about six years ago. She was very approachable, very knowledgeable, and she also provided opportunities for teacher leaders to grow."
	3.	"You got to try to develop your people."
	4.	"To me, that is, like you're saying, that is the ultimate goal, to have every teacher as their instructional leader of their classroom, to grow them to that point."
Creates a Vision	1.	"It's creating a vision. It's putting the right people in position to fulfill that vision in planning it and reading data and then constantly getting better and tweaking you system or your vision."
	2.	"You want them to have a vision. They reflect that vision. Everybody knows what that is."
	3.	"The instructional leader that I admire brings in lots of different people for input and really tries to get a scope of everything before a direction, or a vision is given."

Dispositions	Supporting Quotes
Trustworthy	1. "It's so important, the trust factor, there, to be an effective support to our parents that, maybe, are not familiar with procedures in school. They know trust, and know that they're doing what's best for kids." 2. "I think that, and coming from as a coach, you have to involve yourself with parents and stuff, so the relationships and building trust, I think that's a strength." 3. "For most people, it's trust." 4. "That's the big thing, is trust."
Drive	1. "I think you have to be very driven to be in this job. If you're not willing to get down and work, nobody's going to not necessarily hold your hand, and I think that's one thing I think everybody can attest to." 2. "We didn't correlate that's what we're doing, but if you keep that in mind, of modeling and showing, just like you did those high expectations, what we expect of them, we expect even more from ourselves an instructional leader."
Care	1. "She cared about people as well." 2. "The instructional leader who I admire is one who that always was collaborative, guess I should say, always made me feel that my opinion was important, that there was validity behind it…"
Well Balanced	1. "She was able to balance everything really well, and in lightning speed really," 2. "You have to know, leadership styles of yourself and your principal and then you have to be able to balance each other because I'm very…He's very…I don't think I am as approachable as him." 3. "You don't have time, always, to develop your skills, because you're having to balance the learning process…"
Role Model	1. "I think an instructional leaders should lead by example," 2. "I think, when I envision an instructional leader, I see as someone that models what they wanting to teach us to do in the classrooms." 3. "To be that leader to offer those innovative ideas." 4. "Modeling for everybody, for our teacher, what we expected the same way our teachers model for students."

Note for the Reader

After interview question1 participants were given a handout of the operational definition of instructional leadership. The operational definition is based in Leithwood and Seashore-Louis's (2012) definition of instructional leadership. According to Leithwood and Seashore-Louis (2012), there are four domains of instructional leadership to which the principal should be giving attention. These are: setting directions, developing people, focusing on learning, and improving the instructional program. These are demanding roles, and it is speculated that principal should consider sharing the instructional leadership role with the assistant principal (Leithwood & Seashore-Louis, 2012). Some subsequent questions in the interview referred back

to the four domains of instructional leadership as defined by Leithwood and Seashore-Louis (2012).

Research Sub Question 2 – What are the facilitating factors of instructional leadership? Three overarching themes were identified through the data analysis process that provided an answer to sub question 2- What are the facilitating factors for assistant principals in performing as instructional leaders? These over-arching themes in determining the facilitating factors of instructional leadership were strong support systems, job experience, required instructional leadership activities, and new instructional leadership preparation programs.

Figure 5. Facilitating Factors of Instructional Leadership

Theme 1: Assistant Principals Had Strong Support Systems. One facilitating factor of instructional leadership in the assistant principal role identified by participants was strong support systems. Participants described their support systems by using words such as 'academies' and 'principal mentoring'. Many participants in this study partook in academies

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offered by their school systems to provide support to their assistant principals. These academies were met with positive reviews from participants as being beneficial.

- Example 1 – "The leadership academy-we have speakers come in and talk to us about the duties of an AP, we had lawyers talk to us about educational law. A lot of different people are brought in to tell us…to give us an anticipatory set about what was going to be happening in the job of school leader."
- Example 2 – "A positive on our system is we have an assistant principal's academy now, to where we meet three or four times a year, and our bosses go over things with us that we need to know…"

Another valuable support system to assistant principal participants was the residing school principal. The strong relationship shared between the assistant principal and principal was important to the success of the assistant principal.

- Example 1 – "At our school our principal does a lot of mentoring and the thing I like about her is that she's been doing this for a decade now."
- Example 2 – "The principal is the key to the success of the assistant principal, more than anything else, in that school."

Without support, assistant principals would have a difficult time in assuming the role of instructional leader. Support groups, professional development, and the school principal can all help the assistant principal in the socialization process and feel more confident in their instructional leadership activities.

Theme 2: The Assistant Principal Learns from the Job Experience. Through the focus group interviews, participants commented that the longer time they spent in the job role, the more comfortable they felt, and the more time they had to dedicate to instructional leadership

activities. Job experience as a facilitating factor was mainly derived from interview question number 3 – To what extent did you learn how to be an instructional leader in your principal preparation program? Some example participant quotes are:

- Example 1 – "The prep program is a lot of theory and they give you a lot of scenarios, the best they can, but you honestly, do not know, until you're in it."

- Example 2 – "Theories are great, but unless you walk it every day, or, have a good leader who's going to expose you to that beforehand, there's no preparation you're going to get from a PowerPoint or book."

- Example 3 – "But when I got in the real world of doing the job, I was like, "We didn't do much of this in graduate school." More on the job learning."

- Example 4 – "Again, the things that I need or I think ... it just comes with time."

Although a few of these quotes make it seem as if preparation programs are not properly preparing graduates for the job role of assistant principal, certain aspects of the new instructional leadership preparation program were deemed highly beneficial by participants. These are discussed under this sub-question in the next section.

Theme 3: The Assistant Principal Performs Required Instructional Leadership Activities. When assistant principal participants commented on their instructional leadership activities that are conducted in their schools, it was noted that many of these activities are required by the district or under state and/or federal guidelines. Instructional activities noted by assistant principals were EducateAlabama, Professional Learning Communities (PLC), and Response to Intervention (RtI), data analysis, and grade-level meetings (ALSDE, 2017a, 2017b).

- Example 1 – "We have spent a little bit more on the instructional leadership. Things like doing your PLC together, your EducateAlabama, your testing, your post-test, pre-test, all of that nature"

- Example 2 – "Professional development meetings, which are our grade-level meetings where we're always trying to- It's not just a matter of just this grade level sitting down. We're really looking at data evidence, what is effective, what's not effective, bouncing ideas off of each other, trying to drive and change instruction through those meetings."

- Example 3 – "Planning an RTI of individual student accommodations, such as strategy meetings and RGI meetings and grade level meetings."

- Example 4 – "Also, through Educate Alabama, I spend a lot of time trying to improve and reach our goals but also improve teacher skills."

- Example 5 – "For my instruction audits with CIP at the beginning of the year. We're still in the process of that because of having gotten scores late this year. Also the RTI, we do that monthly. And observations, try to get in the classroom weekly. Try to do at least two, three a day sub-weekly."

Due to these activities being required, assistant principals regularly participated in instructional leadership activities.

Theme 4: The New Instructional Leadership Programs Prepared Assistant Principals. Although some participants did not feel their instructional leadership preparation program adequately prepared them for their job role, those that took part in a redesigned instructional leadership program felt like certain components of the program did prepare them. Cohort modeled programs and those with internship requirements received the highest praise among

participants. For example one participated noted, "I recently came out of the newly designed program for instructional leadership. I think the cohort model is really nice. When you're an instructional leader, you cannot do it alone." Similarly another participant commented on the importance of the cohort model, "There was power and collaboration that happened between my cohort members, and me. We became a family." Other participants found the internship experiences to be the most helpful. One participant illustrated this by saying,

> Strong-based internships, to me, are more beneficial than some of the classes that I had. When I say strong-based, that's where we had to do research, to find out if a summer school program works, setting up research models. That's where I learned a lot of the techniques about looking at data, and instructional leadership. It was mainly from the internship, not exactly some of the classes I had.

One participant even wished he had had the opportunity to participate in an internship during his preparation program. This participant stated, "...The problem is this, most people who become instructional leaders are already in the classroom. Well, you can't quit your job and go do an internship, but really and truly, you should, and we try to do that."

Another participant noted the difference in the whole new instructional leadership preparation program structure compared to when she was in school.

> I even see that with teachers, that are coming into our schools that are new, coming out of current programs. I am going to assume, and, I do believe, that the program has changed a lot, since when I came out. I see Aps that are just now starting out that are a lot more prepared than I was, as far as being an instructional leader.

The difference in preparation when comparing leaders who participated in more traditional programs compared to new instructional leadership programs can be noted in the quotes below.

- Example 1 – "Personally, I received mine in 1996. It's been a while, so it's hard to remember, but I don't remember as much instructional leadership being pushed at me as a way of managing. It was more about budgeting and more about scheduling and that kind of stuff."

- Example 2 – "I graduated from Nova Southeastern in 2011, and that's when the paradigm shift had started. It was an instructional leaders program."

Summary of Research Sub Question 2. Four facilitating factors of assistant principals performing as instructional leaders were identified in this research study. The first facilitating factor noted was the need for assistant principals to have a strong support system within their school community. The more job experience an assistant principal gained correlated positively with taking part in instructional leadership activities. It was also found that a facilitating factor of instructional leadership was the required instructional leadership activities that were participated in. Lastly, it was identified that assistant principals who participated in a newly redesigned instructional leadership preparation program felt more prepared to be an instructional leader within their school. These four facilitating factors of assistant principals performing as instructional leaders helped in answering research sub question 2: What are the facilitating factors for assistant principals in performing as instructional leaders?

Table 4

Summary of Facilitating Factors for Assistant Principals as Instructional Leaders

Facilitating Factors	Supporting Quotes
Strong Support Systems	1. "The leadership academy we have speakers come in and talk to us about the duties of an AP, we had lawyers talk to us about educational law. A lot of different people are brought in to tell us…to give us an anticipatory set about what was going to be happening in the job of school leader." 2. "A positive on our system is we have assistant principals academy now, to where we meet three or four times a year, and our bosses go over things with us that we need to know……." 3. "At our school our principal does a lot of mentoring and the thing I like about her is that she's been doing this for a decade now." 4. "The principal is the key to the success of the assistant principal, more than anything else, in that school."
Job Experience	1. "The prep program is a lot of theory and they give you a lot of scenarios, the best they can, but you honestly, do not know, until you're in it." 2. "Theories are great, but unless you walk it every day, or, have a good leader who's going to expose you to that beforehand there's no preparation you're going to get from a PowerPoint or book." 3. "But when I got in the real world of doing the job, I was like, "We didn't do much of this in graduate school." More on the job learning." 4. "Again, the things that I need or I think ... it just comes with times."
Required Instructional Leadership Activities	1. "We have spent a little bit more on the instructional leadership. Things like doing your PLC together, your EducateAlabama, your testing, your post-test, pre-test, all of that nature" 2. "Professional development meetings, which are our grade-level meetings where we're always trying to- It's not just a matter of just this grade level sitting down. We're really looking at data evidence, what is effective, what's not effective, bouncing ideas off of each other, trying to drive and change instruction through those meetings." 3. "Planning an RTI of individual student accommodations, such as strategy meetings and RGI meetings and grade level meetings." 4. "Also, through Educate Alabama, I spend a lot of time trying to improve and reach our goals but also improve teacher skills." 5. "For my instruction audits with CIP at the beginning of the year. We're still in the process of that because of having gotten scores late this year. Also the RTI, we do that monthly. And observations, try to get in the classroom weekly. Try to do at least two, three a day sub-weekly."
New Instructional Leadership Program	1. "I recently came out of the newly designed program for instructional leadership. I think the cohort model is really nice. When you're an instructional leader, you cannot do it alone." 2. "There was power and collaboration that happened between my cohort members, and me. We became a family." 3. "Strong-based internships, to me, are more beneficial than some of the classes that I had. When I say strong-based, that's where we had to do research, to find out if a summer school program works, setting up research models. That's where I learned a lot of the techniques about looking at data, and instructional leadership. It was mainly from the internship, not exactly some of the classes I had." 4. "... The problem is this…that most people who become instructional leaders are already in the classroom. Well, you can't quit your job and go do an internship, but really and truly, you should, and we try to do that." 5. "I even see that with teachers, that are coming into our schools…that are new, coming out of current programs. I am going to assume, and, I do believe, that the program has changed a lot, since when I came out. I see Aps that are just now starting out that are a lot

more prepared than I was, as far as being an instructional leader."

6. "Personally, I received mine in 1996. It's been a while, so it's hard to remember, but I don't remember as much instructional leadership being pushed at me as a way of managing. It was more about budgeting and more about scheduling and that kind of stuff."

7. "I graduated from Nova Southeastern in 2011, and that's when the paradigm shift had started. It was an instructional leaders program."

Research Sub Question 3 – What are the barriers for assistant principals in performing as instructional leaders? Three overarching themes were identified through the data analysis process that provided an answer to sub question 3. What are the barriers for assistant principals in performing as instructional leaders? These over-arching themes in determining the barriers of instructional leadership were socialization to role, time, limited leadership opportunities, and the assistant principal to principal relationship.
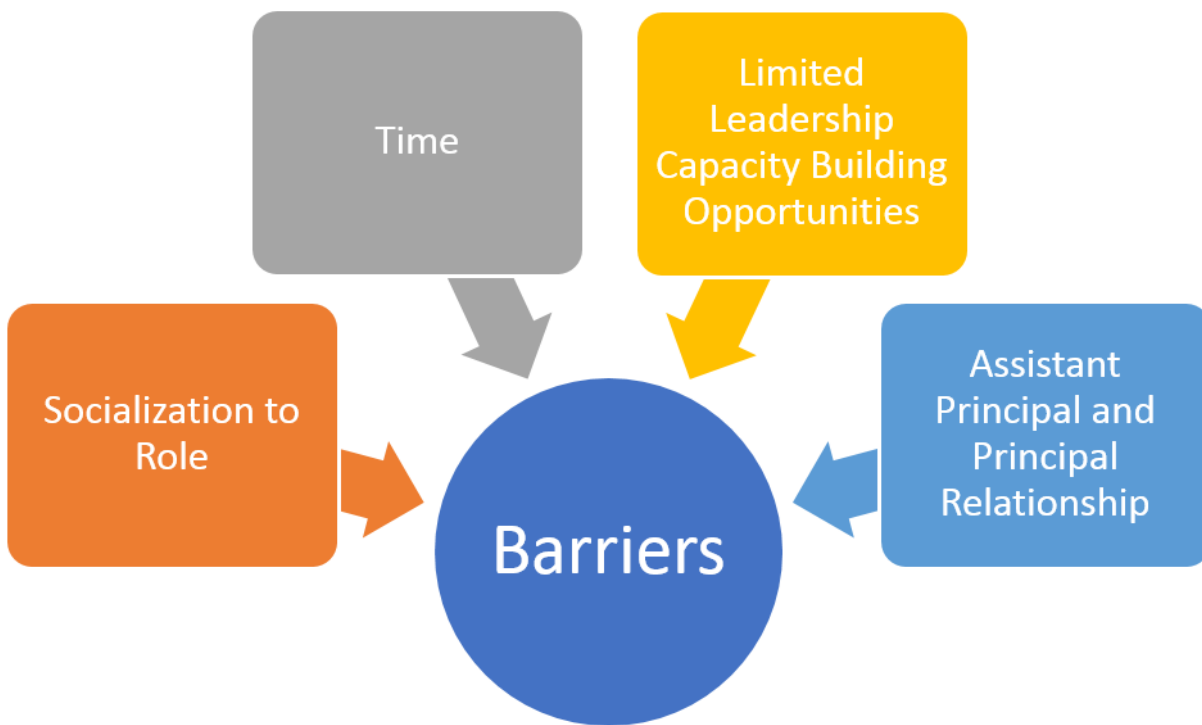
Time

Limited Leadership Capacity Building Opportunities

Socialization to Role

Assistant Principal and Principal Relationship

Barriers

Figure 6. Barriers of Instructional Leadership

Theme 1: Socialization to Role is a Barrier to Instructional Leadership for Assistant Principals. One barrier identified through the focus group interviews was the assistant principal socialization process. The lack of readiness and the time spent on acclimating to the school

environment hindered assistant principals from participating in instructional activities. Several participants commented on needing time in the job to fully understand the role.

- o Example 1: "It's the same way with being a principal, or assistant principal. That first year, you just have to learn."
- o Example 2: "I went through a wonderful program with great instructors but there are just some things that you can't learn in a book or in a class until you actually get in that position."

Other participants spoke to the transition from classroom teacher to first time administrator.

- Example 1 – "You come out [of the classroom], and you have the burden of everyone else's expectations for being an administrator, because everybody knows what that looks like, or should look like. You have to learn to define yourself, in that role, as an administrator. You don't have time, always, to develop your skills, because you're having to balance the learning process, with the expectations of a multitude, and 'untrain' the tunnel vision that you have about a school process should really look."
- Example 2 – "An AP coming out of the classroom could sink quickly if they're not prepared for the way that their day may go."

Other participants spoke to the time needed to fully gain the respect and trust of the school organization.

- Example 1 – "I think that's a timely process. I don't think it's something you can jump in and do because you don't want to try and change everything."

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- Example 2 – "Going into a new environment. How long it took, as new APs, and how it actually took us to build that relationship, and the amount of time invested in building that relationship, making those phone calls, having those conferences. It took me about three years. I'm six years into this, and, it took me, honestly, about three years for parents to truly have confidence, feel comfortable and to give us a call."

Theme 2: Time is a Barrier for Assistant Principals Performing as Instructional Leaders. A barrier to instructional leadership, assistant principals found through data analysis was time. Participants spoke of managerial tasks such as monitoring students, bus duty, and discipline taking up much of their day, which led to less time to dedicate to instructional activities. The quotes below exemplify this assertion.

- Example 1 – "She (principal) absolutely wants me on discipline. That's where I am most of the time."
- Example 2 – "Well, we have 850 students, and I'm the only assistant, which I think that's pretty much the norm, but with that many students and that many buses and that much discipline that just takes up a huge chunk if not all of my day."
- Example 3 – "There is only so many hours in a day. It's (IL) kind of like a hit and miss sometimes when I'm focusing on those things because other things sometimes take priority."
- Example 4 – "There are times when discipline rules my day because I'm the discipline guy at my school. I get stuck dealing in there dealing with that."

- Example 5 – "Percentage wise, instructional with my duties, what my principal wants to do is probably about 40%, percentage wise. 80-90% discipline, and dealing with the sports and break and the lunch duty, up and down the hallways, trying to put out small fires before they get big fires."

Theme 3: Assistant Principals Have Limited Leadership Capacity Building Opportunities. Assistant principals throughout the focus group interviews touched on the limited opportunities they had to build their own leadership capacity. One participant commented, "It would help to build a capacity within our system, and within our schools for leadership to build leaders." There was significant evidence that while some systems offered assistant principal or leadership academies to build leadership capacity most school systems did not. One participant said, "I was told, the AP position is a lonely position b/c you're usually the only one of other. You kind of have to keep a lot of stuff to yourself, in confidence. I know the principals do monthly meetings. I know that we are left behind." Assistant principals in this study craved the opportunity to grow themselves as instructional leaders.

Theme 4: The Assistant Principal to Principal Relationship Can be a Barrier to Instructional Leadership. The assistant principal and principal relationship can be a barrier to performing instructional activities. Many participants viewed themselves as the "assistant" fulfilling what the principal asked of them. This was illustrated in the participant quote, "For me I think it's a different culture because the principal is the principal and then there's the assistant that handles the discipline." Others said the opportunity was never given by their principal to participate in instructional activities. A participant stated, "Our principal is really…She really doesn't involve us as being instructional leaders." It was also found that assistant principals might also feel that their leadership is burdensome or oversteps boundaries. A participant

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commented on this by saying, "I think I can do anything that I wanted to but assistant principals have walked a fine line…are we stepping on toes or we trying to…too big for our britches, get into their (principal) area of responsibility or is that accepted or welcomed?"

Summary of Research Sub Question 3. Assistant Principals for this study identified four main barriers in assuming the instructional leadership role. Assistant principals will face challenges surrounding the socialization process into the role. The lack of time to dedicate to instructional tasks and activities has also been identified as a barrier. Participants noted the lack of leadership capacity building opportunities provided when assuming the role of assistant principal which is also considered a barrier. Also, the assistant principal to principal relationship can also be a barrier if strong communication and trust are not gained. These four findings help address the third sub question of this research study: What are the barriers for assistant principals in performing as instructional leaders?

Table 5

Summary of Barriers for Assistant Principals as Instructional Leaders

Barriers	Supporting Quotes
Socialization to Role	1. "It's the same way with being a principal, or assistant principal. That first year, you just have to learn." 2. "I went through a wonderful program great instructors but there are just some things that you can't learn in a book or in a class until you actually get in that position." 3. "You come out [of the classroom], and you have the burden of everyone else's expectations for being an administrator, because everybody knows what that looks like, or should look like. You have to learn to define yourself, in that role, as an administrator. You don't have time, always, to develop your skills, because you're having to balance the learning process, with the expectations of a multitude, and untrain the tunnel vision that you have about a school process should really look." 4. "An AP coming out of the classroom could sink quickly if they're not prepared for the way that their day may go." 5. "I think that's a timely process. I don't think it's something you can jump in and do because you don't want to try and change everything." 6. "Going into a new environment. How long it took, as new Aps, and how it actually took us to build that relationship, and the amount of time invested in building that relationship, making those phone calls, having those conferences. It took me about three years. I'm six years into this, and, it took me, honestly, about three years for parents to truly have confidence, feel comfortable to give us a call."
Time	1. "She [principal] absolutely wants me on discipline. That's where I am most of the time." 2. "Well, we have 850 students, and I'm the only assistant, which I think that's pretty much the norm, but with that many students and that many buses and that much discipline that just takes up a huge chunk if not all of my day." 3. "There is only so many hours in a day. It's [IL] kind of like a hit and miss sometimes when I'm focusing on those things because other things sometimes take priority." 4. "There are times when discipline rules my day because I'm the discipline guy at my school. I get stuck dealing in there dealing with that." 5. "Percentage wise, instructional with my duties, what my principal wants to do is probably about 40%, percentage wise. 80-90% discipline, and dealing with the sports and break and the lunch duty, up and down the hallways, trying to put out small fires before they get big fires."
Limited Leadership Building Opportunities	1. "It would help to build a capacity within our system, and within our schools for leadership to build leaders." 2. "I was told that the AP position is a lonely position b/c you're usually the only one of other. You kind of have to jeep a lot of stuff to yourself, in confidence. I know the principals do monthly meetings. I know that we are left behind."
Assistant Principal and Principal Relationship	1. "For me I think it's a different culture because the principal is the principal and then there's the assistant that handles the discipline." 2. "Our principal is really……She really doesn't involve us as being instructional leaders." 3. "I think I can do anything that I wanted to but assistant principals have walked a fine line…are we stepping on toes or we trying to…too big for our breaches, get into their [principal] area of responsibility or is that accepted or welcomed."

Chapter V: Summary and Conclusions

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to appropriately identify how assistant principals define instructional leadership as well as delve into the facilitating factors and barriers they face when assuming the role of an instructional leader. The central research question was: How do assistant principals define instructional leadership and what facilitating factors and barriers do assistant principals face in fulfilling this role? This study was significant because of the lack of literature about the assistant principal role, especially the assistant principal as an instructional leader.

In this chapter of this dissertation, the researcher will revisit the literature surrounding the assistant principal as an instructional leader, and include a summary of the purpose, research questions, research design and participants, including the data collection and data analysis processes. The researcher will then present the findings from the data and interpret this through the connection to pre-existing literature on the assistant principal as an instructional leader. The researcher will then present the limitations of this study followed by the recommendations that can be made for further research. The researcher's positionality and learning experiences from this study are also shared.

Literature Review Revisited

The role of assistant principal involves a complex web of responsibilities, and has been overlooked through decades of research (Sun, 2011). Recently, researchers have begun to delve into the intricacies of the assistant principal role. Marshall and Mitchell (1991) define the role this way: "the assistant principalship is the entry level line administrative position where new

administrators learn rules in the administrative culture" (p. 6). According to Kaplan and Owning (1999), "The assistant principal can be a valuable asset to the principal's overall leadership in the school" (p. 80). With the role of assistant principal only becoming a sound position within the last 50 years, it is not surprising that the role is fraught with ambiguity and uncertainty (Glanz, 1994b). In past decades, the role of an assistant principal was defined by the residing school principal (Marshall & Mitchell, 1991). The assistant principal was expected to follow the orders that the principal gave (Marshall & Mitchell, 1991). According to Bates and Shank (1983) certain tasks and responsibilities were delegated to the assistant principal because the school principal did not desire them. These tasks and responsibilities were often managerial in nature (Glanz, 1998). The job responsibilities have often been referred to as the three big B's- "books, buses, and behinds" (Good, 2008, p. 46).

The role of assistant principal has transformed over the years into a job that not only has retained its managerial/supervision responsibilities, but also now includes components of instructional leadership. Niewenhuizen and Brooks (2013) synthesized previous studies noting a commonality of four tasks of the assistant principal: student management, management of school, instructional leadership, and community/public relations. However, with three of the four being chiefly managerial, Marshall (1993) noted that it would be extremely difficult for assistant principals to grow and develop as instructional leaders due to other job responsibilities.

In a study conducted by Hausman et al. (2002), it was found that assistant principals primarily deal with the management of people. Supporting this thought, Marshall (1993) conducted a study around the daily tasks of career assistant principals. This study highlighted that it was "people who make the assistant principal's office come alive" (p. 8), with much emphasis being placed on the student. Marshall noted that the assistant principal's office is a

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public place where a steady flow of individuals is seen each day. One assistant principal interviewed in this study urged other assistant principals to close their doors in order to get all tasks completed. However, building and maintaining relationships with students, parents, and teachers was stated as crucial to being successful in the assistant principal's role (Hartzell, 1995). Hartzell (1995) said,

> Assistant principals can maintain positive relations with the majority of students in the school if they are willing to work at it by mixing in with them in the hallways and at lunch, taking time to talk with them informally at activities, and going out of their way to praise and support students who have gotten into trouble and then straightened out. (p. 63)

Barnett et al. (2012) addressed the issues of the assistant principal job by saying, "the role of assistant principal must evolve from the traditional perspective of disciplinarian and manager to a perspective in which enhancing the instructional program of a school is at the forefront" (p. 92). Muijs and Harris (2003) also suggested the assistant principal needs to move from a traditional role to a more emergent one. The researchers suggested the following items as an assistant principal's emergent role responsibilities:

- Designing curriculum and instructional methods
- Supporting and promoting school goals
- Creating a shared vision
- Working as a transformational leader
- Developing an extensive knowledge base
- Evaluating and mentoring teaching staff

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- Creating relationships with the teaching staff

- Retaining traditional managerial duties

These responsibilities, as suggested by the researchers, will require extensive professional development and training, as they deviate significantly from the traditional managerial roles of assistant principals.

       Role transition and socialization for the assistant principal. Entering the assistant principal role is a major career transition for most individuals. Armstrong (2010) conducted a study to look at the socialization process that characterizes the transition from teaching to administration. The author stated that the socialization process begins the moment the assistant principal steps over the boundary from teaching to administration. She claimed that, "roles and rituals" were adopted to socialize the new assistant principals into the current school culture forcing upon them managerial tasks and responsibilities. Over time, these assistant principals lost their instructional frame of mind and moved to a more managerial mindset. She claimed that for the assistant principal role, "there must be a clear definition of its parameters, a reduction in the focus on management and disciplinary tasks, and an increase in leadership activities" (Armstrong, 2010, p. 710). Through the study, Armstrong identified four phases of the assistant principal socialization process:

1. Entry-Exit

2. Immersion-Emersion

3. Disintegration-Reintegration

4. Transformation-Restabilization

Armstrong (2010) noted that these phases are experienced in any order and at random times. She says, "Each phase of the [assistant principal's] trajectory builds on three previous cycles, and

different rites of passage occur within each phase" (p. 697). The entry-exit phase depicts the assistant principal as aspiring and still viewing the administration position through a teacher's lens. Rites experienced at this level may have been informal such as assuming more school leadership positions, attending additional professional development, and volunteering for more school events. Formal rites might include attending an administrative certification program. The immersion-emersion phase relates to the shift from aspiring to practicing novice assistant principal. This phase highlights the shift from traditional teacher duties to administrative duties and was noted to be a "sink or swim" and "baptism by fire" process (Armstrong, 2010, p. 703). The assistant principal can attempt to circumvent these challenges; however, frustrations will still remain. The third phase, disintegration-reintegration, takes place late in the assistant principal's first year of service.

This phase focuses on the assistant principal's attempt to navigate the multitude of challenges and stressors associated with the role. This attempt, however, is often times met with disappointment and failure. This phase calls for the acceptance of challenges in the assistant principal role through the infusion of personal values and beliefs when confronting them. The last phase of transformation-restabilization refers to the total inclusion of the assistant principal into the school community. Although still being subjected to role challenges, assistant principals reaching this phase have learned how to navigate the potential problem areas of the role. They have begun to rely on the collaborative relationship formed with school personnel and increased their trustworthiness by doing so. The fourth phase in Armstrong's (2010) model represents the highest level in the socialization process.

The assistant principal as instructional leader. Beginning in the 1980's, school leaders were expected to focus not only on the management, but on the instruction taking place in their

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school. Hallinger (1992) stated that the school leader "was expected to be knowledgeable about curriculum and instruction and able to intervene directly with teachers in making instructional improvements" (p. 2). In a synthesis of literature, Hallinger (2005) described instructional leaders as:

- Strong, directive leaders

- Culture builders

- Goal-oriented leaders

Hallinger and Murphy (1987) introduced one of the first detailed descriptions of what instructional leaders' job roles are comprised of. These researchers grouped them into three broad dimensions.

1. Defining the school mission

2. Managing the instructional program

3. Promoting a positive climate

These three dimensions have continued relevance to today's instructional leader's activities as noted by Hallinger (2005). Hallinger (2005) has extended this three dimensional model to include a detailed breakdown of functions of an instructional leader. Similarly, Leithwood and Seashore-Louis (2012) asserted to be an effective instructional leader, administrators needed to participate in the following activities:

1. Setting Directions

2. Developing People

3. Focusing on Learning

4. Improving the Instructional Program

These researchers noted that setting direction should clarify the goals of the school and include collaboration from all school stakeholders. Upon solidifying the school's goals the development of the staff should promote capacity building through continual motivation and support. The instructional leader is a vital role in developing the people so that the support systems are in place when change is needed. Lastly, Leithwood and Seashore-Louis (2012) suggest instructional leaders effectively support and improve the instruction taking place within the classrooms of their school. Utilizing necessary resources, offering support, and monitoring teacher instruction can help an assistant principal effectively improve the instructional programs.

Professional development for assistant principals. The assistant principal should not be excluded from professional development for school leaders. Easton (2008) suggests that throughout the years, professional development has been a training that is done *to* someone. This author noted that, while imperative to the success of school leaders, the concept of professional development needs to shift to the concept of professional learning. Taking part in traditional development activities and tasks is vital; however, leaders need to be able to adapt, change, self-monitor, and have a strong knowledge base.

Conger and Benjamin (1999) conducted a study identifying that professional development programs provide opportunities for leaders to develop and refine skills and strategies needed for school leadership. The authors recommended four main objectives for leadership education:

1. Developing leadership effectiveness

2. Improving career transitions into leadership roles

3. Instilling the vision, mission, and beliefs of the organization

4. Creating the skills and knowledge needed to attain long-term goals

According to Conger and Benjamin (1999), these objectives translate well into professional development programs.

An additional study, conducted by Oliver (2005), supported these claims by researching the professional development opportunities of elementary, middle, and secondary assistant principals. The majority of assistant principals surveyed by the author said they did receive professional development from the district level office. These development opportunities were overwhelmingly founded in management activities. A large number of assistant principal participants wished they had received more professional development on curriculum and instruction. These assistant principals desired more professional development at the middle and high school level, more input on the way it was delivered in, as well as about the time and place of the trainings. The author of this study recommended the need for a comprehensive professional development program for assistant principals. This program would place greater emphasis and priority on instructional leadership skills rather than management. Additionally, he recommended that assistant principals receive professional development on a continuous basis (Oliver, 2005).

Mentoring is one form of professional development that can be offered to assistant principals. Assistant principals, as novices to administration, are uniquely positioned to benefit from mentoring. Liang and Augustine-Shaw (2016), explained that "high-quality mentoring and induction for assistant principals is vital" (p. 235). Their study highlighted the importance of guidance and support in helping assistant principals identify ways to succeed within the position. The researchers maintained the importance of a mentoring relationship in helping novice assistant principals "bridge the gap between preparation and professional growth" (p. 235).

Research Design and Participants

The researcher used general qualitative methods to conduct a thematic analysis of qualitative data from existing data sets to identify how assistant principals in the state of Alabama define instructional leadership as well as the facilitating factors and barriers in fulfilling the role of an instructional leader.

The data sets used for this study were originally collected by Dr. Linda Searby from Auburn University over a six-month span between October 2013 and April 2014 in the State of Alabama. The Auburn University of Institutional Review Board approved the original study, as well as this dissertation study that analyzed the existing qualitative data. In this chapter, the term "researcher" refers to the doctoral candidate who analyzed the existing data from the original study.

For this study, a wide range of assistant principals provided the qualitative data. The source of qualitative data was interview data from five focus groups conducted with assistant principals in different regions of Alabama. The focus group interviews were conducted in late 2013 and early 2014. The focus groups, which had a range of four to fourteen participants, included elementary and secondary assistant principals. Specifically, the focus groups included a total 39 assistant principals. Table 1 depicts the participants' gender. Table 2 depicts whether the assistant principal was at the elementary, middle, or high school level. It is noted that one assistant principal served at a Kindergarten-12th grade school.

Table 1

Assistant Principal Participant Gender

Level	Number in Focus Group	Percentage
Male	16	41%
Female	23	59%
Total	39	100%

Table 2

Assistant Principal Participant Building Level

Level	Number in Focus Group	Percentage
Elementary	14	37%
Middle	13	34%
High	11	29%
Total	39	100%

Note: 1 participant was an assistant principal at a K-12 school and is noted in the total

It should be noted that gender is not a factor of interest studied in this research. It simply

serves as a more in-depth glance at the assistant principal participants.

Data Collection

The data for this study came from five face to face focus groups conducted with assistant

principals in various regions of Alabama which represented urban, suburban, and rural areas. The

interviewer was Dr. Linda Searby, principal investigator of the original study. For the most part,

the focus groups were held in school district central offices or professional development centers,

with one being held in a church conference room. The smallest group consisted of four

participants, and the largest group had fourteen participants. In all 39 assistant principals from

the state of Alabama participated in the focus group interviews. Participants were given an

overview of the study and were asked to sign an informed consent document, outlining the

safeguards that were put in place to protect their confidentiality and keep their identity private, as

well as inform them that their participation was voluntary. Each focus group interview, which

lasted from sixty to ninety minutes, was audio-recorded and transcribed by a professional

transcription service.

Data Analysis

To analyze the responses to the focus group interviews, the researcher employed coding

and theming techniques. This process included analyzing data for similarities of the information

reported and compiling them into manageable segments (Schwandt, 2007). In hand-coding the data, the researcher implemented processes recommended by Saldana (2013) for analyzing qualitative data.

For the focus group interviews, the researcher thoroughly read all five transcribed interviews twice before assigning any codes. Next, each transcript was analyzed again, this time employing eclectic coding (Saldana, 2013). Eclectic coding is a first-cycle coding method in which the researcher assigns words or phrases to lines or segments of the transcript. The codes may be of different types, such as noting emotions, noting processes, highlighting exact quotes (in-vivo coding), or other analytic memos in the margins (Saldana, 2013). Next, holistic coding was employed, in which the researcher applied a single code to a large unit of transcribed data, and a master code list was kept. From the holistic codes, the researcher looked for similarities across the five transcripts in order to develop some common themes, with the research questions always in mind. In this step, the researcher kept a running list of illustrative quotes as examples of each theme. Creswell (2013) stated, "themes in qualitative research are broad units of information that consists of several codes aggregated to form a common idea" (p. 185). Themes, patterns, and categories were identified to align with the research questions in the fourth step. These themes were organized in order for the researcher to create a "conceptual schema" instead of having only a list of themes (Schreier, 2012). In the last step for analyzing the interview data, the researcher reviewed all transcripts again to ensure that primary themes and patterns corroborated with the data obtained from the interviews. This was done to establish validity of the data.

Lastly, the researcher aligned all collective themes under the appropriate research sub-question in order to be able to answer the overall central question: How do assistant principals

define instructional leadership and what are the facilitating factors and barriers in fulfilling the role as instructional leader?

Summary of Findings and Interpretation

  Research Sub Question 1. Three overarching themes were identified through the data analysis process that provided an answer to research sub-question 1-How do assistant principals define instructional leadership? These overarching themes were: Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions. The assistant principal participants in this study overwhelmingly defined an instructional leader as someone who possessed particular knowledge, skills, and dispositions. These three themes were mainly derived from the codes that were found under the participants' responses to focus group interview question number 1: What's your vision of an instructional leader? Due to the wording of this interview question many participants reflected on instructional leaders they currently work with or those they have worked with in the past.
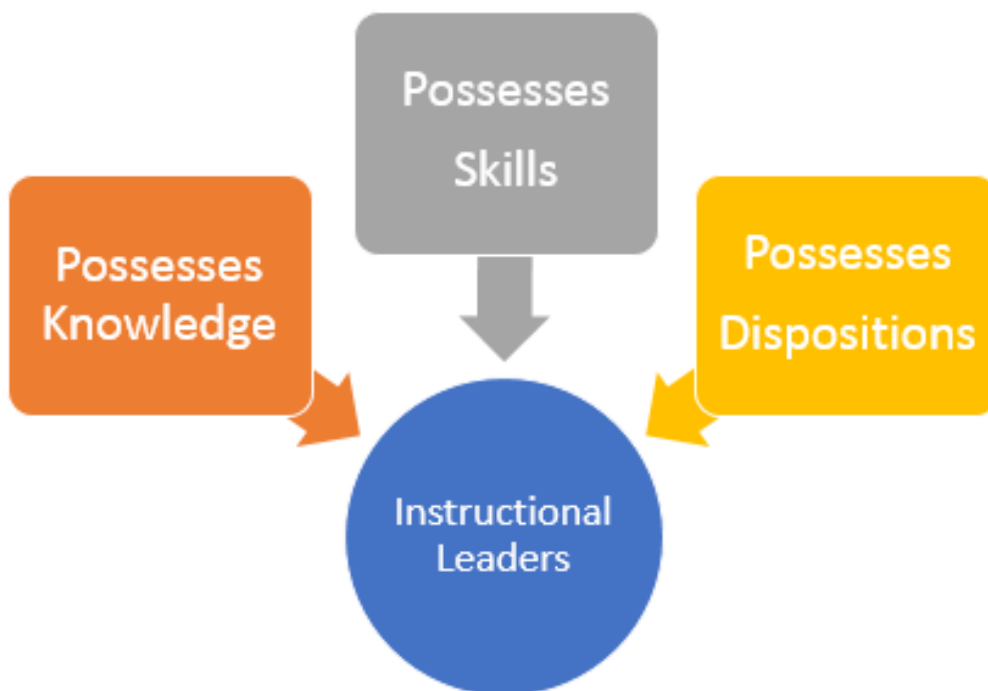
Figure 1. Instructional Leadership Definition Themes

Theme 1: The Instructional Leader Possesses Specific Knowledge. Four emerging

needed knowledge sets were derived from the focus group interviews. These four knowledge sets

possessed by assistant principals were: knowledge of curriculum, knowledge of instruction,

knowledge of people, and knowledge of data.
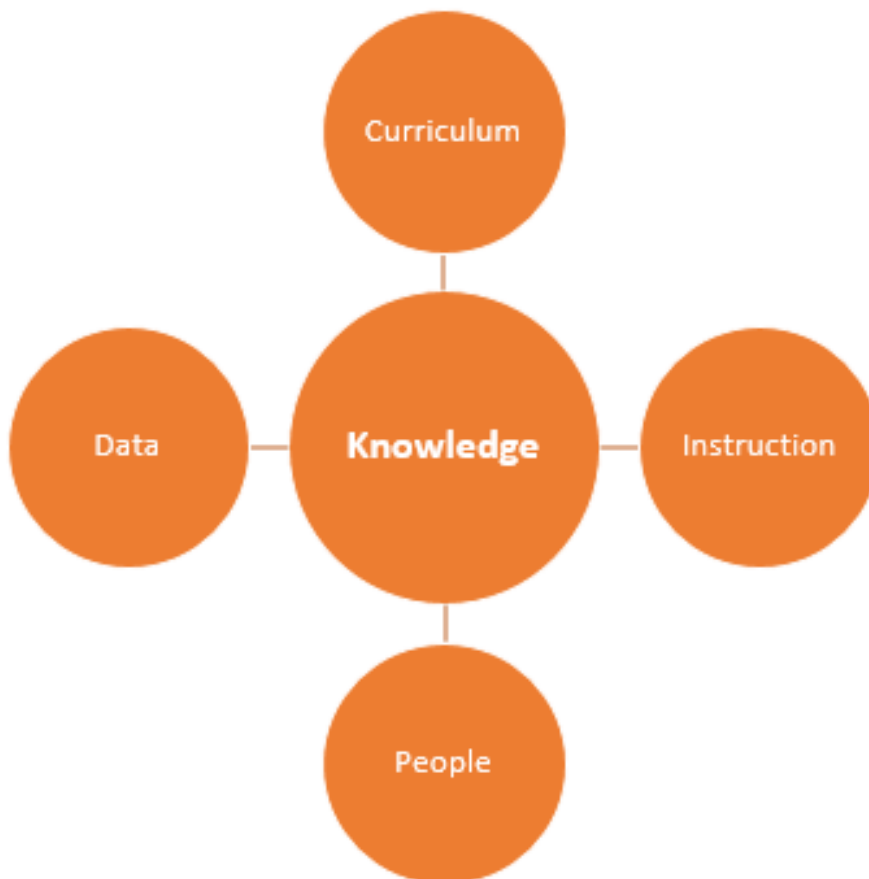
Figure 2. Instructional Leadership Knowledge Sets

Knowledge of Curriculum. According to Seashore-Louis et al. (2010), a strong instructional

leader has a deep understanding of curriculum and can guide and support teachers in the delivery

of content.

Focus group respondents in this study felt that to be an instructional leader one needed an

extensive knowledge base in curriculum. This was found through participants' reflection on

instructional leaders that had impacted their lives or what they envisioned an instructional leader

to be. One participant stated, "I believe that it's also vital for an instructional leader to have a grasp of the curriculum that's going on in the building…." This finding may denote the importance of an assistant principal serving in a role (elementary or secondary) that required curriculum knowledge. It also may imply that assistant principals need continuous professional development to be current in curriculum development. This is supported by an assistant principal saying, "If you're an instructional leader, you should be the master of, or an expert at, that content, that curriculum, those expectations." It can also be said that assistant principals who are well versed in curriculum knowledge become better models for teachers. One participant exemplified this by stating, "…Looking at someone who's knowledgeable about the curriculum and they're able to show what they expect."

Knowledge of instruction. When reflecting on what defines an instructional leader, one assistant principal participant stated, "It's somebody that takes instruction in their school very seriously. It takes top priority." Barnett et al. (2012) supported the notion that assistant principals must change, "to a perspective in which enhancing the instructional program of a school is at the forefront." Having an extensive knowledge of instruction deviates from the traditional role of an assistant principal but is necessary to becoming an instructional leader (Muijs & Harris, 2003). The researcher gleaned the importance of the instructional leader being a role model of the delivery of instruction from the participant quote, "My vision of an instructional leader is just that it's someone to pioneer instruction that's going on in school." It is also necessary that the assistant principal value instructional time and help teachers by protecting that time. One participant stated, "I think an instructional leader protects instruction time. They view it as a priority."

The researcher interpreted knowledge of instruction in two different ways. One, assistant principals need to have a deep knowledge about current instructional techniques and best practices. Secondly, assistant principals need to know about the delivery of instruction used by teachers in their schools. The researcher believes that assistant principals should have experience in being strong classroom teachers who have studied and perfected instructional techniques that work for students. The researcher also asserts that having an awareness of the instruction taking place in the school building can strengthen the overall academic endeavor within the school. The researcher asserts that to have a true knowledge of instruction, assistant principals need the time to conduct observations and walk-throughs to have first-hand knowledge of what is taking place in their school buildings. This notion is supported by Hallinger's (2005) three dimensions to being an instructional leader which included, managing the Instructional Program. When taking a closer look at this dimension Hallinger (2005) states that within managing the instructional program it is necessary to supervise and evaluate the instruction taking place in school.

Knowledge of people. In a study conducted by Hausman et al. (2002), it was found that assistant principals primarily deal with the management of people. The researcher of this study gathered from participant dialogue that an instructional leader is one who has a knowledge or understanding of people who work within the school organization. One participant exemplified this by saying, "You have to know your people. You go to have your hand on the pulse of every classroom, know what's going on, and develop that rapport with those people, including students."

Waters et. al (2003) found that the leadership characteristics of relationship and outreach had positive influences on student achievement, furthering the support of the importance of having a knowledge of people within the school organization. The researcher found throughout

the interviews that knowing the stakeholders within the school community, including the principal, teachers, students, and parents, was imperative to the forward functioning of that school. The findings imply that assistant principals need to be strong communicators who have an awareness of all the people within their school organization. This was supported in one participant's comment,

> They know their people, not at school, but outside school. They know their parents. An instructional leader's someone that the parents can identify with. That someone's really invested in the school. They know their children. I think that's much more so than just what only goes in the classroom, but what's going outside the school, too.

Kaplan and Ownings (1999) identified as an assistant principal more involvement with adults would be a part of the job role making it a possible stressor. Similarly, Kwan and Walker (2012) found that assistant principals in Hong Kong spent very little time in staff development to gain a true understanding of the people they worked with, despite their efforts otherwise. It can be suggested that assistant principals protect time for the creation and maintenance of relationships with those in their school organization.

Knowledge of data. In a study conducted by Schildkamp and Kuiper (2010), it was recommended that school leaders be strong supporters and facilitators of data driven decision-making. When school leaders were supportive of using data for instructional improvement, schools were more likely to use the data to make improvements and changes based on that data.

Participants in this research study also felt strongly about instructional leaders using data to make instructional decisions. This was exhibited in a quote by one participant who stated, "My vision for an instructional leader is a person who works with the data, very fluid with data." It was also supported through the remark, "An instructional leader should know their students,

their teachers, and their data." The researcher found that throughout the focus group interviews participants' responses alluded to the significance of instructional leaders having an extensive knowledge of data to make instructional decisions within their school buildings. This was also exhibited through the quote, "They're someone out front on instruction and want to make sure they're on top of the data…."

Theme 2: The Instructional Leader Possesses Specific Skills. Repeated throughout the five interviews were eight distinct skill sets needed to be an instructional leader. These eight distinct skills sets needed by an instructional leader were: collaborates with faculty and staff, recognizes teacher abilities, builds relationships with stakeholders, models instruction, leads professional development, delegates responsibilities, provides growth opportunities, and creates a vision.

Figure 3. Instructional Leadership Skill Sets

Collaborates with faculty and staff. The socialization process assistant principals face

when assuming the job role can be challenging and stressful. Armstrong (2010) identified four

phases to the assistant principal socialization process with the last phase being total acceptance in

the school community. In the last phase, which Armstrong (2010) calls the transformation-

restabilization phase, assistant principals have formed a collaborative relationship with all school personnel. They have gained total acceptance in the school community.

Participants in this research study commented on the need for an instructional leader to be someone who collaborates with faculty and staff members. One participant reflected on a past mentor, "The instructional leader that comes to mind, for me, is one that always made me feel that my opinion was important, that there was validity behind it, that it was a group undertaking instead of top down type of administrator. It was definitely collaborative." The researcher found that time and time again participants commented on the crucial need for collaborative relationships to be formed between teachers and administrators. This implies that instructional leaders must be strong communicators and provide an open door to school stakeholders. One participant reflected on his opinion of an instructional leader saying,

> I believe this person is highly visible in the school. He's in and out of classrooms on a regular basis, always has an open-door policy with teachers, and there's an open-minded communication between him or her and the teacher as well as him or her and the parents and students.

Some assistant principals also were found to collaborate regularly with the school principal and even participate in shared leadership activities. One assistant principal stated, "My boss [principal] and I work together. We both do things together." By participating in this style of leadership the researcher asserts that tasks were delegated leaving the assistant principal available to participate in more instructional activities.

Recognizes teacher abilities. "An instructional leader would be someone who allows their teachers to be very individualized, to be able to approach it from different levels, different abilities, and to capitalize on that teacher's strengths," quoted one assistant principal from this

study. Blasé and Blasé (2000) support this statement from a study conducted among 809 teachers in the United States. These researchers found that teachers identified successful instructional leaders as those who promoted reflection through conversation and professional growth. Nested within these two key points was that instructional leaders provide teachers with suggestions for improvement. These suggestions often focused on identifying the teachers' strengths and abilities (Blasé & Blasé, 2000).

The researcher claims this finding of recognizing teacher abilities suggests assistant principals have to have rapport with teachers. Assistant principals have to be present and visible during instructional times within the school to gain an understanding of teacher abilities.

When reflecting on her own instructional leadership activities one assistant principal stated, "Relationships with teachers, they're critical. I feel like I do a good job at that and stressing the strengths of my staff and trying to help them to strengthen what they're good at, trying to point them in a direction of…I want to encourage them." This backs the necessity of assistant principals having a knowledge of the people they work with so they may identify, capitalize, and grow on their strengths.

Builds relationships with stakeholders. Leithwood et al (2004) researched what leadership practices influenced student achievement, and instructional leaders investing time into relationships was identified as a main factor.

"It's about building those relationships. It's more than just a process. It's more than just an analysis, It's about having those quality relationships that when those parents or stakeholders, come in, they know that you're just as vested in their child, as they are," stated one participant in this study. This aligns with what Lieberman (1988) indicated, stating the importance of building relationships by identifying it as one way assistant principals could expand their leadership

activities. Hartzell (1995) also supported the leadership activity of building and maintaining relationships with all stakeholders. It was identified as a crucial task in being successful as an assistant principal. A participant remarked,

> In my growth as an instructional leader, building relationships with people to me is number one because if you can get those people to do what you want them to do, because they're talented, they're smart…The teachers we go at our school are very talented and smart. If you get them to buy in to what you want them to do, then that takes a lot of the burden off of you.

While another assistant principal commented, "It's about building those relationships. It's more than just a process. It's more than just an analysis, It's about having those quality relationships that when those parents or stakeholders, come in, they know that you're just as vested in their child, as they are." The researcher asserts that relationship building is an essential instructional leadership task. Building relationships among school stakeholders is a foundational skill of the socialization process.

Models instruction. In a study conducted by Grissom, Loeb, and Master (2013), researchers found that when instructional leaders conducted walk through observations in isolation there was no positive effect on student achievement. However, when principals coached teachers on instruction taking place in their classrooms, positive gains were noted in student achievement.

The assistant principals from this research study also noted the importance of instructional leaders modeling instruction for teachers. One participant remarked, "I think, when I envision an instructional leader, I see someone that models what they wanting to teach us to do in the classrooms." Another assistant principal stated an instructional leader, "Takes that

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opportunity to go into classrooms, every once in a while. Even teaching along with some of those teachers, giving them that opportunity to see something from a different perspective." This finding challenges the claims of Horng and Loeb (2010) who conducted a study with principals, assistant principals, and teachers on the effects instructional leadership has on student achievement. Those researchers concluded that instructional leaders affect student achievement not through traditional instructional leadership activities such as modeling instruction, but through more global activities such as organizational management (Horng & Loeb, 2010). The participants in this study did indicate that instructional leaders must be strong instructional coaches modeling instructional techniques and strategies for teachers. Another participant reflected on her on learning as an instructional leader and pointed out the importance of modeling. She commented, "We didn't even realize we were doing it, that it was modeling for everybody, for our teachers, what we expected the same way our teachers model for students. It was like an 'a-ha' moment for us."

Leads professional development. In a study conducted by Blasé and Blasé (2000), researchers found that school leaders participating in instructional leadership activities such as staff development affected teacher morale, confidence, and motivation. According to an assistant principal in this research study, "An instructional leader to me is an instructional coach, someone who puts teachers in opportunities to be successful. Provides training and professional development for those who need it." While another assistant principal stated,

> We have professional conversation meetings where we're focused in on student needs.
> They [teachers] bring evidence with them where we look at strugglers, where we look at
> what we call celebrations, a student which could be a struggler that has made progress or

could be one of our highest students, but we're meeting with them to drive instructional

based on that.

Fink and Resnick (2001) asserted that principals often times, "rarely provide intellectual

leadership for growth in teaching skill (p.1)." However, more often they arrange times for

professional development due to restricted or conflicting schedules. One assistant principal

supported Fink and Resnick's (2001) finding by stating, "I pretty much……I can provide some

professional development for a teacher." This assistant principal expressed the want to provide

professional development but often times ran in conflicts in doing so.

This finding implies that assistant principals have to allot the time and resources to provide

professional development to teachers. Assistant principals also need to have a deep

understanding and knowledge of the curriculum and instruction taking place in the school.

Delegates responsibilities. Lieberman (1988) urged school leaders to expand their

leadership teams. The study conducted by Lieberman (1988) found that school leaders expanded

their leadership teams by building trust and relationships, making organizational decisions,

building their knowledge base and confidence, utilizing resources, dealing with change, and

managing work. Expanding leadership teams allows school leaders to delegate responsibilities to

those who can help complete duties and tasks while promoting leadership among their school

faculty.

In this research study, one participant commented on the importance of delegation of

responsibilities by saying,

There's so many hats that you have to wear in the process of running a school that can

become overwhelming to you as far as a person, and your family, and all these other

things that if you do not delegate and get strong people to help you, then not only will the school suffer, you'll suffer, and that's important.

Smith and Andrews (1989) chronicled the importance of delegating responsibilities in the book, *Instructional Leadership: How Principals Make a Difference*. Their case study presented in the text exemplified how a school principal delegated responsibility to school faculty members, garnering respect and trust. It promoted professional growth among the faculty while helping to propel the school forward (Smith & Andrews, 1989). Delegating responsibilities is an advanced task that results in instructional leaders distributing their leadership wisely and purposefully. One participant honestly spoke about the importance of delegation by stating,

> We're heading off the nut cases that come through the front door, it's important that we have ahead of time where we have divvied out those responsibilities to our other people who are important in those areas so that they can step in and step up and take on some of that responsibility when we can't be in every part of the building we need to be in.

Another assistant principal from this study stated, "It's knowing you own strengths and then surrounding yourself with people that know more than you do, because effective instructional leaders know what their weakness is and know how find the people that are strong in those area and pull them into the fold."

This finding implies that assistant principals as instructional leaders need a strong knowledge of the job role and the responsibilities required. These leaders must be reflective of their personal strengths and skills and surround themselves with others who have different skills sets that complement their own. The researcher believes that delegating responsibilities is an advanced skill for assistant principals to obtain, but necessary to the job role.

Provides growth opportunities. Blasé and Blasé (2000) conducted a study among 809 teachers in the United States to gain teacher perspective on successful instructional leadership. These researchers found that teachers identified successful instructional leaders as those who promoted reflection through conversation and professional growth. Supporting collaboration, staff development, action research, and teaching and learning were just a few behaviors that were identified from teacher participants as those enacted by effective leaders (Blasé & Blasé, 2000).

The researcher in this study found that assistant principal participants defined an instructional leader as someone who supported professional growth through mentoring, guidance, and growth opportunities. One participant stated, "I think it's important as administrators, too, for those individuals getting, or aspiring, to be, that we allow them opportunities to continue to grow, and, that they ask us for opportunities so that we're aware that they're interested." Another assistant principal reflected on a past principal by stating, "An instructional leader who I admire is one who I worked with about six years ago. She was very approachable, very knowledgeable, and she also provided opportunities for teacher leaders to grow."

This implies that it is necessary for instructional leaders to provide opportunities for professional growth to aspiring administrators and teacher leaders. One participant eloquently spoke to the ultimate point of providing growth opportunities by saying, "To me, that is, like you're saying, that is the ultimate goal, to have every teacher as their instructional leader of their classroom, to grow them to that point."

By supporting teachers in professional growth, the hope is to guide them in becoming instructional leaders within their classroom and school. The formation of trust relationships is vital in supporting teachers through this process.

Creates a vision. One assistant principal defined instructional leadership as, "It's creating a vision. It's putting the right people in position to fulfill that vision in planning it and reading data and then constantly getting better and tweaking your system or your vision." Muijs and Harris (2003) suggested assistant principals become more emergent in their instructional leadership role. One way to become more intentional was to create a shared vision with stakeholders. Conger and Benjamin (1999) also stressed the importance of professional development programs for instructional leaders focusing on creating a strong vision for the school organization. One participant commented on the important of communication by stating, you want them to have a vision. They reflect that vision. Everybody knows what that is." This statement backs the importance of not only creating a vision but making sure it is shared and valued among the school community. It is important to have shared input when creating a vision. One assistant principal supported this by stating "The instructional leader that I admire brings in lots of different people for input and really tries to get a scope of everything before a direction, or a vision is given."

Ultimately, this finding supports the need for instructional leaders to create a shared vision that guides and supports the school organization through the inclusion of all school stakeholders throughout the process.

Theme 3: The Instructional Leader Demonstrates Specific Dispositions. From the focus group interviews this researcher determined that instructional leaders are in possession of certain dispositions. According to the participants, these dispositions make instructional leaders effective and successful in their job role. The participants provided specific insight into five dispositions that instructional leaders possess. These five dispositions were: being trustworthy, having drive, having care, being well balance, and being role model.

Figure 4. Instructional Leadership Dispositions

Being trustworthy. Assistant principals in this studied used words like trustworthy and trust to describe important qualities of instructional leaders. One participant described it as, "That's the big thing, is trust." Building trust and relationships is an activity noted by Lieberman (1988) as a way of expanding leadership within a school building. A study conducted by Tschannen-Moran (2009), found that trust in school leaders positively impacts a school culture and climate. It was also found that school leaders could create trust through open communication

and visibility in the school. One assistant principal chronicles the struggles she had in her assistant principalship but states that gaining trust is crucial component of an instructional leader. She stated, "A lot of times, I had to win that teacher's trust. Why would a physics teacher want to listen to me when I taught fifth grade. You had to build those relationships." Another assistant principal commented, "I think that, and coming from as a coach, you have to involve yourself with parents and stuff, so the relationships and building trust, I think that's a strength."

This finding implies that instructional leaders have to work diligently at creating trust among school stakeholders by creating and maintaining positive relationships.

Having drive. Kaplan and Ownings (1999) suggested assistant principals need to become experts on school improvement within schools. These researchers recommend combining expert knowledge and personal values to do this. Through this combination, these researchers suggested that assistant principals should be able to experiment and try different instructional leadership activities within their school building. However, assistant principals have to have the support, guidance, and willingness to participate in these activities. This literature helps support this researcher in the claim that drive is a disposition needed for effective school leadership. One assistant principal in this study stated, "I think you have to be very driven to be in this job. If you're not willing to get down and work, nobody's going to not necessarily hold your hand, and I think that's one thing I think everybody can attest to." While another commented due to the lack of formal mentoring, "I think a lot of it came from within. The wanting to learn and watching and evaluating and picking up things on my own." One participant pointed out the importance of having high expectations set for himself as an instruction leader. He remarked, "We didn't correlate that's what we're doing, but if you keep that in mind, of modeling and

showing, just like you did those high expectations, what we expect of them, we expect even more from ourselves an instructional leader."

The researcher asserts that personal ambition and drive are needed by assistant principals to fully complete the changing job role of the assistant principal as an instructional leader. The assistant principal also has to set goals from themselves as instructional leaders and set expectations not only for themselves, but for the faculty as well.

Showing care. Michel (1993) suggested, "The assistant principal functions to make the school supportive, contributing to teachers' and students' sense of personal worth" (p. 8). This personal worth creates a sense of care for those under school leaders. One assistant principal participant in this study noted an important quality of a past instructional leader, "She cared about people as well." Another assistant principal exemplified care by stating what instructional activities she takes part in in her school,

> I think, I know, I believe that it's knowing those students. We know our students. We talk to our students, every day. In the breezeway, I can pull a student close to me and say, "Hey, I noticed on your reading test you mad e a C and that was from a D last week. I think that's great. What did you do?

Feeling valued in the school community was important to one assistant principal as she stated, "The instructional leader who I admire is one who that always was collaborative, guess I should say, and always made me feel that my opinion was important, that there was validity behind it…"

The researcher believes that the notion of being cared about builds the morale of school stakeholders, which affects the overall climate and culture of the school. It is important that

instructional leaders invest time and resources in the people within their organization. Communication is key to showing care.

Being well-balanced. Leithwood and Riehl (2003) expressed the need for further research in the area of how school leaders can balance instructional leadership tasks as well as managerial tasks. These researchers illustrated the importance of balanced leadership, but urged others to continue the research in this important area.

Participants in this research study expressed the need for an instructional leader to be able to balance tasks. One assistant principal stated, "She was able to balance everything really well, and in lightning speed really," as she reflected on an instructional leader she knew. Another participant spoke to balance needed in the learning process by stating, "You don't have time, always, to develop your skills, because you're having to balance the learning process…"

Researchers such as Waters et al. (2003) have proposed that a balanced leadership model could yield greater results for student achievement. These researchers suggested using the McREL's framework, which included twenty-one characteristics such as culture, communication, input, flexibility, etc. These twenty-one characteristics were identified as the most important in helping to create a balance in school leadership.

Another important aspect of being well balanced for an assistant principal is having a balanced relationship with the residing school principal. One participant stated, "You have to know leadership styles of yourself and your principal and then you have to be able to balance each other…." Having a strong relationship based in open communication with the school principal allows for a balanced and shared leadership approach to take place within a school.

The researcher believes this finding is of importance because finding balance in leadership tasks was identified as challenging and difficult. It can be assumed that having a

strong support system and the ability to delegate tasks and responsibilities will lend themselves

to helping balance out leadership activities.

Being a role model. Smith and Andrews (1989) suggested that behaviors such as role

modeling by principals provided encouragement and motivation to teachers within the school

organization. This role modeling provided support to the school organization helping to improve

instructional practices of teachers.

Being a role model was important to the assistant principals in this research study as

exemplified through one participant's quote, "I think an instructional leader should lead by

example." While another assistant principal stated, "I think, when I envision an instructional

leader, I see as someone that models what they wanting to teach us to do in the classrooms." This

finding implies that assistant principals as instructional leaders need a strong knowledge of

curriculum and instruction. This knowledge base is needed to lead teachers in the classroom.

Instructional leaders also need to be role models for cutting edge innovative teacher and learning

strategies taking place in his or her school. One participant stated an instructional leader should,

"Be that leader to offer those innovative ideas."

The researcher believes that leading by example is an important trait to exemplify inside as

well as outside of school and in both personal and professional life. The instructional leader also

needs to be knowledgeable in best practices and proficient in supporting teachers in the most

innovative and engaging teaching strategies.

Summary of Research Sub-Question 1. The findings from this research study imply that

assistant principals define instructional leadership by describing specific knowledge, skills, and

disposition sets. Having a strong knowledge of curriculum, instruction, data, and people is

indispensable in serving in the role of instructional leader. When fulfilling the role of

instructional leader the skills sets of collaborates with faculty and staff, recognizes teacher abilities, builds relationships with stakeholders, models instruction, leads professional development, delegates responsibilities, provides growth opportunities, and creates a vision are essential. Lastly, it was found that instructional leaders need to be trustworthy, have drive, show care, be well balanced, and be a role model.

Conceptual Framework Alignment. The researcher concluded that the findings derived from the first research sub-question: How do assistant principals define instructional leadership it? Aligned with the research study's operational definition of instructional leadership. The findings from this research study can fit one or more of the four domains of instructional leadership: Developing People, Setting Direction, Focusing on Learning, and Improving the Instructional Program as developed by Leithwood and Seashore-Louis (2012). Below, the researcher has taken each of the sub-themes that answered Research Question Sub Question 1: How do assistant principals define instructional leadership? And has aligned those with the four domains of Leithwood and Seashore-Louis' (2012) definition of instructional leadership. The reader can easily see through this graphic that the findings for Research Sub Question 1 align with and affirm what former researchers have found about the characteristics of instructional leadership. The researcher can speculate that the reason for this is that the participants who were interviewed are much more tuned in to what instructional leadership entails because of the emphasis on this concept in the current curriculum of leadership preparation programs, as well as the emphasis from the Alabama State Department of Education on the importance of instructional leadership. In essence, the shift from assistant principal as manager to instructional leader is taking place.
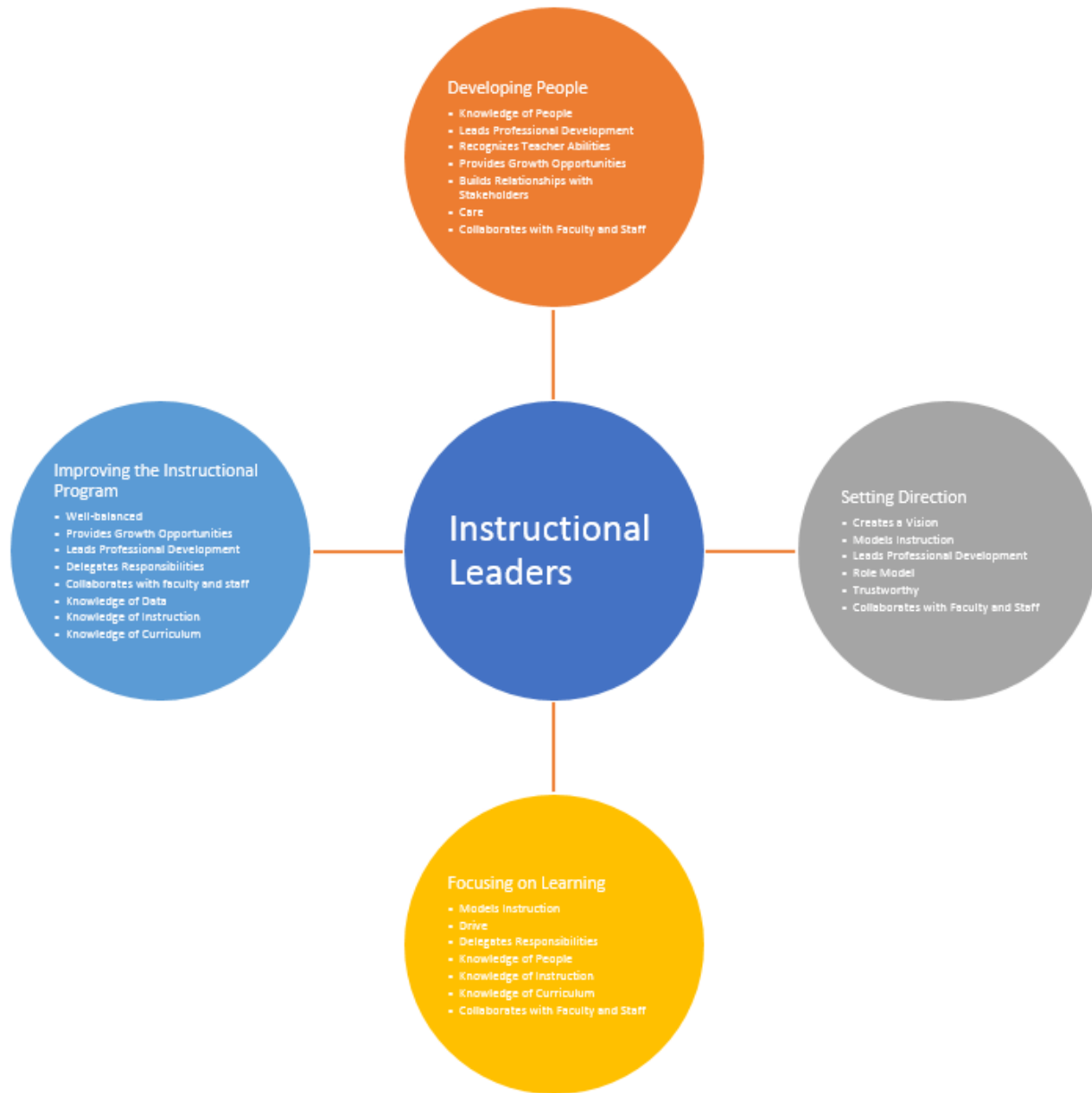
Figure 7. Instructional Leadership Research Findings Aligned with The Four Domains of Instructional Leadership (Leithwood and Seashore-Louis, 2012)

Research Sub Question 2. Three overarching themes were identified through the data

analysis process that provided an answer to Research Sub Question 2 – What are the facilitating

factors for assistant principals in performing as instructional leaders? These over-arching themes

in determining the facilitating factors of instructional leadership were: strong support systems,

well-defined leadership behaviors, job experience, required instructional leadership activities,

and new instructional leadership preparation programs. These themes were derived from the codes that were found under the participants' responses to the focus group interview questions.

Figure 5. Facilitating Factors of Instructional Leadership

Theme 1: Assistant Principals Had Strong Support Systems. Grodzki (2011) conducted a study with Canadian assistant principals about the socialization process. One outcome of this study was the implementation of a Leadership Academy. This academy introduced the aspiring assistant principals to the job responsibilities with emphasis placed on instructional leadership. Grodski (2011) explained, "Participants in this study reported that having the opportunity to gain knowledge of processes, procedures, policies, and expectations contributed to their effectiveness in their roles and lowered anxiety" (p. 14).

The positive effect of a leadership academy for assistant principals was also noted in this dissertation research study. One participant mentioned this by saying, "A positive in our system

is we have an assistant principal's academy now, to where we meet three or four times a year, and our bosses go over things with us that we need to know…."

Another support system for assistant principals is the senior principal. Kaplan and Ownings (1999) recommend shared leadership responsibilities between the principal and assistant principal. These researchers state,

The need to increase all students' achievement, manage emerging crisis, and keep up with the legal, financial, and political requirements of running a successful public school require principals to share power and create an instructional leadership team. (Kaplan & Ownings, 1999, p. 92)

An assistant principal from this current study stated, "The principal is the key to the success of the assistant principal, more than anything else, in that school." The researcher asserts that opportunities to converse with the school principal as well as meet with other assistant principals gives assistant principals the strong support systems necessary to perform successfully in their job roles.

It was also discussed among assistant principals the benefit to having another assistant principal in the same school building. One participant stated, "I think it's very beneficial when you can have another AP in your building. Although in your system, it benefited me a lot, too, having them at other school in your system, but I find that to be invaluable." The researcher perceives this to mean that having another assistant principal in the same school can be an additional level of support. Not only can it be someone to share tasks and activities with, but someone to discuss and collaborate on ideas with. One participant portrayed this idea by stating,

I think you need some one-on-one mentoring at your school, but I think that small peer

group meeting, different studies, different collaboration and networking with other people

in that same situation would be huge. If you could somehow tie all of it together, that

would be the most beneficial thing I think would ever happen for us.

Theme 2: The Assistant Principal Learns from the Job Experience. Mertz (2007)

identified how socialization occurs among assistant principals, how the socialization process

affects them, and how norms and expectations are translated to the practicing assistant principal.

This researcher identified that one way assistant principals can appropriately socialize to role is

by "learning what is lived" (p. 34).

This research is supported by a statement from an assistant principal from this study who

stated: "But when I got in the real world of doing the job, I was like, 'We didn't do much of this

in graduate school.' More on the job learning." Another example is when a participant stated,

"Again, the things that I need or I think ... it just comes with time."

Armstrong (2010) identified four phases of assistant principal socialization: entry-exit,

immersion-emersion, disintegration-reintegration, and transformation-restabilization. The last

phase, transformation-restabilization, refers to the total inclusion of the assistant principal into

the school community. Although still being subjected to role challenges, assistant principals

reaching this phase have learned how to navigate the potential problem areas of the role. They

have begun to rely on the collaborative relationship formed with school personnel and increased

their trustworthiness by doing so. This job experience provides the assistant principal with

knowledge and skills to improve teaching and learning (Armstrong, 2010). This is supported

through the statement, "…….but you honestly, do not know, until you're in it." This assistant

principal felt preparation for the role did not compare to the on the job experience.

Participants in this study felt more comfortable assuming the instructional leadership role once they had spent time in the assistant principal position. The researcher identified that many assistant principal participants were experiencing various phases of the socialization process according to Armstrong (2010). The phase often determined the level of instructional practices the assistant principals participated in.

Theme 3: The Assistant Principal Performs Required Instructional Leadership Activities. The researcher of this study asserts that assistant principals interviewed participated consistently in local, state, or federally mandated instructional leadership activities. If it was a required activity for the assistant principals to complete, they would take part in it. Many participants commented on completing walkthroughs and observations in accordance with EducateAlabama, which was a state mandated teacher evaluation system. Participants also mentioned facilitating Professional Learning Communities (PLC) in their schools, which for the most part is mandated by local school systems. Other participants commented on participating in Response to Intervention for data analysis on student achievement as an instructional activity, which is stated mandated and federally encouraged. The activities that many of the participants mentioned taking part in are not only mandated but supported by the Alabama Standards for Instructional Leadership as well as the *Professional Standards for Educational Leaders* (NPBEA, 2015). These standards embody the importance of the leader in teacher evaluation, data analysis, teaching and learning, as well as continuous school improvement.

This researcher does not want to narrow all instructional activities conducted by assistant principals to just these few things. However, there was a consistency in answers to the question as to what instructional activities these assistant principals took part in. One example response of a participant was, "We have spent a little bit more on the instructional leadership. Things like

doing your PLC together, your EducateAlabama, your testing, your post-test, pre-test, all of that nature." Another assistant principal stated,

> Professional development meetings, which are our grade-level meetings where we're always trying to- It's not just a matter of just this grade level sitting down. We're really looking at data evidence, what is effective, what's not effective, bouncing ideas off of each other, trying to drive and change instruction through those meetings.

While another leader stated their instructional tasks included, "Planning an RtI of individual student accommodations, such as strategy meetings and RtI meetings and grade level meetings."

The evidence from these responses indicates that assistant principals participated the most in instructional activities that were required of them. The researcher believes that this shows that many local, state, and federal initiatives do indeed include instructional leadership activity components.

Theme 4: The New Instructional Leadership Programs Prepared Assistant Principals.
One facilitating factor for instructional leadership that the researcher identified in this study was assistant principals participating in more recent instructional leadership preparation programs. "I recently came out of the newly designed program for instructional leadership. I think the cohort model is really nice. When you're an instructional leader, you cannot do it alone," commented one assistant principal. Another participant stated, "There was power and collaboration that happened between my cohort members and me. We became a family." The cohort model in many new instructional leadership preparation programs allowed participants to work together in a collaborative manner as they completed coursework and internships.

Greenfield (1984) recommended that to alleviate the stressors of assistant principal career socialization, aspiring administrators should participate in an internship in their administrative

training programs. One assistant principal commented, "Strong-based internships, to me, are more beneficial than some of the classes that I had." To the researcher, this supports the incorporation of internships in leadership preparation programs and the necessity they play in preparing an aspiring administrator for future roles.

Summary of Research Sub Question 2. Assistant Principal participants identified four major facilitating factors in their role of performing as an instructional leader. One facilitating factor of instructional leadership was having a strong support system in place. Gaining job experience was recognized as a facilitating factor of instructional leadership. Assistant principals participated in many required instructional leadership activities deeming it as a facilitating factor. Lastly, assistant principals acknowledged the significant role their newly redesigned instructional leadership preparation program played in them being an instructional leader.

Research Sub Question 3. Three overarching themes were identified through the data analysis process that provided an answer to Research Sub-Question 3 – What are the barriers for assistant principals in performing as instructional leaders? These over-arching themes in determining the barriers of instructional leadership were: socialization to the role, time, limited leadership capacity building opportunities, and the assistant principal to principal relationship. These themes were derived from the codes that were found under the participants' responses to focus group interview questions.
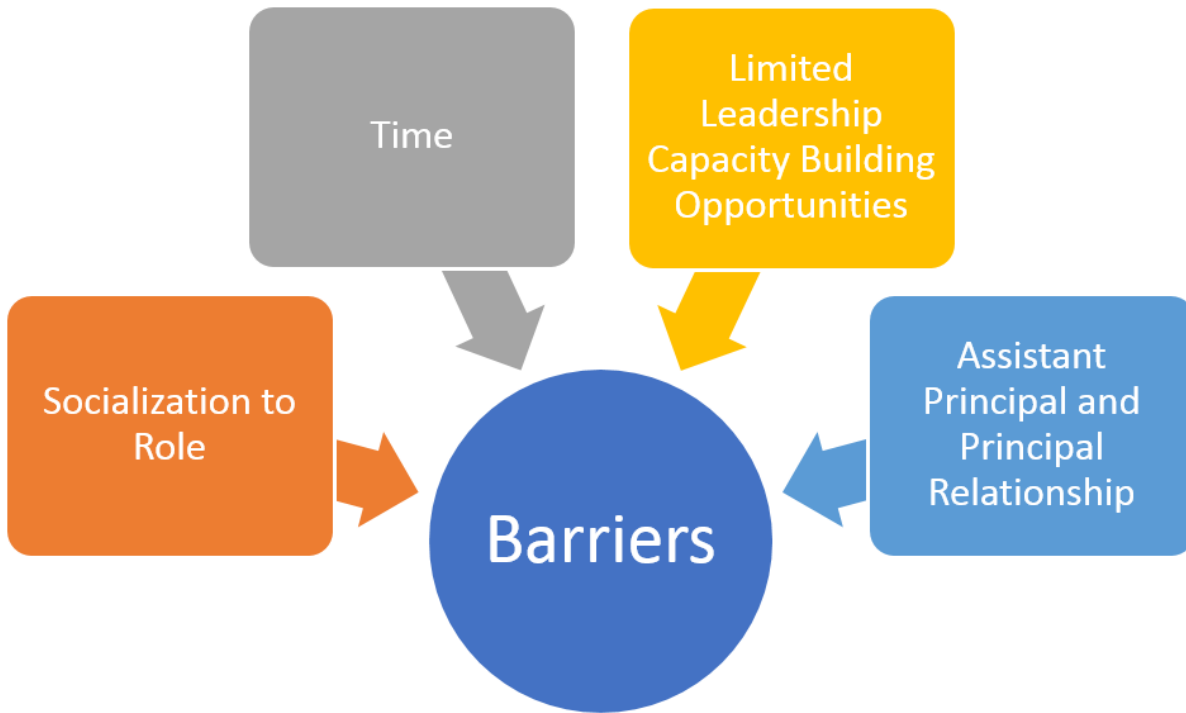
Figure 6. Barriers of Instructional Leadership

Theme 1: Socialization to Role is a Barrier to Instructional Leadership for Assistant Principals. Entering the assistant principal role is a major career transition for most individuals. Catherine Marshall (1992) identified that, "the assistant principalship is the beginning of a career socialization process" (p. viii). Armstrong (2010) conducted a study to look at the socialization process that characterizes the transition from teaching to administration. The author stated that the socialization process begins the moment the assistant principal steps over the boundary from teaching to administration. She claimed that "roles and rituals" were adopted to socialize the new assistant principals into the current school culture, forcing upon them managerial tasks and responsibilities.

This socialization process was noted in an assistant principal's statement, "It's the same way with being a principal, or assistant principal. That first year, you just have to learn." Michel (1996) claimed that to transition smoothly, an assistant principal will need a clear definition of

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the role and responsibilities of the position, ability to resolve conflict, and knowledge of the school culture and influencing factors. This is supported by the participant statement, "An AP coming out of the classroom could sink quickly if they're not prepared for the way that their day may go." Another assistant principal described it as, "Going into a new environment. How long it took as new AP's, and how it actually took us to build that relationship. The amount of time invested in building that relationship, making those phone calls, having those conferences. It took me about three years." This finding implies that it is important for assistant principals to acknowledge the socialization process and understand the challenges that they may face in assuming the role.

Theme 2: Time is a Barrier for Assistant Principals Performing as Instructional Leaders. The researcher identified time as a barrier assistant principals face when assuming the role of an instructional leader. According to participants much of their school day is consumed by taking care of managerial tasks such as discipline. One assistant principal stated, "She (principal) absolutely wants me on discipline. That's where I am most of the time." While another said, "Well, we have 850 students, and I'm the only assistant, which I think that's pretty much the norm, but with that many students and that many buses and that much discipline that just takes up a huge chunk if not all of my day." In a study conducted by Weller and Weller (2002), it was found that an assistant principal's most time consuming responsibility was student discipline.

The researcher concludes that much of an assistant principal's day in consumed with managerial tasks such as discipline and bus duty, limiting the number of instructional leadership activities they can take part in. This is exhibited through one participant's conversation:

Participant A: "As assistant principals we spend most of our time in discipline and RtI.

Discipline and RtI."

Participant B: "If you're lucky, test coordinator."

Participant C: "Yeah, or parent outreach, or sometimes counseling."

Participant D: "Or, teacher outreach."

It is necessary to find a balanced leadership approach that allows assistant principals the ability to conduct instructional activities while attending to managerial duties.

Theme 3: Assistant Principals Have Limited Leadership Capacity Building Opportunities. In a study conducted by Oliver (2005), assistant principals expressed a need for increased professional development. This researcher recommended professional development be provided to assistant principals on a consistent basis to meet their needs (Oliver, 2005).

"I was told that the AP position is a lonely position because you're usually the only one of two administrators. You kind of have to keep a lot of stuff to yourself, in confidence. I know the principals do monthly meetings. I know that we are left behind," stated one assistant principal participant from this study. Another participant commented, "I haven't received any formal mentoring from an assistant principal position to say, but there are certain mandates and mini-core things an assistant principal had to go through that I would consider mentoring." Although professional development can be beneficial for the assistant principal, it cannot be useful in isolation, according to Hunter (2016). This researcher found that, according to assistant principal participants, isolated professional learning opportunities made no impact on their ability to successfully assume the role of an instructional leader (Hunter, 2016).

A study conducted by Petrides et al. (2014) extended Hartzell et al. (1994) findings by asserting that assistant principals often intended their role to be devoted to instructional tasks, but

found they were impeded by oppositional views and outdated school policies. The study called attention to an assistant principals' need for tailored PD (professional development) programs that would be centered on what they needed in regards to their level of experience and school context.

Theme 4: The Assistant Principal to Principal Relationship Can be a Barrier to Instructional Leadership. In past decades, the role of an assistant principal was defined by the residing school principal (Marshall & Mitchell, 1991). The assistant principal was expected to follow the orders that the principal assigned (Marshall & Mitchell, 1991). According to Bates and Shank (1983) certain tasks and responsibilities were delegated to the assistant principal because the school principal did not desire them. As Marshall and Davidson (2016) pointed out, challenges can be felt during the assistant principal's tenure as an educational leader. Hartzell et al. (1994) discovered several challenges assistant principals face in their role as an organizational leader. First, the assistant principal realizes that the position is secondary to the principal. The assistant principal completes tasks that are given by the principal.

Similar findings were noted in this research study. One assistant principal quoted, "For me I think it's a different culture because the principal is the principal and then there's the assistant that handles the discipline." While another commented, "Our principal is really……She really doesn't involve us as being instructional leaders." The researcher believes that the principal and assistant principal relationship is essential to a strong school culture. The relationship between administrators affects all other stakeholders within the school community and can be a deciding factor between success and failure.

Summary of Research Sub Question 3. The participants of this research study identified four main barriers to assistant principals serving as instructional leaders within schools.

Socialization to the role of assistant principal can be seen as a potential barrier to performing

instructional leader ship activities. It was found that time can be a barrier to instructional

leadership due to the managerial and/or tasks that are often delegated to the assistant principal. It

was also noted that assistant principals have limited leadership capacity building opportunities

preventing them from growing professional in instructional leadership skills. Lastly, it was

identified that the assistant principal to principal relationship can be a barrier to instructional

leadership.

Summary of Research Findings

Table 6

Summarized Research Findings

Definition of Instructional Leader	Facilitating Factors	Barriers
Theme #1- Possesses Specific Knowledge • Knowledge of Curriculum • Knowledge of Instruction • Knowledge of People • Knowledge of Data Theme #2-Possesses Specific Skills • Collaborates with Faculty and Staff • Recognizes Teacher Abilities • Builds Relationships with Stakeholders • Models Instruction • Leads Professional Development • Delegates Responsibilities • Provides Growth Opportunities • Creates a Vision Theme #3-Demonstrates Specific Dispositions • Being Trustworthy • Having Drive • Having Care • Being Well-balanced • Being a Role Model	Theme#1-Strong Support Systems Theme #2- Job Experience Theme #3- Required Instructional Leadership Activities Theme #4-New Instructional Leadership Preparation Program	Theme #1- Socialization to Role Theme #2-Time Theme #3-Limited Leadership Capacity Building Opportunities Theme #4-Assistant Principal to Principal Relationship

Assistant principals defined instructional leaders as having specific knowledge sets, skills sets, and dispositions. Having a knowledge of curriculum, instruction, people, and data were identified by the researcher as being a critical component of instructional leadership. The skills of collaborating with faculty and staff, recognizing teacher abilities, building relationships with stakeholders, modeling instruction, leading professional development, delegating responsibilities, providing growth opportunities, and creating a vision were communicated from participants as strong indicators of strong instructional leaders. Being trustworthy, having drive and care, being well balanced and a role model were the dispositions viewed as necessary to be an effective leader by assistant principal participants. This research provided insight into the facilitating factors and barriers that assistant principals face in the role of instruction leader. The facilitating factors include: strong support systems, job experience, required instructional leadership activities, and new instructional leadership preparation programs. The barriers for the role of instructional leader include: socialization to the role, time, limited leadership capacity building opportunities, and the assistant principal to principal relationship.

Implications of the Study

The implications of this research study can impact assistant principals, principals, aspiring administrators, school system personnel, and university leadership preparation programs. The assistant principal role is far under-researched compared to school principals and this study helps to increase, deepen, and broaden literature on the role.

One implication that can be concluded from this study is the impact it can have on school system administrators. Many of the focus group participants expressed a desire to network with other assistant principals within their own school systems as well as expressing a need for a formal mentor. Participants felt strongly about the impact professional development would have

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if provided directly for the assistant principal. These findings also serve to inform school system administrators of the specific challenges faced by assistant principals, as well as how to support them.

University leadership preparation programs can take away from this research study the positive impact cohort modeled programs and embedded internships have on assistant principals as instructional leaders. It also serves to notify university leadership preparation programs of the importance of teaching and discussing the socialization process of the assistant principal.

This research study implies that principals need to understand the importance of the principal and assistant principal relationship. This relationship can help support and guide the assistant principal in participating in instructional leadership activities or impede their ability to grow as a professional. Shared leadership is needed from the principal and the principal can help the assistant principal build capacity to develop as an instructional leader.

Assistant principals will find this study of particular interest due to its outcomes. These findings possibly can give comfort to other assistant principals who often feel isolated or alone in their job role.

The researcher believes above all the study will have the most implications for aspiring administrators or administrative degree holders who have yet to obtain an assistant principal position. Knowing the facilitating factors and barriers to instructional leadership as an assistant principal can better prepare aspiring administrators and degree holders for a future position.

Limitations

The researcher has identified possible limitations to this research study. First, the researcher was not in attendance during the focus group interviews with elementary assistant principals. Additionally, the conditions in which the focus group interview was conducted may

have had an impact on the participants' responses could be seen as a potential limitation. The sample size of this research was acceptable for focus groups and survey participants. The findings, however, may not be generalizable to all assistant principals in the state of Alabama or other locations.

Recommendations for Further Research

There is limited existing literature surrounding the role of assistant principal, and even less literature on assistant principals performing as instructional leaders. This researcher sought to broaden the literature on assistant principals as instructional leaders and the facilitating factors and barriers they face in assuming that role. Further research is needed to continue to expand the wealth of knowledge and understanding surrounding the assistant principal job role.

Continuing research on the assistant principal role is vital to the understanding of the role and facilitating factors and barriers one would face in the role.   Further research could be conducted more extensively by level (elementary and secondary) or by community or geographic region. Continued research could also surround assistant principal perceptions of the shared relationship between themselves and the school principal.

Researcher's Positionality and Learning Experiences

The researcher in this study has been an elementary school teacher in the state of Alabama for seven years. Five years were spent teaching fourth grade, one year in third grade, and one year as the Title One teacher all at the same elementary school. The researcher obtained a bachelor and master's degree in Elementary Education in 2009 and 2010 respectively, followed by a second master's degree in Instructional Leadership in 2014. Most recently in 2016, the researcher obtained an educational specialist degree in Administration of Elementary and Secondary Education. Although the researcher has not served in the assistant principal role, the

researcher's current job role of Title One teacher has allowed numerous opportunities to be

involved in instructional leadership activities. A school principal and assistant principal have

informally mentored the researcher of this study for the last three years. The findings of this

research very closely mimic the facilitating factors and barriers discussed and observed with and

among the researcher's assistant principal mentor. The mentoring relationship has allowed the

researcher to become more empathetic and understanding to the assistant principal job role.

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Appendix A

Assistant Principals Focus Group Interviews

Focus Group Interview Protocol

Assistant Principals

Thank you for attending our focus group today. The purpose of our study is to assess the capacity of assistant principals to be instructional leaders and to identify mentoring needs you may have in order to expand your capacity as instructional leaders.

Please introduce yourself by providing your full name and telling us the level of school (i.e., elementary, middle, high) that you serve, how long you have been an assistant principal, and where you completed your principal preparation program (i.e., what university or college).

Envision an instructional leader . . . reflect about how he or she thinks and behaves.

1. Describe your vision of an instructional leader.
2. Review the operational definition we propose to use in the formal study.
   - In what ways does your vision of an instructional leader align with our operational definition?
   - In what ways is your vision of an instructional leader different?
3. To what extent did you learn how to be an instructional leader in your principal preparation program?

Think about your current work as an assistant principal.

What percentage of your time do you spend on activities associated with our operational definition of instructional leadership?

4. What are those instructional leadership activities?
5. With regard to our operation definition of instructional leadership, in what areas do you
   a. Feel most confident? Why?
   b. Feel least confident? Why?

Think about the mentoring you have experienced as an assistant principal.

6. Describe the formal mentoring you have experienced as an assistant principal.
7. Describe the informal mentoring you have experienced as an assistant principal
8. To what extent did that mentoring focus specifically on instructional leadership?

Think about being the head principal of a school—THE instructional leader accountable for setting direction, developing people, redesigning the organization, and improving the instructional program that collectively influences student achievement.

9. Do you feel ready to serve as the head principal? Why or why not?
10. Which function within our operational definition would be your first priority for professional growth?
11. What form of mentoring would help you feel ready to be THE instructional leader of a school (e.g., one-on-one mentoring at school, small peer group meetings, book study)?

Appendix B

Auburn University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval

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/vpr/ohs/index.htm

Revised 2/1/2014 **Submit completed form to IRBsubmit@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 _Brittney Herring Duncan_ Title _Student_ Dept./School _Educational EFLT/Edu._

   Address _2422 Antler Ridge Dr. Auburn, AL_ AU Email _herribr@auburn.edu_

   Phone _256-996-1485_ Dept. Head _Sherida Downer_

   FACULTY ADVISOR (if applicable):

   Name _Dr. Linda Searby_ Title _Associate Professor_ Dept./School _Educational FLT/Edu._

   Address _4075 Haley Center Auburn University, 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: Assistant Principals 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

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3. PROJECT SUMMARY
   a. Does the research involve any special populations?

   O YES ⊚ NO   Minors (under age 19)

   O YES ⊚ NO   Pregnant women, fetuses, or any products of conception

   O YES ⊚ NO   Prisoners or Wards

   O YES ⊚ NO   Individuals with compromised autonomy and/or decisional capacity

   b. Does the research pose more than minimal risk to participants?   O 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(i)

   c. Does the study involve any of the following?

   O YES ⊚ NO   Procedures subject to FDA Regulation Ex. Drugs, biological products, medical devices, etc.

   O YES ⊚ NO   Use of school records of identifiable students or information from instructors about
                   specific students

   O YES ⊚ NO   Protected health or medical information when there is a direct or indirect link that could
                   identify the participant

   O YES ⊚ NO   Collection of sensitive aspects of the participant's own behavior, such as illegal
                   conduct, drug use, sexual behavior or use of alcohol

   O 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.)
      The subject populations consists of elementary and secondary assistant principals from the state of Alabama with varying years of experience.

   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 #13-259EP1308)

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 collection of data being analyzed for this study was initially collected for a mixed methods study conducted between October 2013 and April 2014 with elementary and secondary assistant principals in the state of Alabama with approval recieved from the Auburn University Institutional Review Board- Protocol #13-259EP1308. An email was sent to all state of Alabama superintendents to gain permission to survey assistant principals within their district. The superintendents were asked to distribute it among their elementary and secondary assistant principals. Data was collected using this online service www.surveymonkey.com and the data from participants was de-identified. The survey allowed participants to contact the initial researcher if they were interested in participating in a focus group follow-up. The initial reseacher also contacted school districts in the state of Alabama for permission to send out an email to assistant principals within their district to invite them to participate in a focus group interview. Five focus group interviews were conducted in the state of Alabama with elementary and secondary assistant principals. This qualitative study will only analyze the data from the focus group interviews.

The research questions for this study are:
CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTION
1.How do assistant principals define instructional leadership and what facilitating factors and barriers are found in fulfilling the role of an instructional leader?
SUB-RESEARCH QUESTIONS
1. How do assistant principals define instructional leadership?
2.What are the facilitating factors for assistant principals in performing as instructional leaders?
3.What are the barriers for assistant principals in performing 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)

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 ___Brittney Duncan___ Date _1/24/17_

Signature of Faculty Advisor ___Linda Searby___ Date _1/21/17_

Signature of Department Head ___Sherida Downer___ Date _1/25/2017_

Appendix C

Auburn University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval for Data Set

Auburn University

Auburn University, Alabama 36849-5221

Educational Foundations
Leadership and Technology
4036 Haley Center

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

Date: January 19, 2017
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 Candidate, Brittney Duncan, to utilize data which I collected in 2013-2014 under IRB approval from Auburn University. The candidate is in the Educational Leadership Ph.D. Program and I am serving as her dissertation chair.

This data are from research with assistant principals in Alabama, and have been de-identified. The data are transcribed interviews from five focus groups which I conducted.

The individual 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