EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR PRINCIPALS:

PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR NOVICE PRINCIPALS AT

THE DISTRICT LEVEL

by

DANA HARMAN

STEPHEN TOMLINSON, COMMITTEE CHAIR
BECKY ATKINSON
JOYCE LEVEY
JANE NEWMAN
PHILIP WESTBROOK

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ABSTRACT

Being a school principal is harder than it has ever been before and is becoming increasingly more difficult due to constant, pressing economic, technological, and global changes. Most novice principals will not have a successful first-year experience; they will be expected to effectively lead their schools with little practical knowledge and minimal, if any, support from their school district. This study provides information describing the first-year experience of novice principals and what novice principals want from their district in terms of support and induction.

The qualitative data used in the analysis are from interviews conducted with 7 principals, all having less than 5 years in the principalship. Findings show that novice principals want to participate in induction programs specifically designed to meet their needs as well meeting the district's needs. More specifically, they want well-suited mentors, regular formal meetings with their superintendent, and regular informal meetings with their peer groups.

Considering that school improvement, strong student achievement, and a school culture focused on student learning almost solely rest on the quality of school leadership, this research is significant in identifying novice principals' needs for professional learning support at the district level. Furthermore, recent literature provided by the Georgia State Department of Education indicated the number of principals leaving their positions is increasing; many are retiring, but a large percentage is leaving the principalship, if not public education all together.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Ruth Smith is a novice principal; and although she is beginning her fourth year in the

principalship, serving at two different levels, elementary and middle school, has left her unsure

that she is an effective leader. When Ruth became an elementary school principal, she had little

if any knowledge of the nuances of elementary education. Having been a middle school and high

school teacher for 11 years, the only prior knowledge she brought into the position was from a

parent's perspective.

Because Ruth was a first-year principal, her school district assigned her a mentor. Her

mentor had only a few months more experience than Ruth; she had many problems in her own

school and little time to advise and coach Ruth through her first year. The school district did not

provide support outside assigning a mentor; many district leadership team meetings, which could

have been professional learning opportunities, were cancelled and the superintendent's book

study group did not ever finish its assigned reading. Ruth's elementary principal colleagues

shared that the system's philosophy for improving building-level leadership was, "Don't make

your problems ours; you will hear from us when you mess up." Ruth's saving grace was her

faculty at Rock Valley Elementary School; they accepted her lack of elementary school

knowledge, and worked throughout the first year to teach her as much as possible about

elementary curriculum, instruction, policies, and school culture.

After 3 years at Rock Valley, Ruth was reassigned to a middle school. She was much more confident about this position because her 7 years of teaching experience at this level made her credible to the faculty. She was also confident in her knowledge of a middle school culture.

With this move, the system did not provide a mentor or coach. While Ruth did not believe she needed a mentor, she did wonder what support would be available if she required guidance. She met the other middle school principals, but she did not know them well enough to establish which ones she could turn to for advice. Moreover, when the superintendent met with Ruth to set his expectations for her performance, he explained that there was no reason why Avaville Middle School should not make AYP, given that the faculty was strong, there were good people in key positions, and the students were capable. He expected Ruth to move the school to the next level to ensure that the school made AYP that year, and every year. Ruth left the superintendent's office wondering how on earth she was going to do that without district-level support when the previous principal had not been able to do it in 7 years.

Ruth's story is similar to the experiences of so many other novice principals. The school system leaders hire people they believe possess the talent and skills to be effective school leaders, but then give them the keys to the buildings and tells them that they will be contacted when there is a problem. New principals are cast out and expected to navigate a successful course through the perils of student safety, personnel issues, teacher accountability, and student achievement--all with few, if any, problems.

After 4 years, Ruth is no longer a novice principal and yet there are times when she still feels alone, sometimes lost, and burdened. She expects support from the district level to help her become a successful, effective school principal. What is the school district going to do to provide support before she gives up and quits?

I am Ruth; it is amazing that after 5 years as a principal, these feelings of insecurity still exist. I have just finished meeting with my protégé; it's true--the more things change, the more they stay the same. His frustrations and problems are the same as mine, but I am the experienced principal. What am I able to offer? What should my school district offer him in terms of support? Surely, there is more than my stumbling mentorship. My district, and school districts around the country, must begin to provide leadership development and support before novice principals like my protégé decide to leave the profession.

Statement of the Problem

Most new principals will struggle in their first-year experience. Being a school principal is harder than it has ever been before and is becoming increasingly more difficult, thanks to ever passing economic, demographic, technological, and global changes (Levine, 2005). Many novice principals struggle to effectively lead their faculties through the school improvement process. They feel isolated, and there is no one specifically available to offer them guidance. They have little practical knowledge to draw upon and have had few opportunities to gain practical expertise.

To overcome this shortfall of experienced educational leaders, some school districts have initiated principal induction programs in their school systems. Furthermore, those school districts have taken on the responsibility of leadership development and support in order to improve the skills of new principals while they are on the job. But there are many, if not most, that do not have induction programs in place for their first-year principals. Without such support, novice principals are overwhelmed with the demands and expectations of the job.

This is just one of many reasons why there is a shortage of educational leaders who are ready to take on the principalship. Another reason is that so many sitting principals are leaving the profession, either by retiring or pursuing another career, it is virtually impossible to replace them with experienced people. Another reason is the dynamic change in the role of the principal from building manager to instructional leader. Finally, sitting principals are choosing to leave their positions because of increasing expectations for performance for which they do not believe they are ready. They have a degree in Educational Leadership, but they have no on-the-job experience. Without support from their district, these novice principals are struggling to make the connection between their theoretical knowledge and its practical application.

Why are Principals Leaving and Who Wants to Take Their Place?

The principalship is in a precarious position. Principals are retiring at an alarming rate, and more principals are leaving the profession before retirement. Over the next 5 years, school districts are expecting to replace more than 60% of all principals. This percentage represents not only the retirement of the baby boomers, but also the principals who are leaving the profession. Over an 8-year period, the attrition rate of principals is 45% to 55%, with the greatest attrition occurring during the first 3 years on the job (Grogan & Andrews, 2002). Dwindling resources, overwhelming paperwork, crumbling facilities, and increasing demands for accountability are among the reasons why over 40% of principals have left the position over the last 10 years, a turnover rate that is likely to continue into the next decade (Matthews, 2002).

In Georgia, the attrition rate of principals is 14.4%; 310 principals left their positions at the end of the 2006 school year. The mean age of principals who left their positions in 2006 was 51.8 years, and they ranged in age from 28-70 years. The average experience of principals who

leave continues to decline gradually every year, decreasing from 26.5 years in 2003 to 24.9 years in 2006. As in previous years, most principals (56.8%, $n = 176$) who left their positions left the Georgia public school system altogether. Other principals who left their positions either returned to an assistant principalship (25) or returned to teaching (13) (Afolabi, Eads, & Nweke, 2008).

Most disconcerting is that there are educators with leadership certification who choose not to move into the principalship. Pounder and Crow (2005) asserted that educators across the board increasingly see the role of the principal as being more challenging and less desirable than the job is worth. Additional research findings suggest that the shortage of candidates seems to be attributed not only to the way we have chosen to operate schools, but also to three additional factors: (a) nature of the job, (b) insufficient salary to warrant the risks and personal time to assume the position, and (c) lack of mobility of candidates to accept jobs that are open. A fourth factor is, surely, the additional stress of meeting state benchmarks to remain accredited in this era of high stakes testing and accountability (Grogan & Andrews, 2002).

Irwin (2002) talked with principals about their increased level of stress. They were the first to arrive at school each morning, they stayed past normal working hours to meet with parents and community leaders, and they frequently gave up their personal time to attend student activities. A little more than a decade ago, principals were supervisors who handled discipline, buses, and lunchroom duties. They completed the minimum classroom observations, and spoke with parents at athletic events. Today's school leaders must increasingly work with teachers and parents to overcome obstacles that prevent students from achieving a quality education (Irwin, 2002). A decade later, leaders must have strategic plans in place that shape the learning environment and create a collaborative culture centered on student academic achievement. Principals must develop professional learning communities that maximize teachers' instructional

skills and content knowledge. These are complex and demanding tasks. Irwin (2002) concluded, "It is no wonder that it has become extremely difficult to find new principals" (p. 41).

Many school districts in the nation are struggling to persuade educators with leadership certification to consider or prepare to move into the principalship (Lauder, 2000). A nationwide study of the school principalship found that the number of aspiring principals produced from university educational leadership programs is estimated to be two to three times the number of job vacancies, due to retirement and attrition; however, district-level leaders question the readiness of these candidates to become effective leaders. In fact, it is projected that of those candidates graduating from a university program, only a small percentage will have the skills necessary to be highly effective principals in their first year (Grogan & Andrews, 2002).

School districts with leadership development and support programs, however, are building a pool of principals who are ready to effectively face the overwhelming challenges in their first years. These superintendents realize the necessity of building upon the knowledge aspiring leaders have, to insure that they make the smooth transition into the principalship. They also realize the necessity of providing the support to maintain the district's leadership integrity.

Being a principal is challenging, gut-wrenching, heartbreaking work. With the exodus of so many principals, more and more candidates are unwilling to move into the leadership role. Why has being the principal become so difficult?

What is the Role of the Principal?

The principalship is a complex and demanding job, as the principal's office houses all the responsibility for school operations and student success (Linn, Sherman, & Gill, 2007). Principals in this 21st century are expected to know more and to do more, and yet maintain a

balance so that they do not fail to meet those expectations. Even though the specific targets are

constantly moving, principals are expected to have the skills set necessary for immediate

success; for new principals, there is no time for failure or incompetence. In addition to building

the skills set for overseeing school operations, principals must first become highly

knowledgeable instructional leaders focused on student success.

Instructional leadership is one of seven correlates of the effective schools research

conducted in the 1980s (Association for Effective Schools, 1996). The correlates are the means

to achieving high levels of student learning. They have been replicated in numerous educational

studies since the 1980s and the results indicate that when school improvement processes are

founded upon the effective schools research, the proportion of students that achieve academic

excellence either improves or remains the same.

> In the effective school, the principal acts as an instructional leader and effectively and
> persistently communicates that mission to the staff, parents, and students. The principal
> understands and applies the characteristics of instructional effectiveness in the
> management of the instructional program. (Association for Effective Schools, 1996)

The principal's role as instructional leader has evolved over the past 2 decades. Pre-

service training is beginning to give way to dramatically different forms of principal preparation.

Driving this monumental change is the understanding that what districts are looking for from

school principals is much less managerial in nature and much more academic and instructional in

nature. The reasons for this paradigm shift are clear. The push for unprecedented levels of

improvement in student performance, epitomized by the federal No Child Left Behind Act,

requires a different kind of leadership focused on instruction and achievement. Underpinning

that recognition is a growing body of research on what good leaders do (Olson, 2007).

The principal is now, more than ever, the instructional leader of the school; as

instructional leader, the principal has a myriad of duties and responsibilities. Instructional leaders

analyze data, teach others how to analyze data, and lead others to make instructional decisions based on the data. Instructional leaders not only monitor the implementation of research-based instructional strategies, but also provide instruction and guidance to teachers as they work to improve the quality of instruction in their classrooms. Principals as instructional leaders guide professional learning programs within the school, sometimes as the participant and other times as the leader. The principal must also be knowledgeable about national trends in education such as standards-based instruction and grading or school reform movements. Moreover, the instructional leader must educate teachers and community members alike about the constant change in public education reform.

Principals are held accountable for their knowledge of research-based instructional strategies and monitoring their teachers for the classroom implementation of those strategies. Principals are required to analyze student achievement data, develop school improvement plans based on that data, and monitor the effectiveness of the plans. Principals are shadowed by accountability factors such as "Adequate Yearly Progress" and whether or not their schools are deemed "failing" schools.

The principal's role has shifted from managing and evaluating teachers to creating and maintaining a data-driven collaborative school culture (Bossi, 2007). The principal is both the instructional and learning leader, focused on the achievement of all students. This focus requires a new skills set. The principal must now be able to engage in systems thinking and demonstrate the ability to understand and guide the complex processes of evaluation, change, and group development (Bossi, 2007).

As instructional leaders, principals must build a professional learning community that participates in reflective practice, fully accepting total responsibility for setting student learning

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goals and their achievement of those goals. To do this, principals gather, analyze, and respond to school data then work with teachers in planning, monitoring, and evaluating instructional strategies and resources at all levels to close any achievement gaps revealed in the data analysis (Bossi, 2007). The challenges of accountability can be overwhelming in and of themselves but take into account that these practices might cause teachers to consider a paradigm shift in their instructional values, and the stress of these challenges almost becomes overwhelming for a new principal.

Possibly one of the greatest challenges of being the instructional leader is keeping up-to-date with current trends and research in educational reform. It is imperative to the quality of a school's instructional program that the principal knows, understands, and is able to make decisions based on the most current research.

It is important to note that some of the reform movements also contribute to the complex and changing portraits of principals (Hausman, Crow, & Sperry, 2000). One such reform is school choice. Evidence shows that managing the environment takes a great deal of time because of school choice initiatives, especially those initiatives that afford parents greater influence (i.e., school council elections and meetings). Principals spend more time giving parent tours, holding informational meetings, and creating marketing tools such as brochures.

The demands of school choice reform are similar to the demands of the standards and accountability reforms. Principals are under great pressure to devote the necessary time to each reform and there is not enough time in one day to devote to all reforms. The principal's primary role in accountability reform movements is that of an instructional leader. The primary role in school choice reform is one of community liaison and marketing manager. Very rarely is there enough time in one day to devote a sufficient amount of time necessary to ensure success.

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One last school reform that places demands and expectations on principals is school and community collaboration. When the principal is not holding a school council meeting or observing classrooms to determine which instructional strategies most improve student achievement, he or she is reviewing the character education curriculum, meeting with the counselor to plan Red Ribbon Week, or talking with the local behavioral health institution to arrange for transportation for the two students who will begin their treatment the following week. The extent to which the school serves the needs of youth with disadvantages will be largely contingent on the school's leadership. The importance of interagency collaboration in school has only recently been emphasized and it is probable that the principal will serve at the nexus of this partnership and activate services for many students (Hausman, Crow, & Sperry, 2000).

The contextual nature of the position is inherent with conflicting demands and expectations, and yet school reform efforts in the last several years frequently propose a single concept that the principal needs to be an ideal principal (Hausman, Crow, & Sperry, 2000). Principals must be prepared to take on a world of "decentralized school structures, increasing and changing environmental boundaries and roles, less homogeneous schools, closer contact with stakeholders, and a market-driven view of education" (Hausman, Crow, & Sperry, 2000, p. 12).

In sum, the school principal's job has become almost overwhelming. No longer is the principal's primary role that of a building manager and supervisor. Additional roles are instructional leader, data analyzer and interpreter, school improvement plan developer, instructional monitor, professional learning coordinator, lead learner, and community liaison. Effective principals must focus on their interpersonal skills, capacity to read and adjust to a situation, and ability to understand and cope with far-ranging issues. They must be politically

astute, adaptable, and ethically grounded. It is understandable that educators with leadership

certification are unwilling to leave the comfort of their classrooms to take on the extra work

involved in being a principal in this era of accountability.

<center>I Have My Certification, but Am I Ready to be the Principal?</center>

To what extent have university-based educational leadership programs evolved to meet

the challenge of preparing principals? There are questions about the quality of educational

leadership programs offered in colleges and universities. As a field, despite a few strong

programs across the country, educational administration programs are weak in standards,

curriculum, professoriate, the caliber of students, and scholarship (Levine, 2005).

An educator at Morehead State University, David Barnett (2004), conducted a study on

the applicability of leadership training programs. The results of his research indicated that while

the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards effectively described the

responsibilities of school leaders, the leadership training programs did not provide adequate

preparation of educators in their new role as administrators. In fact, the largest discrepancy in

program offerings and principal needs was in the areas of instructional leadership and

accountability.

In a feature article entitled, "The Accidental Principal: What Doesn't Get Taught at Ed.

Schools," Hess and Kelly (2005) summarized the findings of their research study. They

explained the disparities between the content focus of courses taught in educational leadership

programs and the actual content needs of administrators who are expected to be immediate,

effective instructional leaders. In fact, their results indicated that only a small percentage of

content classes introduced relevant issues such as accountability as a management issue, data

analysis and improvement, and change. Hess and Kelly (2005) asserted that graduates of

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principal preparation programs are ill-equipped for the challenges and opportunities posed by an era of accountability. The question of content is essential; principals receive limited training not only in the use of data and research, but also in personnel areas like termination and systematic evaluation of faculty.

The content taught in traditional university programs suggests an emphasis on training candidates for more traditional leadership roles. Programs appear particularly unprepared to help principals meet the challenges of leading new schools, or operating in a changing policy environment. Many university programs fail to teach the array of skills necessary to lead effective schools (Hess & Kelly, 2005).

Mohn and Machell (2005) studied the differences between staff development courses offered by school districts and university-based principal preparation programs. The purpose of the study was to offer a more unified model of school leader learning. The research indicated that the major distinctions between the two traditional types of learning were related to the focus of learning. University-based programs were often heavily theory-based with a strong emphasis on school management. There was also evidence to support that practitioners believe that the content taught in university-based programs was not connected to what leaders actually need to do in their schools; furthermore, university-based programs provided few practical skills for applying theoretical knowledge to the real world. Mohn and Machell (2005) asserted that the requirements and sanctions of the No Child Left Behind Act cause this to be an ideal time to re-conceptualize learning for both aspiring principals and novice principals.

In 2005, Arthur Levine, former President and Professor of Education at Teachers College, Columbia University, published a report, based on the results of a 4-year study of America's education schools, entitled *Educating School Leaders*. In the study, researchers used a

9-point template to judge the quality of school leadership programs. The 9 points were purpose, curricular coherence, curricular balance, faculty composition, admission requirements, graduation standards (degrees), research, financial resources and systematic self-assessment. Levine (2005) reported, "The findings of this report were very disappointing. Collectively, educational administration programs are the weakest of all the programs at the nation's education schools" (p. 13).

On the 9-point template, the majority of educational leadership programs ranged from inadequate to appalling, even at some of the country's leading universities. Levine (2005) found that the mission of the programs was unclear from their inception. The curricula were disconnected from leaders' needs and the professoriate was ill equipped to educate school leaders. Admission standards were incredibly low and the degrees awarded did not sufficiently meet the needs of today's schools and school leaders. Moreover, the research required from programs' students was detached from actual practice.

According to educational administration alumni surveyed in this 4-year study, 56% reported that a most important resource that education schools needed to do a better job was building a faculty with more experience as practitioners (Levine, 2005). Forty percent stated a more relevant curriculum as one of the three most important resources for success, and 35% believed that the curriculum should require more clinical experiences.

Unfortunately, the metamorphosis of educational leadership programs is not keeping pace with the role changes of the principalship. The roles and daily activities of principals are constantly changing, but they are not educationally prepared to navigate those changes in order to be successful. Hess and Kelly (2005) discovered that a majority of new principals feel less than minimally prepared to take on the new challenges they face as leaders in the new era of

accountability. There must be meaningful reform in the content taught in university educational

leadership programs so that principals are better equipped to meet the challenges of school

leadership in this era of accountability (Hess & Kelly, 2005).

In light of the need for meaningful reform, there are examples of leadership programs in

which universities and school districts are working together to redesign principal preparation

programs. From 2005 through 2008, the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) worked

with the Tennessee State Board of Education and two universities--East Tennessee State

University and the University of Memphis--to pilot redesigned educational leadership

preparation (SREB, 2008). This redesigned program was built around the following components:

- strong university-district partnerships;
- careful selection of candidates;
- intensive and authentic field-based experiences for candidates;
- courses reconceived and redesigned to prepare principals who can lead changes to foster greater motivation and achievement among all groups of students;
- significant mentoring support for all candidates from successful principals and former principals who have been trained to serve as mentors;
- peer support from candidates being trained in cohorts; and
- a high-level commission with diverse membership and a stare board of education mandate to study and recommend policy changes to reform school leader preparation statewide. (p. 1)

This redesigned leadership preparation program is one that represents true meaningful reform

rather than patching holes in a faulty system. Redesigning state leadership standards as well as

the state evaluation system is the beginning of reform necessary to develop high-quality

instructional leaders.

In acknowledging the idea that new principals do not believe they are prepared for their

position, even though they have a Master's degree in Educational Leadership, school districts

should provide support necessary to bridge leadership theory and practical application. New

principals have fundamental, theoretical leadership knowledge; what they do not have is the

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"know-how," those practical competencies gained through working experience. Practice, without theory, cannot alone produce fully skilled behavior in complex situations; however, theory without practice has even less chance of success. Theory and practice are intertwined in a mutually supportive process as a new principal develops his or her skill (Benner, 2009). Both must be cultivated as a novice principal grows and gains expertise.

Conclusion

Today's successful principal must demonstrate strong instructional leadership to meet the new and challenging goals set forward in this era of accountability (Quinn, 2002). The responsibility for raising achievement levels of all students rests squarely on the principal's shoulders. Today's principal must also be a manager, visionary, politician, strategist, community leader, and, after 9/11, an emotional leader as well (Kennedy, 2002).

There are few principals prepared to successfully carry out all of these roles. Experienced teacher leaders who have a leadership degree are electing to stay in the classroom; new principals who just finished their university educational leadership programs are being placed in low-performing schools. Most new principals entering the profession lack the skills, knowledge, or experience to succeed. In some states, the transition time from assistant principal to principal is less than 2 years. In other states, a large percentage of principals have less than 3 years experience in the job. Even the experienced, successful principals are discovering they cannot sustain the level of energy and enthusiasm it takes to continue. Exhausted, they are leaving before retirement or at their first opportunity for retirement (Quinn, 2002).

The principalship is in a precarious position. Novice principals need support and guidance during their first years in the principalship. School systems have the opportunity to

develop quality principal candidates by committing to provide the support necessary to keep people in leadership positions. By supporting principals at the beginning of their careers, they will develop the skills and gain the experience that will help them successfully lead schools in this era of accountability.

Significance of the Problem

School improvement, strong student achievement, and a school culture focused on student learning almost solely rests on the quality of school leadership. "Everything rises and falls on leadership" (Maxwell, 1993, p. viii). In 2007-2008, 326 out of 2,100 Georgia public schools were in "Needs Improvement" status as defined by the No Child Left Behind Act (Afolabi, Eads, & Nweke, 2008). Of those 326, there were 115 schools at consequence level 3 or higher. Research supports that putting young, inexperienced principals in low-performing schools is a common practice, because the pool of candidates is so shallow, school districts have little choice. However, districts do have a choice about how much and what kind of support and development to provide for these novice principals.

What are school systems to do, given that university educational leadership programs are slow to make necessary changes to meet the challenging needs of school principals? There are school districts that are implementing programs for novice principals that provide the support necessary to develop leaders who will be successful and stay in leadership positions. What about all the school districts without a vision for leadership? As public education changes at rates unparalleled in its history, what will it take for districts to realize the incredible need for district-level leadership development and support?

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Purpose

It is my goal that this study will prove to districts the monumental necessity of using their resources to create a systemic change that values leadership development and support. Without such reform, changes in leadership preparation are likely to be short-lived (SREB, 2008). Due to current economic conditions, districts are cutting leadership support programs from their budgets; it is a short-term, easy economic sacrifice, but at what long-term expense? Because leadership development is crucial to the long-term success of a school district, it is too important to make it dependent on funding.

What are the characteristic features of an effective professional learning program for novice principals? This study addressed this question by interviewing 7 novice principals whose districts did not provide a formal support program. For the purpose of this study, a "novice principal" is one who has served as a principal for less than 4 years. The purpose was to gather practicing novice principals' perspectives on their first-year experience and to learn if these principals think participating in a district new principals' induction program would have been useful during the first year in their position. Hopefully, professional development directors in public school systems will find the results of this research valuable in their efforts to create effective professional learning programs for novice administrators. Finally, university and college professors might use the information to assess the value of their curricula and build in ways to articulate with district programs for the improvement of leadership skills.

Research Questions

The goal of this dissertation study was to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the first-year experience of new principals who are not involved in a leadership induction program?

2. Do these new principals think participating in an induction program would have been beneficial during the first year? If so, what are their ideas about the curriculum and design of such a program?

Definitions of the Study

Novice--principal who has 4 or fewer years in the principalship.

Induction program--designed to provide support and guidance necessary and unique to new principals.

Formal support--organized, planned meetings designed to focus on the needs and skills unique to new principals.

Professional learning--lessons and activities developed to teach new principals identified skills, theory, and practical application

Mentor--an advisor.

Formal mentoring--assigned relationship in which a mentor and a protégé are well-matched; mentor and protégé have clear roles, goals, and expectations of their relationship.

Participants in the study were employed in two Georgia school districts. Both districts were rural and had more than one middle school and high school; both educated approximately 12,000 students. Districts were comparable with reference to special education population, free and reduced lunch population, student ethnic populations, and graduation rate.

Methodology

I identified 7 novice principals whose districts did not offer the formalized support inherent in an induction program. I conducted qualitative research using phenomenological methods to learn more about new principals' first-year experiences. My goal was to gain insight into what these principals thought about participating in a district leadership induction program. Essentially, did they think an induction program would have been useful during their first year? Moreover, what components did they believe should be incorporated in such a support program?

In order to answer my research questions, I arranged formal interviews with each principal. I was interested in these principals' detailed descriptions of their first-year experiences. I hoped to gain insight into their thoughts, feelings, and ideas about that experience. I wanted to see the essence of that experience--stresses, goals, joys, frustrations, and needs. I then wanted to learn what these principals expected from their districts in terms of professional support during that year. What could that experience have been with the formal support of their districts? What could they have learned through an induction program instead of through "trial by fire?" What mistakes could have been thwarted? What more could have been achieved?

Summary

Most new principals will struggle in their first-year experience. There are school districts that do not provide formal support through an induction program. That support is necessary to better ensure first-year success, which might convince principals to stay in this profession. The purpose of this qualitative study was to report the first-year experience of novice principals and discuss what these new principals think about participating in an induction program. Working

directly with these principals provided a solid foundation for any school district to consider as it

develops or revises its own leadership support program.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

What are school systems doing to support the success of their new, young leaders? An

assistant superintendent of human resources lamented:

> I see the new, young ones struggling in their first administrative positions. Sometimes I
> feel like we row them out to the middle of the lake and just throw them in, hoping that
> they'll learn to swim. They are strong and brave, but the water is colder now, deeper now,
> and the shore is farther away that it was when I was thrown into my first leadership
> position. I wish I could help them, but I'm barely able to meet the demands of my own
> job. I'm not sure how, but we've got to do something. (Bossi, 2007, p. 33)

Literature relevant to this study is presented in this chapter. The primary focus of this review is

research on effective professional learning for school leadership, primarily related to new or

novice principals. The review is presented as follows: (a) the need for reformation of current

university educational administration programs, (b) the professional development needs of

principals, and (c) examples of effective professional learning programs.

University Educational Administration Programs: The Need for Change

Researchers have conducted many studies that indicate university educational

administration programs are in danger of becoming obsolete. For example, in *Questioning the*

Core of University-Based Programs for Preparing School Leaders, Murphy (2007) contended

that the fatal flaw of all university leadership programs is the "elevation of academe over the

domain of practice" (p. 582). Universities have built their programs solely on theory and the

academe of leadership thus marginalizing the importance of practice. Murphy (2007) further contended that universities marginalize practice and glorify knowledge generated by people who really do not know the business of schooling or leading schools. Even though there are universities working to redesign educational administration programs, many critics believe reform efforts are moving too slowly to teach leaders how to become the instructional leader in the school (Hackman & Alsbury, 2005).

In the feature article of *Education Next*, "The Accidental Principal: What Doesn't Get Taught at Ed. Schools," Hess and Kelly (2005) explained the disparities between the content focus of courses taught in educational leadership programs and the actual needs of administrators who are expected to be immediate, effective instructional leaders. Their results indicated that only 13% of the time, specific coursework actually addressed how school management is linked to state assessments, standards-based accountability systems such as Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), or any other demands of NCLB (Hess & Kelly, 2005). In fact, only 2% of all instruction emphasizes accountability as a management issue.

Leadership also requires that principals be familiar with data and research. Hess and Kelly (2005) noted that approximately 29% of the instructional time categorized as "managing for results" addressed data, technology, or research skills. That 29% represented only 6% of the class sessions linking these skills with effective school management. The question of course content is pivotal. Their research indicated that principals receive very limited training about necessary leadership skills such as the use and analysis of data, technology, and research. Principals are also limited in their training in personnel issues such as hiring quality employees, terminating incompetent employees, and using data in the employee evaluation process.

In sum, the authors concluded that principal preparation programs continue to train principals to do the things they have traditionally done--manage facilities, develop budgets, monitor curricula, and encourage faculty. There must be a meaningful reform in the content taught in university educational leadership programs, they argue, so that principals are better equipped to meet the challenges of today's school leadership (Hess & Kelly, 2005).

Practicing principals also advocate reform of preparation programs. Brown (2006) urged university leadership programs to adopt four changes to increase the likelihood of their graduates' success. In facing the accountability pressures in this *No Child Left Behind* era, universities must be willing to make the changes necessary to help develop educational leaders capable of overcoming new challenges. Brown (2006) suggested that universities raise admission requirements, rethink required coursework, establish appropriate program standards, and broaden the learning experience for leaders.

Perhaps the greatest indictment of university educational administration programs comes from an extensive report published by the Education Schools Project in 2005. The report is based on a 4-year research study of programs across the nation, including case studies of 28 schools and departments of education chosen to reflect the diversity by region, religion, race, gender, and Carnegie type.

Reporting the findings, Levine (2005) concluded that universities, policymakers, and school systems should pursue three strategies for improving the preparation of school administrators: eliminate the incentives that promote low quality educational leadership programs, enact high standards and close inadequate programs when necessary, and redesign curricula and degree options to make them more relative to the needs of the principals and superintendents. He offered the following recommendations:

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- School systems, municipalities, and states must find alternatives to salary scales that grant raises merely for accumulating credits and degrees;
- Universities must champion high standards for education schools and their leadership programs by embracing financial practices that strengthen those programs;
- Weak programs should be strengthened or closed;
- The current grab bag of courses that constitutes preparation for a career in educational leadership must give way to a relevant and challenging curriculum designed to prepare effective school leaders. A new degree, the Master's in Educational Administration, should be developed;
- The doctor of education degree (Ed.D.) in school leadership should be eliminated; and
- The doctor of philosophy degree (Ph.D.) in school leadership should be reserved for preparing researchers. (pp. 63-68)

He concluded that the findings of this study would not surprise education schools or their leadership programs; in fact, Levine (2005) asserted that leaders of university programs typically deny their problems and resist improvement. Facing the facts, he cautions university-based programs to make the necessary reforms before they are completely replaced by alternative routes for people to enter school leadership careers.

Pioneering Change

Responding to Levine's challenge, universities are working to improve their educational administration programs. Most notably, university faculty are joining with local school districts to redesign programs of study that better meet the complex needs of school principals. Martin and Papa (2008) contended that effective principal preparation requires a partnership between school districts and universities. Their article examined the major obstacles that stand in the way of closing the gap between university preparation and real-world practice. As Executive Director of the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA), Martin professed the NCPEA is dedicated to addressing the obstacles and resolving them.

One obstacle is that many educational leadership programs serve educators who are not interested in being a principal. The authors suggested that school districts partner with

universities to select candidates for master's degrees and entry into administrative certification programs. A partnership of this kind could decrease the number of educators who are not principal candidates and therefore possibly improve programs' effectiveness (Martin & Papa, 2008).

Another obstacle is that principal preparation places too much weight on class lectures and theory and not enough emphasis on practical application. Being an effective school leader is better achieved through action. Field-based activities that link theory and application should be designed to meet the needs of adult learners. The context of practical application activities should be the schools in which principal candidates serve. School districts and universities working together to design curricula, research, and application activities is an effective method to achieve the necessary balance between theory and practice (Martin & Papa, 2008).

Martin and Papa (2008) also cited that communication and collaboration between universities and school districts is short-term, isolated, and sporadic. In addition, preparation programs provide inconsistent systems for continued learning; practicing principals take the initiative to continue their training. However, the NCPEA supports the belief that many of the issues discussed in this article can be resolved through active, collaborative relationships between universities and their neighboring school districts.

Quinn (2005) emphasized the need for universities to drastically change principal preparation programs to comply with the NCLB goal of improved student achievement. He provided many examples of partnerships between universities and school districts which reflect efforts to reform leadership development programs. Efforts include building on Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards, candidate recruitment, and curriculum overhaul.

One partnership that focuses on candidate recruitment is the program between University of North Texas and the Dallas Independent School District. Using several criteria, teams from both groups meet together to evaluate nominees. The criteria are as follows: a record of ongoing professional development, demonstrated knowledge of instructional technology, an increase in student achievement, and experience working with all stakeholders in a school community. In addition, nominees must meet the standard university admissions requirements. Similar partnerships are located at Rutgers University and the University of Buffalo in New York.

Quinn (2005) also cited the partnership between the University of Oklahoma and the public schools of Tulsa and Oklahoma City. The reform efforts there focus on curriculum, with university students meeting regularly with school improvement teams to discuss real problems and examine possible solutions.

Such collaboration between universities and school districts are the foundation for positive program reform. In this way, principal candidates can be more competent instructional leaders, qualified, and committed to meet the NCLB mandates.

There are exemplary university/school district partnerships that provide extensive support to building principals; the Washoe County School District (WCSD) in Reno, Nevada, collaborated with the University of Nevada, the University of Phoenix, and the University of Pittsburgh to establish the Principals' Academy in 2001. The academy is a 10-tier model that professionalizes the principalship from pre-novice to distinguished expertise (Hall & Harris, 2008). The academy has provided leadership training, mentorship, coaching, and professional learning to practicing administrators as well as other professionals in different roles throughout the school district.

Tier 1 is the recruitment phase in which participants are introduced to school administration. Tier 2 is an apprenticeship. In a joint effort with the universities, participants are offered college credit for internships outside their school settings. They collaborate with the sitting administrators and leaders and work directly with students, teachers, parents, and staff on a variety of initiatives in the school. Tier 3 is a leadership institute that focuses on preservice training to aspiring administrators. Again, the institute is a collaborative effort between the WCSD and the universities (Hall & Harris, 2008).

Tier 5 is the "First Years" training series for all new principals in the WCSD; the principals are divided into cohort groups that meet regularly. They network with experienced mentor principals and participate in complex problem-solving exercises. Mentors meet with new principals in smaller learning communities to perform walk-throughs in schools, to engage in book studies, and to collaborate to build relationships and leadership capacity in first-year administrators.

Tiers 6 through 10 are designed to further support new principals over the first 5 years of their administrative careers. There are mentorships, academic initiatives, veteran administrative support, and the opportunities for a doctorate as well as National Board Certification. WCSD recognizes that developing school principals as instructional leaders is essential to meaningful school improvement; the Principals' Academy is designed to support promising administrators as novices all the way through the continuum to expert building principals (Hall & Harris, 2008).

In sum, universities must be aggressive in the improvement of educational administration programs. The metamorphosis has been slow; there are university faculty members who have not been open to reform efforts. However, with the support of highly influential organizations such as the SREB, there are universities who are taking the lead to bring about change. It will be a

disservice to children and schools if more academic institutions do not embrace the responsibilities of change.

<p style="text-align:center">Professional Development: What Do Principals Need?</p>

Before 2001, principals' daily roles and responsibilities were managerial in nature, governing the behavior of the people in the building as well as directing the facility itself. Since 2001, the role of the school administrator has changed from manager to instructional leader (Barnett, 2004). In addition to managing the daily activities in the school, the principal leads professional learning communities, analyzes student achievement data, develops a comprehensive school improvement plan, and presents all of this information to the school's stakeholders. The principal monitors classrooms to ensure teachers are focused on student learning and using effective, research-based instructional strategies to provide content knowledge. The principal engages in shared decision-making strategies; there is no longer a top-down hierarchy in which the principal governs autocratically.

In response to concerns that many university programs do not effectively blend theory and practice, Fleck (2007) addressed what veteran colleagues and school districts can do to help new principals be better prepared in their jobs. In order to share their best practices and strategies, veteran principal colleagues were encouraged to invite new principals to informal gatherings and to schedule regular luncheons. These small, informal meetings create opportunities to reflect and share concerns and build relationships. Furthermore, veteran principals should promote networking opportunities and should offer and ask for assistance with school problems. These kinds of interactions will build confidence in new principals (Fleck, 2007).

The article also lists district-level constructs that bridge the gap between theory and practical knowledge. The author suggested that school districts need to

- Create a new principal induction program;
- Create a quality mentoring program;
- Set goals with new principals and meet to discuss them on a regular basis;
- Create networking opportunities for new principals to meet together regularly;
- Require new principals to visit other principals within their district; and
- Encourage attendance at principal meetings within their region (p. 26)

"Learning the work of any occupation is difficult and time-consuming," (Peterson & Cosner, 2005, p. 28). New school leaders need a variety of learning opportunities to acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to successfully accomplish what is expected of them. On-the-job training is the chief learning opportunity for many new principals; however, school districts can provide more effective professional development.

Effective professional development is structured collaborative learning embedded within work context. Peterson and Cosner (2005) contended that school districts can use four different approaches to enhance leaders' opportunities to learn from on-the-job experience. One approach is to provide structured interactions with the superintendent; learning and support is viewed as more effective when the superintendent is aware of the principal's school context. If the superintendent has an in-depth knowledge of the principal's school, the principal can target problems to discuss during a structured meeting. Superintendents facilitate structured meetings by participating in joint school tours followed by analysis and by holding monthly meetings with principals with specific agendas focused on solving current daily problems in schools.

A second approach is structured interactions with experienced administrators; these interactions can also support learning from one's experiences. School districts use regularly scheduled team meetings designed to address new principals' context-specific learning needs.

These interactions provide opportunity for reflective discussions and deeper analyses of complex issues (Peterson & Cosner, 2005).

Another approach that enhances a new principal's on-the-job training is having a mentor or coach. A mentor and coach provide critical job-embedded support not only to novice principals, but experienced principals as well. Mentors who regularly visit principals and observe classrooms gain important insight into a school's context thereby giving strong support to new principals who are learning on the job.

A final approach suggested by Peterson and Cosner (2005) is customized, collaborative ventures between school districts and local universities. Designing professional development customized within the context of the local district allows for case-based and problem-based learning for new leaders. Analyzing learning cases and participating in structured discussions help principals be more effective in their daily work.

Peterson (2002) asserted that successful professional development requires insightfully designed structures and value-driven cultural elements. Structures such as mission, curriculum, instructional approaches, and use of time are important to supporting learning. Cultural elements such as rituals, ceremonies, symbols, and values are also essential to building a sense of community, building a sense of commitment, and enhancing motivation to learn.

Successful professional development programs for school administrators have common structural arrangements. Successful programs have a clear focus on specific leadership skills administrators need to improve student learning. Articulating the purpose of the program is essential to its success. In addition, curriculum coherence is vital to a program's success; the curricula should have an integrated, carefully planned set of topics, skills, and conceptualizations based on a defined sequence of well-considered learning objectives (Peterson, 2002). The

instructional strategies used in the program are also key to a successful program. A variety of approaches includes experiential learning, small group work, simulation, role-playing, case study, and action research; the effectiveness of a program could improve through the use of a variety of instructional strategies geared toward adult learning.

In sum, effective professional development for principals is essential to school improvement. Research indicates that traditional university preparation programs for principals are too theoretical and classroom-oriented, and, therefore, ineffective. The report not only outlines four sets of standards for principals' professional learning, but also suggests ways to improve professional learning at both the university and school district levels (NSDC, 2000).

The four sets of standards for principals' professional learning outlined in this report are standards for student learning, teaching, staff development, and instructional leadership. The National Staff Development Council (NSDC) contended that any professional development must be founded upon one or more of these standards to be most effective. The council's suggestions for universities are that university training should be more job-embedded, continuous, and long-term. Regular school visits by principals to observe their peers' work are also advocated (NSDC, 2000). In conjunction with effective professional development at the university level, the NSDC suggested that school districts help principals distribute leadership, focus on selection and continuous learning of principals, fund apprenticeships, assign coaches, and make time for ongoing learning and development.

Novice-Expert Theory

There is a relationship between theory and practice in the acquisition of skill. First-year principals have a great deal of theoretical knowledge about leadership, but they do not have a

great deal of practical knowledge. Even though many new principals serve as assistant principals, that experience does not necessarily provide the experiences and applications needed for novice principals to perform at an expert level.

In the 1970s, Hubert and Stuart Dreyfus began their seminal research on how people attain and master skills. They studied highly-skilled practitioners, and their research showed the qualitative changes in competence as a person moves from novice to expert (Hunt, 2008). People just do not "know more" or gain skill. Instead, they experience fundamental differences in how they perceive the world, how they approach problem solving, and how someone goes about acquiring new skills over time. In this model of skill acquisition, there are five stages: Novice, Advanced Beginner, Competent, Proficient, and Expert (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 2009).

Through instruction, a novice acquires the rules for drawing conclusions or for determining actions, based on facts or features that are recognizable without experience. A novice can reasonably be expected to have this ability to recognize objective or subjective features based on prior experience in other life arenas (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 2009). A novice practices rigid adherence to what he or she has been taught and are characterized as having little situational perception and no discretionary judgment.

In stage 2, the Advanced Beginner performance improves to a marginally acceptable level only after the novice has considerable experience coping with real situations (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 2009). "Through practical experience in concrete situations with meaningful elements which neither the instructor nor student can define in terms of objective features, that advanced beginner starts intuitively to recognize these elements when they are present" (p. 38). These become "situational" elements that advanced beginners recognize without having prior concrete

experiences. An advanced beginner's situational perception is still limited, but guidelines for action are drawn based on similar prior experiences.

In stage 3, Competence, the learner gains more and more experience, which can be overwhelming in that the learner recognizes an incredible number of potentially relevant situational elements that might cloud judgment. To cope with this problem and move toward competence, people learn through instruction or experience to adopt a hierarchical perspective (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 2009). A competent performer must devise new rules and reasoning procedures for a plan or perspective determination, so that already learned rules for actions based on relevant facts can then be applied.

At this stage, the learner feels great responsibility for his or her actions, which is not characteristic of a learner at the "novice" or "advanced beginner" stage. The competent performer, after wrestling with the question of a choice of perspective or goal, feels responsible for, therefore emotionally involved in, the result of that choice. If a learner moves to this stage and accepts this intuitive involvement, the stage is set for further advancement toward becoming an expert (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 2009). A learner in this stage now sees actions in terms of long-term goals. A competent learner is conscious and deliberate in planning, and develops standardized procedures and routines.

As a learner moves toward stage 4, Proficient, he or she acquires the ability to discriminate among a variety of situations. Added to that concern and involvement, plans of action are intuitively evoked. Action becomes easier and less stressful as the learner simply sees what needs to be achieved rather than deciding by a calculative procedure (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 2009). However, a proficient performer, seeing the goal and the important features of the situation, still must decide what to do. There is still a determination of actions. Someone in the

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"proficient" stage of skill acquisition sees situations holistically, but sees what is most important; therefore, decision making is less labored.

The expert not only knows what needs to be achieved, based on mature and practiced situational discrimination, but also knows how to achieve the goal. A more subtle and refined discrimination ability is what distinguishes the expert from the proficient performer (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 2009). The expert not only sees what needs to be achieved, but also how to achieve it. Experts simply do what experience has shown normally works. While most expert performance is ongoing and non-reflective, the best of experts, when time permits, think before they act. They reflect upon the goal and upon the action that seems appropriate to achieving their goal (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 2009). In essence, beginners follow rules and experts trust intuition. It is through achieving each level of skill acquisition, that a learner gains those experiences upon which intuition is nurtured.

This model of skill acquisition could be fundamental in informing the design of principal preparation programs. Education is one profession that does not inherently guide its leaders through the novice stage toward competence in skills and practice. There is no innate framework for this process to take place. Districts must be deliberate and conscientious in providing a program that identifies leadership potential and then develops that potential into expertise. One vehicle used to accomplish this task is professional learning.

<center>Examples of Effective Professional Learning Programs</center>

The NSDC has published a great deal of literature about professional learning for principals. Sparks, Executive Director of NSDC (2002), asserted that the strongest forms of professional learning for principals are job-embedded and standards-based. Educational Research

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Service's publication *Professional Development for School Principals* (as cited in Sparks, 2002) defined effective staff development as long term and planned, focused on student achievement, supportive of reflective practice, and designed with opportunities to work with peers.

Effective professional learning includes using data for continuous school improvement, training in interpersonal relationships, and studying organizational change processes. Furthermore, high quality methods of staff development include ongoing study groups, regular visits to colleagues' schools to learn more about instruction and to provide support, and frequent in-school coaching on critical skills such as monitoring teachers to improve classroom instruction, and the critique of student work samples (NSDC, 2000).

One model of effective professional learning involves a strong working relationship between school systems and universities that bridges the gap between theoretical concepts taught in the classroom and practices that comprise a principal's day (Davenport, 2001). An example of this model is the educational partnership between the Kansas State University College of Education and its local school districts. Devin (2004) outlined the steps taken to design the (PALA) Professional Administrative Leadership Academy. First, the PALA Planning Committee clarified the purpose of the academy, which was to increase the number of qualified candidates for future leadership positions in the participating school systems. The committee then outlined expectations for the project (Devin, 2004). Second, the committee developed the process for selecting participants. Establishing appropriate selection criteria was critical in finding candidates who could work through the complexities of leading schools in the NCLB era (Browne-Ferrigno & Shoho 2002). The planning committee then constructed the budget and identified available resources. Step four involved determining program content and establishing program standards. The committee decided that the ISLLC standards were the framework of the

curriculum and that the 21 competencies for principals identified by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration would intertwine through the standards and field experiences. Steps five and six focused on the assessment of student progress at the end of each year during the 2-year program. The assessment tool was a required Masters portfolio, consisting of self-reflection assignments, a mentoring log, feedback from mentors using specifically designed rubrics, and personal interviews (Devin, 2004).

The academy is one model used in effective professional learning programs. Others include learning portfolios, cohort groups, professional learning communities, and mentoring. Many effective programs use one or more of these models concurrently. One example is the learning program developed by Jefferson County Public Schools in Louisville, Kentucky (Richardson, 2000). This program, designed for middle school principals, has four components. The principals function as a cohort group founded upon common educational interests. They participate in a traditional institute of learning, meet regularly for staff development days dedicated to one specific area of instruction, and design their individual professional development plans as well as a peer evaluation program (Richardson, 2000).

The unified model of learning outlined by Mohn and Machell (2005) includes learning activities that focus on professional standards (ISLLC) combined with an emphasis on competencies related to school improvement. The learning activities occur at both school and district sites, and are facilitated by administrative practitioners and university faculty members. The target population is a combination of acting school principals and aspiring school principals.

Mohn and Machell (2005) contended that the use of both administrative practitioners and university faculty members provide a higher level of current practical knowledge, skills, and competencies that correlate with greater authentic learning. In addition, the target population

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creates a system of peer support and mentoring; that system of support is crucial to not only the learning activities such as field-based experiences, but also for the learners as they attempt to implement new learning into their leadership practices.

The Collaborative Principal Preparation Program (CPPP) is highlighted in this article. School administration faculty members from a regional state university met with superintendents from six suburban districts in a Midwestern metropolitan area in the fall of 2001 to develop the CPPP. One fundamental purpose of developing a new preparation program was to address the areas of concern about traditional principal preparation programs and the growing need for high quality leadership candidates to fill projected vacancies in administrative positions (Mohn & Machell, 2005). Because districts sought high quality candidates, each district used its own selection criteria to identify potential administrative candidates who were perceived to have the potential to become strong instructional leaders; these candidates entered the program in the initial cohort.

Collaboration between the university and the school districts was a hallmark of the CPPP. A leadership team was created at the beginning of the program; the team consisted of a representative from each school district, the regional professional development center, and faculty members from the participating university. This instructional team met three times each year to coordinate activities, review progress, evaluate results, and make modifications to improve the program (Mohn & Machell, 2005).

Several components of the program were designed to specifically address the concerns related to traditional principal preparation programs. One component was the selection of university faculty; members of the university faculty group were former school administrators with extensive experience in public schools. The emphasis throughout the program was a

balanced approach between theory and practice. Another concern was the content taught in the program classes; the leadership team reviewed course syllabi to make sure the material was relevant to the demands of school leadership. The leadership team also provided opportunities for practicing administrators to teach topics in courses in which they had expertise. In addition, participating districts selected strong instructional leaders to serve as mentors to students throughout the 2-year program. Students and their mentors worked together regularly to complete activities and assignments; this gave them the opportunity to reflect on the content being learned and its connection to administrative practice (Mohn & Machell, 2005).

A final component of the CPPP was a structured support system in the districts once candidates became practicing administrators. The CPPP worked to gain funding to support enhanced professional development opportunities for program students and their mentors. The goal was to put in place continuous improvement and structured support for new administrators (Mohn & Machell, 2005).

Mohn and Machell (2005) reported several strengths of the CPPP. First, the students are engaged in learning activities related to school improvement. The activities are structured to ensure that students worked regularly with their mentors.

Another strength of the program is mentors' participation in professional development. Mentors have the opportunity to learn from recognized authorities in order to enhance their skills as well as gain insight into the perspectives of an aspiring administrator. CPPP training opportunities are also made available to any district administrator who wished to attend. Training opportunities include walk-through supervision, data analysis, and performance-based teacher evaluation. Participating in these learning activities with aspiring leaders gives practitioners the opportunity to gain perspective from students and learn from each other.

The CPPP also provides university faculty members with the opportunity to participate in professional development activities that allow them to stay current in the areas of instructional leadership and school improvement. Systematic contact between school districts and university faculty members enable faculty members to establish a consistent perspective of what educational leadership students need to know to become effective instructional leaders.

This model of learning (CPPP) should give aspiring school leaders a strong knowledge base. The model "holds promise in terms of increasing organizational capacity by ensuring that all schools have in place a highly qualified school leader and a system for renewing this critical and rapidly diminishing human resource" (Mohn & Machell, 2005).

The National Institute of School Leadership (NISL) borrowed from the leadership practices of other professions to build an innovative program for principals. This principal training program resulted from a study that found disconnects between education leadership programs and what principals need to know and be able to do to guide improved instruction (Hughes, 2005). The program focus is training principals to be change agents in their schools, giving them strategies to change school culture through high expectations for all, a commitment to prove instruction, and a dedication to the single strategic goal--high achievement for all students.

The NISL uses facilitators to train principals to head leadership teams. Those teams then train cohorts of school leaders in the skills needed to meet the requirements of increased accountability. The NISL program trains principals to do the following:

- Formulate a clear vision that inspires others;
- Think strategically;
- Lead the implementation of fully aligned, standards-based instructional systems;
- Build effective math, reading, and writing programs;
- Design and implement professional development programs;
- Manage for results that produce steady improvements in student achievement;

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- Coach faculty teams to get the job done; and
- Foster ethical and moral behavior in a just, fair, and caring culture. (p. 36)

The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) recognized the critical role school principals play in school improvement and increased student achievement. The organization is taking deliberate steps to help states achieve their goal of improved school leadership (SREB, 2008). The SREB Learning-Centered Leadership Program is designed to assist states and school districts with the reform of leadership preparation and professional development programs to align such programs with accountability systems and standards that focus on student learning. This program supports states and districts through major initiatives focused on research and benchmark reports, program models, annual forums, and curriculum modules.

Through research and literature reviews, the SREB identified 13 "Critical Success Factors" (CSFs) associated with building principals who have worked to improve student achievement in their schools. These factors are the foundation of the work of the Learning-Centered Leadership Program:

> *Competency I: Effective principals have a comprehensive understanding of school and classroom practices that contribute to student achievement;*
> - CSF 1---Focusing on student achievement
> - CSF 2---Developimg a culture of high expectations
> - CSF 3---Designing a standards-based instructional system
> *Competency II: Effective principals have the ability to work with teachers and others to design and implement continuous student improvement;*
> - CSF 4---Creating a caring environment
> - CSF 5---Implementing data-based improvement
> - CSF 6---Communicating
> - CSF 7---Involving parents
> *Competency III: Effective principals have the ability to provide the necessary support for staff to carry out sound school, curriculum, and instructional practices;*
> - CSF 8---Initiating and managing change
> - CSF 9---Providing professional development
> - CSF 10---Innovating
> - CSF 11---Maximizing resources
> - CSF 12---Building external support
> - CSF 13---Staying abreast of effective practices. (pp. 2-3)

Summary

Novice principals graduate from their university educational leadership programs lacking the skills necessary to be dynamic, even effective, leaders. According to Hess and Kelly (2005), "The principal's critical role in the No Child Left Behind era may just be taken for granted. There is growing evidence to suggest that the revolution in school organization, management, and curricular affairs may have left principals behind" (p. 35). School systems have taken opportunities to work with universities to design leadership learning that is theoretical yet applicable to the reality of school leadership. Effective professional learning for principals should be standards-based, job-embedded, and long-term. School principals must be more than building managers, they should become instructional leaders who affect change that improves student achievement.

This review presents several models of leadership development that go beyond the traditional university educational leadership programs. Undeniably, the question remains, are these programs producing more effective leaders? The purpose of this study was to learn about the first-year experience of novice principals who did not participate in a district induction program. Additionally, the purpose was to discover if novice principals think an induction program would have been useful to them during their first year. It is hopeful that my findings will inform the literature review. If the principalship is to survive, school districts need to make steady progress in developing exemplary leaders. This means providing support and guidance, including effective improvement strategies and appropriate training (Matthews, 2002). My findings might not only add to the literature, but also show just how much new leaders think induction programs are absolutely necessary to their success in their first year as principal.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to describe the first-year experience of new principals. Moreover, do these principals think a district induction program for new principals would have been helpful to them during the first year? Essential to this research is the central question posed by Evans and Mohr (1999), "Can principals' professional development improve practice?"

Leithwood, Strauss, and Anderson (2007) discovered that principals agreed that professional learning opportunities provided by their school districts positively affected their job performance. Positive feelings of efficacy were also found when districts provided individualized support for principals in accordance with the challenges they were facing in their schools. However, very little is known about how districts should design professional development programs that can develop and sustain effective leadership practices (LaPointe & Davis, 2006). It is my hope that this research study will provide relevant and timely knowledge of effective professional learning and induction for new principals.

Research Questions

The goal of this dissertation study is to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the first-year experience of new principals who are not involved in a leadership induction program?

2. Do these new principals think participating in an induction program would have been beneficial during the first year? If so, what are their ideas about the curriculum and design of such a program?

Research Design

Answering these research questions demanded an understanding of the participants' beliefs about an induction program and its potential influence on their practices as school principals. This was best done through a qualitative inquiry designed to reveal the complexity of reasons and values that shape an individual's thought or action. I sought participants' beliefs and understandings about their first-year experience, which is best done through qualitative research. The strength of qualitative research is its ability to provide complex textual descriptions of how people experience a given phenomenon (Family Health International, 2010). Central to this approach are the assumptions that individuals are embedded in a social context of rules and practices that shape understanding and provide meaning and purpose to behavior. Furthermore, the key to explaining a person's actions is the discovery of their knowledge, beliefs, and desires; discovering their view of the situation, the goals they set, and the means they employ to achieve these ends. Moreover, the explanation results when the participants' understanding of this set of dynamic factors is made intelligible to the researcher. This is the purpose of qualitative inquiry.

Overview of Qualitative Research

There are many kinds of qualitative research, methodology, and traditions of inquiry. In general, as Creswell (1998) explained, they share a common goal of exploring social or human problems. "The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed

views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting" (p. 15). Researchers undertake qualitative studies in a natural setting, playing a key role in collecting data as words or pictures. Other characteristics include the idea that the outcome is the process and not the product of the study, and that data are analyzed inductively, paying attention to participants' perspectives and meanings, and the researcher uses expressive language (Creswell, 1998).

Qualitative research seeks out the "why," not the "how" of its topic through the analysis of unstructured information; it is used to gain insight into people's attitudes, behaviors, value systems, concerns, motivations, aspirations, culture, or lifestyles. Ospina (2004) listed several reasons to use qualitative inquiry as a research method:

- To explore a phenomenon that has not been studied before (and that may be subsequently developed quantitatively)
- To add rich detail and nuance that illustrates or documents existing knowledge of a phenomenon, generated quantitatively
- To better understand a topic by studying it simultaneously (triangulation) or concurrently with both methods (mixing quantitative and qualitative methods at the same time or in cycles, depending on the problem)
- To advance a novel perspective of a phenomenon well studied quantitatively but not well understood because of the narrow perspectives used before
- To try to "understand" any social phenomenon from the perspective of the actors involved, rather than explaining it (unsuccessfully) from the outside
- To understand complex phenomena that are difficult or impossible to approach or to capture quantitatively
- To understand any phenomenon in its complexity, or one that has been dismissed by mainstream research because of the difficulties to study it, or that has been discarded as irrelevant, or that has been studied as if only one point of view about it was real. (p. 9)

Five traditions of qualitative inquiry and research design are biography, ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, and case study. One qualitative approach, phenomenological research, seemed the best suited to the goals of this study.

Phenomenological Research

The empirical phenomenological approach involves returning to experience in order to

obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for a reflective structural analysis that

portrays the essences of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The aim is to determine what an

experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a

comprehensive description of it. The researcher derives the essences, or meanings, of the

experience from these individual descriptions.

Meaning is at the heart of a phenomenology of science; intentional experiences,

phenomena, are inseparable from their meaning. Meaning directs a person's interaction with a

phenomenon and characterizes the rational component of that intentional experience. Because all

knowledge and experience are connected to phenomena, inevitably, a unity must exist between

ourselves as "knowers" and the things or objects we come to know and depend on (Moustakas,

1994).

Brentano (1973, as cited in Moustakas, 1994), distinguished between the natural sciences

and the human sciences. The need to make this distinction emerged out of a growing discontent

with a philosophy of science that failed to take into account the experiencing person, the

connections between human consciousness and the objects that exist in the material world.

Bretano's insight into the intentional character of consciousness provided inspiration for

Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. Both men believed in the intentional nature of

consciousness, the necessity of self-evidence, the value of inner perceptions, and the dependence

of knowledge on self-experience.

Husserl's phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994) emphasizes subjectivity, discovery of the

essences of experiences, and provides a systematic and disciplined methodology for the

derivation of knowledge. Husserl's approach is called "phenomenology" because it focuses only on the data available to the consciousness--the appearance of objects. In phenomenological studies, the investigator abstains from making suppositions, focuses on a specific topic freshly and naively, constructs a question or problem to guide the study, and derives findings that provide the basis for further research and reflection. It is a "science" because it renders knowledge that cannot be called "contingent." It is logical in its assertion that the only thing we know for certain is what appears in consciousness, and that fact is a guarantee of its objectivity.

But can objectivity really be guaranteed when dealing with people's consciousness? Maybe consciousness is better defined as looking at all perspectives of a phenomenon; perhaps objectivity comes through acknowledging and accepting personal bias. I am a biased researcher; as a principal who did not have a successful first year, by my own definition, I want to believe that being in an induction program would have made me more successful. I have made assumptions on which I base my belief that being in an induction program would have made me a better leader. I assume that my peers had the same frustrations I did as a new principal. I assume that their experience was like mine or worse; I assume that everyone wants formal support and guidance from our district leaders. Being so passionate about this topic has created my biased view; I really want to discover that participating in an induction program as a new principal is the "silver bullet" that will make the first-year experience more successful for more new leaders.

To summarize, phenomenology is a scientific study of the appearance of things, of phenomena. To review, the following principles summarize the core ideas of phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994):

1. The focus is on the appearance of things, removed from everyday routines and biases, from what we are told is true in the natural world of everyday living;

2. Phenomenology is concerned with wholeness, with examining the phenomenon from many sides, angles, and perspectives until a unified vision of the essences is achieved;
3. Phenomenology seeks meanings from appearances and arrives at essences through intuition and reflection on conscious acts of experience; and
4. Phenomenology is committed to descriptions of experiences, not explanations or analyses. Descriptions retain, as close as possible, the original texture of things, and their phenomenal qualities. (pp. 58-59)

Justification for Using the Phenomenological Approach

In conducting a qualitative research study, there are five traditions of inquiry available to the researcher. Which tradition to use is determined by the goal of the research study. If the purpose of a study is to explore the life of an individual, the best tradition to use is the biography. The grounded theory approach will work if the researcher's purpose is to develop a theory grounded in data from a specific field. The focus of an ethnography is describing and interpreting a cultural and social group. A researcher might choose the case study approach if his focus is developing an in-depth analysis of a single case or multiple cases. Finally, the focus of the phenomenological approach is understanding the essence of experiences about a phenomenon (Creswell, 1998).

In phenomenological science a relationship always exists between the external perception of natural objects and internal perceptions, memories, and judgments. The objective reality of phenomenology is the manifest presence of what appears and can be recognized only subjectively by the person who is perceiving the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

The functions of phenomenology support this researcher's belief that it is the best research approach to use for this qualitative study. One function of a phenomenological approach is that it seeks to determine meanings derived from experiences, not matters of fact. Another function is that it offers direct insight into the essence of things, growing out of reflective

description. Finally, the phenomenological approach seeks to obtain knowledge through a state of pure subjectivity, while retaining the values of thinking and reflecting (Moustakas, 1994).

The core ideas of phenomenology are based on the premise that "human experience makes sense to those who live it, prior to all interpretations and theorizing. Objective understanding is mediated by subjective experience" (Creswell, 1998, p. 86). A phenomenological study describes the meaning of lived experiences for many individuals about the phenomenon or concept, which, in this study, is their first-year experience. An additional phenomenon, or lack thereof for this study, is participants' thoughts about participation in a district induction program for new principals.

Population and Participants

A purposive sampling of 7 novice principals participated in this study and worked in 2 school districts. Two of the participants had an established professional relationship with me; using that relationship to network, I solicited 5 more novice principals who agreed to participate in this study. Both school districts were located in Georgia; the following 2010-2011 demographic information is outlined on each district's report card, which is located on the State's Department of Education website (see Table 1).

Table 1

Demographic Information

Criteria	District 1	District 2
K-12 Enrollment	10,242	14,048
Asian students	1%	0%
Black students	45%	18%
Hispanic students	4%	7%
White students	48%	69%
Multiracial students	2%	6%
K-12 percentage--students with disabilities	10%	13%
K-12 percentage--gifted students	6%	9%
K-12 percentage--economically disadvantaged students	71%	61%
2011 Food Stamp households	6,585	7,552
Per capita income	$27,890	$27,871
2011 Graduation rate	74%	76%

District 1 offered an academy for new administrators from 2004-2006. The academy was cut when the district cut personnel. From 2006-2007, the district paid for its new principals to participate in leadership program offered by a leadership institute endorsed by the State Department of Education. The district has not had a formal support program for new principals in place since 2008. However, district personnel meet monthly with all principals; these meetings serve to disseminate information, review data and initiatives, and discuss student achievement.

The focus on leadership development evolved in District 2 during the course of this research study. The change occurred with the new superintendent. Under the leadership of the former superintendent, new principals were assigned a mentor; these mentors were either retired principals or principals also serving in the district. However, there was no formal mentoring program in place. New principals participated in the same informational, supervisory meetings as the other district leaders. These meetings took place monthly and were focused on district improvement initiatives. The superintendent also led annual book studies, which were introduced each summer at a district leadership retreat.

The new superintendent continued with the similar monthly meetings, and added not only a professional learning component for all principals, but a focused learning environment for new principals also. New principals now meet regularly with the superintendent as well as a consultant on a monthly basis. Meetings are designed to support new principals in leading their schools through an improvement process. In these meetings, principals receive guidance and advice as well as have the opportunity to work with other new principals on their work tasks.

Participants

All principals were novice principals, which, defined in this study, means they had been principals for no more than four years. Three principals were in their first year, two were in their second, and two were in their third year. McCartney, Turner, and Ford were in their first year. McCartney had been an assistant principal at both the elementary and high school levels for at least five years before becoming an elementary school principal. Turner had been an assistant principal at both the middle and high school levels for several years and was a middle school principal. Ford served as an assistant principal for 3 years at the elementary level before becoming an elementary principal.

Principals Dylan and Jackson were in their second year as principals. Both served as assistant principals in other districts before becoming principals in their current districts. Dylan had been a high school assistant principal for 3 years; he was currently the principal of a similarly large high school in a district comparable to his previous district. Jackson served as a high school assistant principal for 2 years before becoming a high school principal. He moved from a one-high school district in Georgia to a two-high school district also in Georgia.

Principals Springsteen and Nicks are in their third year as principals. Springsteen was a high school assistant principal for 4 years before becoming a middle school principal. He stayed in the same district and in the same cluster of schools; his middle school fed students into the high school where he served as assistant principal. Nicks actually began her career as an educational leader at the district level. After serving as Director of High School Education for a number of years, she is currently a high school principal in that district.

Study participants can also be categorized by the amount of formal support they received from their district in their first year. Nicks, Springsteen, Dylan and Jackson had little formal support from their districts; all attended monthly district principals' meetings. Neither Nicks nor Jackson had support outside those meetings. Dylan and Springsteen had a mentor who was a retired high school principal and former superintendent. They met informally and sporadically during that first year. McCartney, Ford, and Turner had minimal support from their district; all were assigned the same consultant who served as their mentor. They met monthly, using a formal agenda developed by the consultant and their superintendent.

All participants faced problems specific to the first-year experience. With the exception of Principal Ford, all were new to their schools. They spent time learning names and faces, learning about the community, and studying achievement data and the school improvement plan. They spent time sifting through documents and information trying to get an accurate perspective on the strengths and areas for improvement in their new schools.

A few participants faced the challenges created by regular turnover in the school's leadership. Principal Dylan is the third principal in 5 years at his high school; both his faculty and student body can be described as transient. Principal Nicks took over her school in the middle of the year after the former principal left after only 1.5 years in the position. Principal

Turner became the principal when the former principal left in the middle of his second year and an interim principal finished out the year.

All principals face a myriad of problems during their first year, but Jackson and Nicks faced an additional set of problems due to their schools' participation in a state school improvement grant. The challenge that made their schools eligible for the grant was poor academic performance, especially in math. Nicks' school had not made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in 7 years. The challenges of the grant were associated with financial and academic accountability. The Georgia Department of Education assigned a full-time school improvement specialist to the school to support quarterly monitoring, but it [GADOE] did not provide guidance about managing budgets nor did it disperse funds until the end of the first semester. According to Nicks, the grant accountability requirements for administrators interfered with the opportunity to conduct the work. The requirements are in addition to district expectations of school administrators.

These participants dealt with many problems unique to their first-year experience. Some were experiencing additional problems singular to their school situation. Regardless, an induction program might have been successful in providing a foundation for developing leadership skills and practice.

Data Collection

Evidence from phenomenological research is derived from first-person reports of life experiences. I first asked two former colleagues to participate in the study. Having been in education for almost 25 years, I have met many people in different school situations. Even though we had not maintained consistent communication throughout those years, I reached out to

them because they were novice principals. I worked with one colleague 22 years ago; we were teachers in the same middle school, but at different grade levels. She left that school after 4 years and moved to another district in the state. I worked with the other colleague almost 15 years ago when I was a high school teacher. We were both English teachers, but worked in different schools in the same district. We met at district meetings while working together on curriculum units of study. I had had positive professional working relationships with these potential participants; I hoped they would agree to participate in my study because I was not a stranger to them. Often, people choose not to participate in research studies because they are too busy and do not have a connection with the study. I have often refused or disregarded requests to participate in dissertation studies and surveys myself. Because our prior relationship was professional in nature and short-lived, I believed they could be impartial and unbiased in their participation and responses to my interview questions.

My former colleagues agreed to participate and gave me suggestions of other novice principals to contact about participating in the study. All initial contact was made through face-to-face conversations, emails and phone calls. Novice principals interested in participating in the study were contacted to schedule an initial meeting; of course, it was in these initial meetings that the researcher explained informed consent. Potential participants reviewed the form and the researcher outlined confidentiality; it was explained that pseudonyms would be used for both school districts and participants in order to protect their identities. If the principal agreed to participate in the study, the researcher obtained informed consent at that time and scheduled an interview for a later date. Interviews, approximately 60-90 minutes, were conducted with each participant at his or her school; the interview was structured using an interview protocol sheet. The protocol sheet detailed the research questions of this study. The researcher audiotaped the

interview; at a later date, the audiotapes were transcribed and organized with the interview notes into a narrative. The narrative was sent to the participants for review. Any necessary follow-up was conducted via email.

As with any qualitative research study, there are field issues to consider, especially during the interview process. With phenomenological interviews, asking appropriate questions and relying on participants to discuss the meaning of their experiences requires a skillful interviewer (Creswell, 1998). Because of my prior professional relationships with two of the participants it was important that the interview did not become conversational in nature. This was a daunting task. It was difficult to maintain an objective distance during the interviews. It was also important not to make inferences about participants' comments or try to assimilate their thoughts with my own ideas about formal support from the district. It was challenging to ensure that discussion stayed focused on their answers.

While reading through the interview scripts, making notes in the margins, the researcher found and listed statements of meaning for individuals and then grouped those statements into meaning units. After a general classification of ideas and thoughts, the actual data analysis process began.

Data Analysis

There is no consensus about the best way to analyze qualitative data (Creswell, 1998). There are common features in different analysis processes; generally, the researcher begins with a general review of all of the information gathered. Data analysis is an exceptionally detailed, extensive process; the first step is "horizontalization," where interview notes are organized by similar statements. Statements are classified into "clusters of meanings" defined by

phenomenological concepts. These clusters are then compiled into a "textural description" of what was experienced and a "structural description" of how it was experienced (Creswell, 1998, p. 55).

After each interview, transcripts were typed and sent via email to each participant for review and approval. Once approved, I began the initial coding process by organizing my notes, aligning participants' answers by question. My goal was to see if there were words or ideas common to all participants' answers. I then highlighted identical words as well as words with similar meanings to see if a common theme emerged. My notes outlined not only common words and ideas within each answer to each question, but also commonalities throughout all questions. After highlighting common words and ideas, I began to group them according to possible themes. I discovered that participants' descriptions of their first-year experience were similar in nature to their descriptions of their self-confidence, the benefits of participating in a formal support program, and their advice to other first-year principals. I also discovered similarities in participants' answers to questions about curriculum and format of an induction program.

After the initial review and sorting, the researcher will begin reducing the data, establishing codes or categories. Eventually, a visual display of the information will be produced to show its organizational flow (Creswell, 1998). After the initial process, I created a matrix consisting of the common words and ideas in order to look for common themes or categories. In studying the data, I reduced all the data into major themes that encompassed most of the meanings of common words, phrases, and ideas. One major theme was isolation; this word most identified with the emotions associated with the first-year experience, a new principal's confidence, and participants' ideas about the benefits of participating in an induction program. Participants used words like, "shock," "overwhelming," "reassurance," "validation," and

"affirmation." These words or similar words expressing the same sentiment led me to the theme of isolation. Additionally, "community" is the word I considered as I analyzed participant responses about the format of an induction program. All participants noted that they wanted someone, whether it is a mentor or a small peer group, to work with or talk to about the experiences they had during their first year. "Community" is, in my mind, a word that connotes "an emotional sense of belonging," "a working with others toward a common goal."

Another major theme I discovered was a lack of knowledge. In deeply analyzing participant responses, the theme is more about a lack of working knowledge. The participants did not state that they did not know about such topics as budget and finance or personnel. Their responses reflected that they did not know how to apply that knowledge in a way that met the expectations of their district. An idea stated by 5 out of the 7 participants was that they needed to know about the district's improvement plan and have an outline of the tasks necessary for achieving the initiatives of that plan.

Through analysis, more questions emerged. I needed more information about the participants' experiences in their Educational Leadership programs, and I also want to learn more about their experiences as assistant principals. I emailed all participants to inquire about these experiences; 5 out of the 7 replied. I analyzed their responses within the context of the major themes that had already emerged from the analysis. I also looked for other possible themes. Responses provided additional insight into the theme of working knowledge and how it is different from theoretical knowledge. I also gathered insight that suggested further research needs to be done about the purpose and philosophy of the assistant principalship.

Phenomenological data analysis proceeds through the methodology of reduction, the analysis of specific statements and themes, and a search for all possible meanings; for this

phenomenological study, the analysis approach advocated by Creswell (1998) was used. He cited

the steps of a modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method advanced by Moustakas (1994):

- The researcher begins with a full description of his or her own experience of the phenomenon.
- The researcher then finds statements (in the interviews) about how individuals are experiencing the topic, lists out these significant statements (horizonalization) and treats each statement as having equal worth, and works to develop a list of nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statements.
- These statements are then groups into "meaning units," the researcher lists these units, and he or she writes a description of the "textures" (textural description) of the experience--what happened--including verbatim examples.
- The researcher next reflects on his or her own description and uses imaginative variation or structural description, seeking all possible meanings and divergent perspectives, varying the frames of reference about the phenomenon, and constructing a description of how the phenomenon was experienced.
- The researcher then constructs an overall description of the meaning and the essence of the experience.
- This process is followed first for the researcher's account of the experience and then for that of each participant. After this, a "composite" description is written. (pp. 147-150)

The study ends with the researcher having a better understanding of the "essence" of the

individuals' experiences with the phenomenon. For this study, the "essence" is more about

participants' lack of experience with the phenomenon. The purposive sampling of 7 novice

principals was a group of people who had not participated in an induction program; my purpose

in selecting these participants was to learn more about their first-year experience without the

formal support of an induction program. That essence, combined with my learning more about

what participants would have liked to have had in terms of formal support, gave me a better

understanding of the possible components and design of an effective induction program.

Researcher Positionality

I have been a principal for 5.5 years now; even though I consider myself an effective and

successful leader, I truly believe that my skills and knowledge-base would be stronger now had I

had the opportunity to participate in an organized support program during the first 2 years of my principalship. Of my own accord, I attended seminars, workshops, and conferences; I read books and journal articles. But I did not have a base with which to work through my learning; there was no group or cohort with which to discuss my new knowledge or ideas for school improvement. Learning and knowledge are most meaningful when people talk together about what the learning means to them and how they plan to use it.

There were two reasons I wanted to conduct this qualitative study; I wanted to learn about other novice principals' first-year experiences. I wanted to know if others think an induction program would have been useful during that first year. Qualitative research allowed me to do that; the qualitative approach emphasized the researcher's role as an active learner who can tell the story from the participants' view (Creswell, 1998). I wanted to be an active learner in this process.

In addition, I wanted to use the results of this study to help articulate to my district the rationale for instituting a new principals' support program. When I move into a district-level leadership position, I will be prepared to offer to the district an opportunity to develop strong leadership skills in new principals. Moreover, there will be a framework in place that guides new principals in implementing effective leadership practices in their schools.

Being so passionate about this topic led me to worry about being an effective researcher. It was essential for me to practice reflexivity, or self-awareness, so that I did not taint the information with my own bias. In phenomenology, the concept of the Epoche is essential; in the Epoche, the researcher sets aside prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas in order to understand the phenomenon from the participants' point of view (Creswell, 1998). No position whatsoever is taken in the Epoche; every quality has equal value and nothing is determined in

advance. The challenge of the Epoche is to be transparent to ourselves, to allow whatever is before us in consciousness to disclose itself so that we may see with new eyes in a naïve and completely open manner.

I am very curious to see if a new principals' support program will do all that I expect it will do. How beneficial, if at all, is it for new principals to participate in a support program? What knowledge and skills do they gain? How do they implement effective practices into their schools? Do they believe they were more successful their first year as a result of participating in the program? Did I really miss out on something special?

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

The purpose of this research study was two-fold; the first purpose was to examine the first-year experience of novice principals. The second purpose was to examine what novice principals want from their school district in terms of support during their first years of service. Through interviews and written responses, a group of seven new principals described in detail their first-year experience; they passionately shared their distress and frustration as they had no one to guide them through the minefield of being a new principal. They had no one to show them how to assimilate their theoretical knowledge with the practical, daily applications of leadership.

Through this research study, this group of novice principals delineated what they desired from their district. By sharing the problems unique to their first-year experience, they offered solutions to those problems for future principals. They expressed a need for support--formal, constant and consistent support from district leaders. In place of their isolation, they stated the need for a sense of community with their peers. And recognizing their lack of knowledge, they called for real-life opportunities to see leadership theory in practice. Most emphatically, they believed new principals should not experience the frustration of trial-by-error learning. The first-year experience is difficult at best; new principals want their districts to invest in them. They want to learn, they want to develop their skills, and they do not want to do it alone.

To ensure anonymity, participants' names were changed to the names of famous rock

stars. This idea was based on one principal's belief that districts should value new leaders so

much that they are trained, supported, and treated "like rock stars."

Table 2

Study Participants

Novice Principals	Gender	Ethnicity	Experience	Grade Level	AP Experience
Linda McCartney	Female	Caucasian	1 year	Elementary	4 years
Stevie Nicks	Female	Caucasian	3 years	High School	0 years
Tina Turner	Female	Caucasian	1 year	Middle School	4 years
Bruce Springsteen	Male	Caucasian	4 years	Middle School	4 years
Lita Ford	Female	African American	1 year	Elementary	4 years
Bob Dylan	Male	Caucasian	2 years	High School	5 years
Michael Jackson	Male	African American	1 year	High School	2 years

Following the steps laid out in the methodology chapter, I scheduled personal interviews with

each subject. Participants all agreed to face-to-face meetings, and were very accommodating

with their time. All interviews were conducted in the participants' offices, with the exception of

Stevie Nicks and Tina Turner. Those interviews were conducted after a principals' meeting at the

district professional learning complex. Most of the interviews lasted just over an hour; because

most interviews took place during the school day on the principal's campus, a specific amount of

time was scheduled into the principal's day. Only two interviews lasted 1.5 hours, Bruce

Springsteen's and Michael Jackson's; they took place after school and were the last scheduled

appointments for the day.

Four of the participants agreed to answer follow-up questions in response to findings

within the data analysis. In particular, I sought to discover more information about novice

principals' educational leadership programs. Of greatest interest was their understanding of the

relationship between leadership theory and leadership practice. Their written responses were included in the data analysis.

All principals were novice principals, which defined in this study, means they have been principals for no more than four years. Three principals were in their first year, two were in their second year, and two were in their third year. McCartney, Turner, and Ford were in their first year.

Linda McCartney has been an elementary principal for 1 year. She was an elementary school teacher for 16 years and an elementary curriculum specialist for 5 years. She served as an assistant principal in three different schools for a period of 4 years. During the middle of her fourth year, the district moved her from the elementary to the high school level. McCartney shared that making that move was exceptionally difficult because there are so many differences at each level. The curriculum, students' needs, extracurricular activities--the learning curve was steep.

Stevie Nicks' career path is quite different from the other participants. Nicks served as a high school English teacher for 11 years before moving directly to the district office. She was the Director of High School Education for 12 years. During that time she worked with the high school principals in the district, helping implement district and state initiatives at the school level. She was a resource for principals and provided guidance and support as needed. After 12 years, Nicks accepted a position as a high school principal in the same district.

Tina Turner had been an educator in the same school district for 13 years. After serving 7 years in the classroom, Turner became an assistant principal at the middle school level, finishing out that academic year. She then moved to the high school level where she was an assistant principal for the next 3.5 years before taking a principalship at a middle school in the district.

Turner strongly believed in the necessity of induction and support for novice principals. In fact, she saw value in participating in a formalized leadership academy before taking on a leadership position. She cited such a program in the largest school district in Georgia; "It is an extensive, organized program; when you are finished, you are ready to take office. If you work through the program, you won't need support once you've become a school leader." Turner asserted that learning should not be just "trial and error." Districts should address principals' obvious needs and work to prepare them to move from level to level.

Bruce Springsteen was a middle school teacher and coach for 10 years before becoming a high school assistant principal. He served in that role for 4 years before accepting a position as a middle school principal. He stayed in the same district and in the same cluster of schools; his middle school feeds students into the high school where he served as assistant principal.

Lita Ford had been a principal for 1 year. All of her leadership experience had been at the elementary level. Her career path was a bit different from the others' in that she had been both the assistant principal and principal at the same school. The district moved her to another elementary school as an assistant principal for 2 years before allowing her to return to her current school.

Bob Dylan's career path is much like Ford's experience. He had served at the high school level his entire career. He was a high school English teacher for 8 years before becoming an assistant principal. After 5 years, he accepted a position as a high school principal in a neighboring school district. Dylan was the one participant in this study who wanted more support from his district, but he did not want to be involved in a formal induction program. He believed the most difficult aspect of leadership is making quick decisions based on good judgment, which cannot necessarily be taught. It is more experience driven. Also, he stated that his experience as

an assistant principal was valuable in preparing him to be a principal. His principal gave Dylan a variety of duties and responsibilities that provided learning opportunities to better prepare him for a principalship.

Michael Jackson lived and taught in Florida for several years before moving to Georgia. He was a high school assistant principal for 2 years in another school district before accepting his current position and had been a high school principal for 2 years. As an assistant principal, Jackson served in a district that serves 3,761 students. The district was 67% White and 29% African American; 56% of the student body is economically disadvantaged, which means those students participate in the free and reduced lunch program. Jackson's current district was quite different, serving 10,242 students. Demographically, 71% of students were economically disadvantaged, 48% were white, and 45% were African American. Student achievement scores were so low that the school qualified for a 3-year school improvement grant. Principal Jackson stated that many of his daily frustrations originate from this grant; there is so much paperwork, so many site monitoring visits, and a great deal of policies and procedures to follow to qualify for the money each year.

Three participants in this study had no formal support, while others had minimal support provided by an assigned mentor. Nicks, Springsteen, and Jackson had no formal support from their districts. Dylan had a mentor who was a retired high school principal and former superintendent. They met informally and sporadically during Dylan's first year. McCartney, Ford, and Turner had minimal support from their district; all were assigned the same consultant who served as their mentor. They met monthly using a formal agenda developed by the consultant and their superintendent.

Study participants worked in two school districts. Principal Jackson worked in a district located in Central Georgia. Prior to Jackson's employment, the district provided a well-organized, formal induction program for its new principals. Led by the superintendent, new principals met monthly using a formal agenda tailored to district programs and expectations. That program was scaled down and finally cut due to lack of funding. The district made its new principals participate in a state leadership program called "Rising Stars." As funding continued to dwindle, leadership development became nonexistent.

All other participants worked in a district located in West Georgia. The district's philosophy about leadership development had changed with its superintendents. The former superintendent did not implement any kind of leadership support when Principals Nicks and Springsteen became principals. The current superintendent assigned a mentor to Principal Dylan when he accepted a principalship. The next year McCartney, Ford, and Turner were hired; the superintendent hired a consultant to work with them. They met with the consultant every month, focusing on an agenda of topics developed by the superintendent.

All participants agreed that having district support was important to their success during the first year as principal. Each had different experiences as assistant principals, and agreed that their time as assistant principals should not be viewed as a preparation program for the principalship. Furthermore, findings indicated differences of opinion about what kind of support is best.

Does the assistant principalship serve as a true preparation for leaders as principals? Is it an effective apprenticeship? If the district is not deliberate in developing assistant principals, then the answer is, "It depends." Study participants agreed overall that being an assistant principal is much different than being a principal. Reality does not constitute training, and no

matter the numbers of years of experience as an assistant principal, participants stated that they did not believe they were ready to be the principal.

Principal Nicks had no previous experience as an assistant principal. She left the classroom to go to the district office before becoming a principal. Springsteen's tenure as an assistant principal was at the high school level; he stated that he did not feel his experience prepared him to be a middle school principal. Both Ford and McCartney served as assistant principals and principals at the elementary level. Both noted they understood specific job duties and responsibilities such as curriculum and instruction.

Dylan was the only study participant who stated that his 5-year tenure as an assistant principal was valuable preparation in becoming a principal. Dylan's principal gave him a wide variety of duties and responsibilities. He also gave him a great deal of autonomy and decision-making power. Dylan's principal served as his mentor, teaching and guiding him through the learning process.

Participants' individual experiences as assistant principals show different levels and kinds of preparation. Could districts better use this experience as preparation for the principalship? Despite the fundamental differences in the two experiences, it is possible. However, daily reality is not a substitute for direct training and support.

Regardless of their first-year experiences, these novice principals agreed that their first year was overwhelming. They experienced many problems, but had ideas for solutions. District-level support and induction was one solution to those problems.

Data Analysis

Once the interviews were completed, notes and additional written information gathered were reviewed, organized, and outlined. An examination was done to determine themes and common strands of thought. Focusing on similarities, such as common words, two central themes were identified: the need for community and the application between theory and practice. The same process was used to study contrasting experiences of participants. In the following sections, I explore the first-year experience through these themes and the challenges participants faced in their role as new principals.

First-year Experience

The first year as a principal can be described as difficult, at best. "Stressful" was the overarching idea, made significant by words like, "constant pressure," "challenging," and "overwhelming." One point that was reiterated during the interviews was the realization by most new principals that, "I did not know what I didn't know." The learning curve is straight upward, and there is little time to truly know and understand information before it must be applied in working situations. The recognition of lost opportunities was extremely frustrating. The first-year experience was also described as "all-consuming." Every principal noted that they experienced a level of stress they had not encountered before; stress that resulted from the weight of responsibility, building relationships, and establishing credibility.

Principal McCartney used the word "shock" to describe her first year. She indicated that she "was ignorant of the differences between being the assistant principal and the principal." She discussed the constant level of pressure she felt, a pressure she had never experienced. She struggled to manage the day because so many people demanded her time; she kept getting behind

in completing her tasks. Both Principal Springsteen and Principal Dylan felt that pressure as well. They both discussed how quickly they had to learn new information and how they felt like they could never finish a task before starting another one. Common descriptors were, "overwhelmed," "learning on the fly," "whirlwind," and "my feet didn't touch the ground." Principal Jackson echoed these sentiments using the word "chaotic" to describe his first year as the principal.

All principals shared that their confidence waivered at times during their first year. Their confidence waivered when they were dealing with situations in which they felt they had little prior knowledge or experience. Principal McCartney was very confident about curriculum and instruction; she lacked confidence in her ability as a public relations representative for her school. Springsteen and Jackson both stated that their confidence as principals was low. Springsteen did not think that he learned enough during his four-year tenure as an assistant principal. Jackson's confidence was low because he was a first-year principal in a very large, underperforming high school; he had so much to learn so quickly because his high school was on the verge of being taken over by the state. It was a Title I school, and it was selected to receive a multimillion dollar school improvement grant.

Another common idea expressed by all novice principals centered on the concept of "balance." They all noted that being a school principal was overwhelming and all-consuming. They discussed the importance of acknowledging the intense stress level, but managing it in such a way that it did not take precedence over or negatively affect their personal lives. McCartney advised, "There is no framework of reference. Know that being a principal is a very different pressure than you have ever experienced." She also encouraged future principals to balance family and job, and "Be true to yourself--own who you are and what you believe in." Springsteen

believed in good time management skills to accomplish tasks; he said it was important not to work long hours. Principal Ford also mentioned long work hours and emphatically stated, "Go home!" Also like Springsteen, Ford noted the importance of being a good planner and finding someone who has a similar work ethic.

Principal Jackson said it was important for new principals to give themselves credit for being there; they were chosen for this job. He said, "It is OK to acknowledge that you don't know everything."

Problems

Being a new principal is tough. More and more principals are leaving the profession; younger and less experienced educators are being thrown into a job that has been described as overwhelming. What problems do new principals face that make the job so stressful? Participants in this study listed and discussed a multitude of problems which can be organized into two main categories--isolation and lack of knowledge.

Isolation

All participants made comments about needing someone to confide in, reflect with, and talk to about the daily experiences of being the principal. Many participants felt isolated in their positions; as the new leader, there is no one who is equal. It is lonely at the top. Principal Nicks stated that she wanted, "someone to talk to, someone to bounce ideas off of. I want someone with whom to share my confidences and emotions I can't share with teachers, someone who is my equal." Isolation compounded emotional distress; new principals had no affirmation, no

reassurance of a job well done, no one with whom to share fears and frustrations. McCartney simply stated that she just needed someone to, "give me permission to realize "I'm not perfect."

Most principals wanted to work with their peer group. For some, a sense of community would have positively affected their self-confidence during their first year as principal. Ford gained confidence from support sessions she arranged with her peers. "We share our experiences, praise one another, and find each other's strengths. There is a sense of safety in this group." Nicks wanted someone to help her work through the decision-making process, sharing ideas for possible solutions.

Isolation is one of many problems new principals face in their first year. That isolation can negatively affect one's self-confidence because there is no one available to combat the feelings of insecurity that creep up on someone when they are lonely. These novice principals wanted to build relationships with their peers; they wanted the affirmation, collaboration, and perspective that come from belonging to a community.

Lack of Working Knowledge

The relationship between what new principals know and what they need to know is unclear. It might be that the disconnect is more about the practical application of their leadership knowledge and how it meshes with their districts' policies and procedures for leaders. Regardless, these novice principals believed they should have more knowledge about how to do their jobs well.

In terms of knowing how to do their jobs, participants discussed how their Educational Leadership programs prepared them for the actual principalship. Most believed they were fundamentally ready to take on a leadership position, but felt unprepared in how to actually be a

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principal. All participants discussed the idea that their collegiate experience provided a foundation for school leadership. Most believed their programs provided an explanation and review of the general theory and practice of leadership. Principal Nicks stated,

> My experience with the Educational Leadership program included a foundation for school leadership; however, the collegiate theory and practice was a very general orientation. Although specific skills were introduced, significant learning and skill development in the areas of finance, human resource development, effective parent interactions, technology, curriculum, instruction, and assessment occurred through authentic experiences and professional learning.

Nicks did note that her university experience certainly helped develop understandings for education reform and that the most helpful portion of her experience in the graduate program was school law.

It was interesting to note that these new principals did not find fault with their preparation programs. Although they believed they were lacking in their knowledge, participants asserted that they did not see how universities could truly prepare people for the day-to-day reality of being a principal. Nicks noted that the world of education was constantly changing and that it was impossible to keep up with that change. Principal Dylan asserted,

> I really cannot say that my leadership program prepared me in any of those areas [finance, human resource development, communication, technology]. While it did help somewhat, my job as an assistant principal helped me much more. I feel like I received some exposure to those elements; however, the day-to-day operational burden of each was not sufficiently addressed. I do not know that it could be adequately done given how various systems approach those topics differently.

These novice principals have a degree in Educational Leadership; they have knowledge about building school culture, instructional supervision, finance and maintenance operations, but, they asserted that they need to better understand how their district wants them to put this knowledge into practice. These principals wanted to clearly know the policies and procedures their districts had in place that govern them in how they do their jobs as principals.

All wanted to learn more about budget and finance both at the school and district levels. Other mentioned topics of interest were school operation, state-mandated testing, and scheduling to maximize state funding. Several participants needed more information about their districts' personnel policies; they were most interested in the interviewing and hiring process, teacher evaluation, and documenting poor-performing teachers. Additionally, time management, public relations, scheduling, communication skills, and monitoring school initiatives were areas of concern.

Principal McCartney would have appreciated support with time management and more access to a greater number of professional resources. Turner wanted more general information about the district and a basic knowledge of expected tasks. Springsteen wanted an outline listing monthly tasks and deadlines; he believed he would have greatly benefitted in his ability to do his job if he had a framework to help him stay on track with his responsibilities. If he stayed organized, he could know ahead of time if he needed additional information, clarification, or understanding and get it before he completed a task or responsibility incorrectly.

A lack of working knowledge and isolation are just two themes in the myriad of problems that principals face in their first-year experience. But it is the emotional distress created by isolation and not knowing that makes these new principals feel the overwhelming, all-consuming pressure that is almost unbearable to even the strongest of people.

What are the solutions to these problems? How can districts address these problems and solutions with their new principals? Three words—support through induction.

Is Induction an Answer?

To induct means to provide with knowledge or experience of something not open to all (Merriam, 1997). When asked about the concept of a formal induction program, all of the participants in this study agreed that induction could have been beneficial in a variety of ways in guiding them through their first year as principals.

Most of the participants agreed that their confidence in being a new principal would have been bolstered by an induction program. Knowledge is power and that power can sustain one's self-confidence during trying times. For some, it would have given them a sense of community, for others, a sense of accomplishment. All participants agreed that it was important that districts provide support for first-year principals. Principal McCartney stated, "I think it's critical in functioning as a good principal." Principal Jackson believed induction was "an integral part of the transition into a leadership role."

Principal Ford suggested that support for leaders should be included in a district's improvement plan; improving the caliber of district leaders would be an initiative. She asserted that districts should "invest and grow us." McCartney agreed that districts should "absolutely value" providing support for new principals. She went on to say that superintendents should want induction for new principals; the district would reap rewards more quickly from new administrators' performance. Principal Jackson stated, "High performing principals without induction is not possible."

What does a formal induction program look like? What are its components? What is its purpose or does it have more than one? In reviewing participants' descriptions of their first-year experience and in keeping with the themes of isolation and lack of working knowledge, participants' common ideas focus on a community approach and a basic curriculum and design.

A community approach to leadership support addresses new principals' feelings of insecurity and isolation. A sense of community helps new principals deal with many emotions regarding that first-year experience. Possible benefits of participating in an induction program are building relationships with peers, gaining perspective from veteran principals, networking, affirmation, and collaboration. Collaboration can also help new principals develop and build leadership skills.

Many of the participants noted that their self-confidence might have been improved through an induction program. Working with peers allowed them time and opportunity for self-reflection and evaluation. Springsteen went as far as to say, "I would have realized my strengths based on what my peers couldn't or wouldn't do; I could have measured myself by others' progress."

Ford worked in a district that provided minimal formal support. A sense of isolation pushed her to reach out to her peers, and she arranged to meet regularly with the other new elementary principals in her district. "My self-confidence is positively affected by the meetings with my peers. We shared our experiences, praised one another, and found each other's strengths. There is a sense of safety in this group. We get tangible work done."

Four of the novice principals in this study had a mentor their first year. Most participants agreed that there was great value in having a mentor. However, they were quick to mention that the mentor should be well-matched to ensure a more positive learning environment. Ford, McCartney, and Turner shared a mentor. Their mentor was a consultant their superintendent hired to meet with them monthly. She [consultant] developed the agenda topics. Ford did not like this experience at all. She stated, "My self-confidence has been negatively affected by support

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sessions with the consultant. Sessions are rigid and inflexible. The consultant is cold in her interactions with me." Turner was more neutral in her response about their mentor. "I complete activities or prepare documents for our meetings. During our meetings, I ask questions and listen to her recommendations. Our agendas are based on what our superintendent wants." McCartney thought the process was beneficial to her. She stated, "I am held accountable for my progress by completing various assignments. . . . I am working to meet expectations outside myself, which creates another level of awareness for me."

Principal Dylan's mentor was a retired superintendent and former high school principal. He thought mentors should be retired administrators because they are more readily available. He went on to state, "Retired administrators can offer reflection and reassurance based on similar experiences." Principal Jackson agreed that having a mentor/coach available to help reflect on performance-related tasks would be important in an effective induction program. He stated that novice principals could gain a better understanding of their own leadership strengths and weaknesses while learning from experienced, veteran educational leaders.

Curriculum

It was evident that the principals' chosen topics were based on their self-assessed needs. While budget and personnel were the most discussed topics, each principal acknowledged a need to know more about a variety of topics. Several of the principals stated that they wanted input in developing the curriculum and/or agendas for induction; they commented that the program should be "tailored" to meet their needs. Only one principal discussed the importance of differentiating professional learning for new principals. He stated that his time would be better spent in learning sessions that met his identified needs. Because time has been the major cost of

participating in an induction program, as cited by these novice principals, it is important to note that designing induction based on principals' self-assessed needs is important.

Participants had definite ideas about the topics of study included in a district-level principal induction program. University educational leadership programs of study included classes in human resources, budget and finance, school law, facilities operations, and instructional supervision. Novice principals begin in their new positions with a fundamental knowledge of such leadership principles, but, again, struggle with the application and practice of those principles. These new principals wanted more clarity and understanding of their school districts' processes and policies governing human resources, budget and finance, and so forth.

When asked about the curriculum of an induction program, participant responses included many ideas such as school improvement, scheduling for instruction, Federal programs, school policy, time management, and instructional supervision and monitoring. The topics that were listed by most, if not all participants, were human resources and budget.

The budget process was included as a topic of study by five of the seven novice principals involved in this study. Participants generally wanted to better understand their district's budget process at the school level. They were interested in gaining more knowledge of the full-time equivalent (FTE) and QBE funding; one topic of study inherent in that funding is instructional scheduling and maximizing learning time. Both Principals Dylan and Ford wanted to learn more about process of developing a master instructional schedule.

Other participants stated that they needed a better understanding of district policies governing school accounts. Additionally, they wanted to learn more about the funding categories and how best to allocate state monies into those categories.

A majority of the participants also stated they wanted to learn more about human resources. Principal Dylan stated that he wanted to learn more about personnel evaluations, specifically the process of giving unsatisfactory evaluations to underperforming teachers. He stressed that he needed to understand his district's teacher evaluation process, focusing on the procedures for developing professional development plans to remediate struggling teachers and documenting that process for possible dismissal due-process hearings.

Principal Nicks and Principal Turner expressed concern over their need to learn more about the interviewing process. Both wanted to develop their skills as well as a process by which to hire effective teachers. They also stated that once they hired effective teachers, they needed to learn more about how to retain those teachers.

The novice principals in this study wanted to be successful in their new leadership roles. While they agreed that there are many topics of study to undertake in an induction program, they wanted to know more about policies and processes governing budget and human resources. They wanted their districts to provide direction and perspective on how school business should be conducted.

Design

Many ideas about the design of an induction program were discussed during the interviews, including the length of time. Most new principals thought formal, monthly work sessions were the best way to provide support. They agreed that these work sessions should involve district personnel and possibly outside consultants. There were differences of opinion in terms of the format of the sessions; some principals wanted more collegial, collaborative meetings whereas others thought whole-group lecture meetings worked best.

Generally, participants sought a formal induction program consisting of a mentor and regularly scheduled learning sessions with their peers. Participant responses in this category further support the theme of seeking a community approach to induction. Six of the seven participants in this study stated they wanted to be in an induction program with other novice principals in their respective school districts.

All agreed that an induction program should be tailored to the district in which they were employed. Springsteen stated that the superintendent should lead the program; the learning sessions should be common from year to year as they serve to teach new principals the philosophies, principles, and processes that govern district operations. McCartney suggested learning tasks be aligned to district initiatives and the improvement plan.

Another common idea was regularly scheduled meetings. Most participants thought novice principals should meet every month to learn more about specific leadership topics and their practical applications within their districts. Springsteen wanted an agenda determined by district personnel. McCartney and Turner agreed, but both Ford and Nicks thought novice principals should have input on the agenda. Springsteen thought a whole-group lecture meeting format was most effective, but McCartney and Ford disagreed. Both stated they wanted to use meeting time to collaborate with their peers on the assigned topics of study. McCartney said, "I envision district support as more organic in nature; we work in an atmosphere where we refine our ideas about what's going on in our schools." Principal Ford agreed that district personnel should "provide necessary support based on our topics." She envisioned an atmosphere in which leadership theories are actually practiced.

Principal Turner's idea of induction was a bit different; she discussed a leadership academy designed and implemented by an extremely large district in the state. It was an

extensive program focused on preparing assistant principals for the principalship. Turner asserted that once a candidate worked through the program, there would be little need for support after taking office.

Jackson also had very different ideas about principal induction. He believed induction was most important before taking on a principalship. His idea was that a new principal could go into a new position with the benefit of having had practice with practical applications followed by reflection and learning. He envisioned a year-long program; the first semester would be devoted to a series of performance-related tasks. During the second semester, the participant would be paired with a coach, and most of their time would be spent on reflection of those performance-based tasks.

Whether or not induction should end after a new principal's first year was an interesting concept that surfaced during the interviews. Most principals stated that one year of formal induction was sufficient. However, Principals McCartney and Dylan suggested that a second year of support could be beneficial. McCartney asserted that a second year of induction could be visionary in its purpose, and a continuation of the first year. She described the first year as sort of "triage--in the moment." The second year should be more about reflection, long-range planning, and deeper thought processes. Principal Dylan suggested that during their second year, new principals should work with peers of their choice. The group should meet as they feel necessary; the district should provide direction and give principals perspective on how to conduct district business.

"Shock, pressure, all-consuming, challenging, overwhelming"--participants in this study used these words to describe their first-year experience as principals. They struggle with loneliness and isolation; they have a great deal of leadership knowledge, but they do not see how

it fits with the daily reality of actually being the principal. They need help and they realize it. In fact, they crave it. Most participants have support from their districts, but they want a different kind of induction process. A formal induction process addresses isolation and the emotional stress it causes. Induction could serve to bridge that gap between leadership principles and leadership practice. While participating in a formal induction program will not solve every problem, it will help in more ways than not.

It is hopeful that this study will inform individuals at the district level who wish to develop induction programs for novice principals. Examining a principal's first-year experience provides valuable insight about the problems new principals face. One problem is the emotional stress of the job. While that problem in and of itself cannot be completely solved, the sense of isolation and lack of knowledge can be addressed. The participants offered possible solutions to making the first-year experience more beneficial and manageable. It is important to note that the novice principals interviewed for this study strongly believed that participating in an induction program was essential to the level of success one achieves during the first year in office. Districts should also recognize that value and commit to investing in its new principals; that commitment is a commitment to its future successes.

Summary of Findings

These interviews were guided by two research questions:

1. What is the first-year experience of new principals who are not involved in a leadership induction program?

2. Do these new principals think participating in an induction program would have been beneficial during the first year? If so, what are their ideas about the curriculum and design of such a program?

Weaving together the main themes from participants' responses, we can see that the first-year experience can be described as lacking--a lack of community and a lack of working knowledge. Participants described their first year as "stressful," "overwhelming," and "all-consuming." They felt isolated, unable to reach out to their peers to seek guidance, information, support, even affirmation. They found themselves unprepared for the emotional stress of that first year. They also found they were unprepared for the expectation for practical knowledge. They did not know how best to combine their knowledge of leadership theory with the daily, practical applications and competencies associated with being a principal. They needed a professional community that would help them translate formal learning into practical experience. This is not something easily done alone. All participants recommended an induction program for modeling and support.

As for the second research question, these novice principals agreed that participating in an induction program would have been helpful in that first-year experience. They agreed that it would have provided a sense of community to quash their feelings of isolation. An induction program would have provided a vehicle for learning more about their districts' expectations for leadership. These novice principals had many ideas about the curriculum and design of an induction program; key components include formal monthly meetings led by district personnel balanced with informal small group meetings designed as work sessions. Topics of study include budget, personnel, public relations, and an understanding of district expectations for performance. Having the professional development support of their districts could have provided

them a working knowledge of the principalship which might have made that first-year

experience less "overwhelming" and "all-consuming."

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

In this chapter, I explore the implications of the research findings for our understanding of principal preparation. I also explore novice principals' need for district support through an induction program and consider appropriate policy for such a program. Overall, my conclusions are in strong agreement with the current research about induction, professional development for educational leaders, and the challenges of the first-year experience.

Being a school principal is harder than it has ever been before and is becoming increasingly more difficult. The job of the school leader has been transformed by extraordinary economic, demographic, technological, and global change (Levine, 2005). As a result, principals are leaving the profession at an alarming rate; many choose to leave only after a few years in office, never making it to retirement age. Left in this wake are young educators who are left to flounder in new leadership roles.

Their leadership ability and skills are questionable, even to themselves. They do not believe they have been prepared to be the principal and yet they are given the keys to the building and left alone to find their own way. They discover that way only through making mistakes, faltering through the school improvement process, not realizing how much more they could achieve if they only knew what to do. Ignorance is not bliss, and after a few years of fumbling around in the dark, these novice principals leave their positions and the cycle begins again with a new naïve bright soul believing he is on the cusp of greatness.

That is crazy. How insane is it for district leaders to allow this exercise in stupidity? Education is one profession in which its leaders are expected to be experts on the very first day of the new assignment, with little to no learning support. There is no systematic plan for helping them move along the natural continuum from novice-to-expert. Why do school districts not embrace the importance of providing induction and support for their new principals? Plenty of research supports this process, and the findings of this study verify that novice principals want formal guidance and support from their districts. They want to participate in an induction program.

Discussion of Findings

Hess and Kelly (2005) discovered that a majority of new principals feel less than minimally prepared to take on the new challenges they face as leaders in the new era of accountability. My participants agreed; preparedness or lack thereof, is a concern for these novice principals. They used words like "overwhelmed," "shock," and "chaotic." They did not believe that they were sufficiently prepared to take on the role of principal. Springsteen actually commented, "I didn't know what I didn't know." Principal Jackson noted that recognition of lost opportunities was very frustrating during his first year. In a presentation to the University Council for Educational Administration in Phoenix, Arizona, Plavko and Daresh (1989) shared that the world of the novice principal is one that is characterized by considerable anxiety, frustration, and professional isolation. Novice principals suffer a great deal of stress associated with their new job and its responsibilities.

My participant responses support current research focused on principal preparation. Hess and Kelly (2005) asserted that graduates of principal preparation programs are ill-equipped for

the challenges and opportunities posed by an era of accountability. Educational leaders are formally trained through university programs of study; however, my participants believed that their programs, while fundamentally sound and valuable in leadership theory, did not fully prepare them for the daily practice of being the principal. The complexity of the actual job is difficult to clearly convey through a pre-service program.

It is important to note that there was no indictment of the participants' leadership preparation programs. In fact, they spoke highly of their programs, stating they believed they had learned a great deal about leadership. Most agreed that the coursework of their programs provided a foundation of understanding about leadership. One participant specifically stated that her school law class was most beneficial to her in her first-year experience. However, all agreed they needed more practical application opportunities in their preparation programs. A valuable point is there should be a delicate balance between leadership theory and leadership practice in and beyond the preparation program. New principals need the fundamental knowledge of leadership theory. Knowledge is a firm foundation for the novice leader. But drawing upon Dreyfus' situated learning theory; induction programs could become the vehicles by which leaders move through the stages, from novice to competent to expert.

My participants said the pressure and demands of the principalship added a level of learning that could not have been experienced in a university preparation program. District-level support programs for novice principals can bridge that gap between theory and practical application of leadership as well as move leaders from novices to experts. Principal induction is the process by which new school principals make the transition from theoretical leadership to operational leadership (Andrews, 1989). My participants agreed they needed an induction program during their first year as principals. Induction could have provided a framework for task

completion, new knowledge about the district's policies and philosophies of leadership, reflection on actual practices, and a community of learning for new leaders.

My findings concur with the research. In a study of novice principals, Barnett and Shoho (2005) noted that new principals spend a great deal of time attempting to understand the peculiar dynamics of their school organization, assessing staff members' strengths and weaknesses, and determining areas of need. In their second year, principals were ready to begin to initiate changes and take actions focused on school improvement. These authors asserted that it was during this critical 2-year period when new principals either develop the confidence and competence to become effective school leaders or burn out (Barnett & Shoho, 2005).

There is a great deal of research outlining novice principals' needs during that first year. In her study entitled, *The Perceptions of New Principals Regarding the Knowledge and Skills Important to Their Initial Success*, Petzko (2008) cited that the domains of human relations and personnel were very important to new principals. These domains were defined as, "the ability to communicate; resolve conflicts; motivate employees; manage teams; and select, evaluate, and further develop faculty and staff" (p. 238). Educational leadership, defined as the knowledge and skills needed to provide vision, create effective schools, and use situational leadership theory was also placed in the top five importance areas (Petzko, 2008). Also ranked in the top five needs of new principals were knowledge and skills associated with curriculum, precisely curriculum alignment, content, the instructional process, student evaluation, and curriculum change processes.

The literature review includes information about developing effective induction programs. Goal-setting and planning, instruction and curriculum development, policy guidelines, time management, and conflict management are areas of responsibility having the greatest need

for inclusion in an induction program (Elsberry & Bishop, 1993). In addition to connecting

leadership theory to leadership practice, participating in a district induction program also deters

the sense of isolation new principals experience in their new jobs. Induction programs need to

stress the development of strong norms of collegiality within a cohort of new principals so that

they can realize that they are not responsible for knowing all the answers (Plavko & Daresh,

1989). These new principals must also realize they will rarely be effective by trying to do

everything alone; their success as a school leader is often based on their ability to seek support

from many different people in the school district.

My participants agreed they needed more practical knowledge; their responses support

current research, and add to it. Like the research, participants want to learn more specifically

about personnel. They want to know more about effective hiring, especially the recruiting and

interviewing processes. However, they were more focused on how to effectively document poor-

performing employees instead of learning more about how to retain their best employees. Other

responses that support the research are effective communication, supervising instruction, and

building relationships. Participant responses that extend topics cited in the research literature,

suggesting more information about school improvement, scheduling for instruction and

maximizing funding, Federal programs, school policy, time management, and public relations.

The topics that were listed by most participants were human resources and budget and know-

how.

An induction program also builds a sense of community among novice principals. One

major problem new principals face is isolation from their peers, the lack of feedback, and

interpersonal support (Daresh, 1987). Participants in this research study want this sense of

community. All participants made comments about needing someone to confide in, reflect with,

and talk to about the daily experiences of being the principal. They want to confide in fellow

novice principals and senior, seasoned administrators as well. Affirmation and reassurance were

very important to both Principals McCartney and Turner. Principal Madonna sought someone

with whom she could share confidences and reflect on ideas. Principal Dylan appreciated

informal meetings with his mentor and Springsteen was glad he could call on his mentor when

necessary.

Districts providing induction programs are duty bound to closely examine the knowledge

and skills emphasized in their curriculum to better align it with the needs and perceptions of this

vital constituency of school leaders (Petzko, 2008).

The literature about new principals' induction and support can be tied to the Dreyfus

research on the relationship of theory and practice in the acquisition of skill. This model

describes how and why our abilities, attitudes, capabilities, and perspectives change according to

skill level. Additionally, the model shows there is more to skills levels than just being better,

smarter, or faster (Hunt, 2008). My participants agree there are many benefits in participating in

an induction program during their first year as a principal. Their responses support the Dreyfus

model of skill acquisition.

A logical assumption is that most educational leaders are novices when they become

principals. As novices, they are concerned about their ability to succeed; with little experience to

guide them, they really do not know if their actions or decisions will guide or lead to success in

their schools. While novices understand the need to learn, new principals are more driven to

accomplish immediate goals, make the school their own, and establish credibility with their

faculty, staff, and students. They might struggle to effectively respond to mistakes, and so might

be fairly vulnerable to confusion when their plans do not go the way they are intended (Hunt, 2008).

In this stage of the Dreyfus model, the instruction process begins with the instructor decomposing the task environment into context-free features which the beginner can recognize without the benefit of experience (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 2009). The beginner is then given rules for determining actions on the basis of these features. Through instruction, the novice acquires rules for drawing conclusions or for determining actions, based upon facts and features of the situation that are recognizable without experience in the skill being learned (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 2009). Think about what participating in an induction program could do for new principals at this juncture. The district could outline its rules and expectations governing principals' responsibilities to the district. In a 1-week summer seminar, new principals could learn the district's components of the school improvement process. They could learn about school finances, personnel guidelines, and instructional supervision. They could also receive a district calendar listing required tasks and deadlines.

As new principals experience the growing pains of the novice, they begin to see problems, make decisions, and manage their schools from the viewpoint of an advanced beginner, which is the second stage of the Dreyfus model. Through practical experience, the advanced beginner starts to intuitively recognize elements of a situation and break away from the fixed set of rules a little bit. Advanced beginners can start using advice in the correct context, based on similar situations they have experienced in the recent past, but just barely (Hunt, 2008). They have begun to create overall principles, but they have no holistic understanding, and they're really not ready to understand the "big picture."

At this stage, the power of induction is very important. New principals need experienced mentors; they need to meet regularly to talk about and discuss the problems they face daily. They need to reflect on how they handled or mishandled situations at school so that they continue to learn and develop their craft. It is important to articulate their decision-making process so that their more-experienced mentor can guide them through the reflection process, figuring out where they went wrong in making a decision or edifying what was right in that process. It is also important to engage in reflection with peers. Principal Springsteen really solidified this point when he said that he could learn about himself and what he was doing well or not doing well by learning from his peers.

It is also the responsibility of the district to continue to teach new principals as they are moving through this advanced beginner stage. Many professions, medicine, law, manufacturing for instance, provide training programs for employees when they are new to the job. There are also opportunities for additional training as employees move into new roles within the profession. School districts have to be involved as any business is in the on-the-job training of employees; furthermore, districts should take this responsibility seriously. Principal McCartney believed that superintendents should want induction for new principals because the district can more quickly reap the rewards from their performance. Principal Ford wanted it to be an initiative in the district's improvement plan; to improve the caliber of leadership in the district through knowledge and practical competence.

Again, there should be a balance between theory and practice. The district can offer monthly workshops about topics of interest for new principals. My participants stated they would like to learn more about public relations, the school improvement process, scheduling to

maximize instruction, developing professional learning for their faculty, time management, personnel procedures, and school budget.

At the third stage, competence, new principals can now develop their own conceptual models in effectively managing their schools. They can begin to figure out how to solve new problems on their own. They seek out and apply advice from experts and use that advice effectively. A *competent* new principal will seek out and solve problems; their work is based more on deliberate planning and past experience (Hunt, 2008). A competent principal might be described as "having initiative" or being "resourceful" (Hunt, 2008).

Additionally, a competent principal becomes more emotionally involved in his or her tasks and at times it is increasingly difficult to draw back (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 2009). The novice and advanced beginner, applying rules and maxims, feel little or no responsibility for the outcome of their acts. The competent principal, on the other hand, feels great responsibility, and thus emotionally involved in, the result of his or her choices or decisions. An outcome that is clearly successful is deeply satisfying and memorable, whereas a disaster is not easily forgotten (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 2009).

Quite honestly, I do not know the role of an induction program at this stage; it is a question for further research. I do not know if there is a need for formalized induction at this stage. It depends on new principals and their level of performance on the continuum of the Dreyfus model. In thinking about my participants and their responses, most, if not all were advanced beginners at the end of their first year as principals. I think there is much to be gained from regular reflection meetings with a mentor, peers, or possibly both. Other businesses take such ongoing training very seriously. If not an induction-type program, perhaps some sort of continuing mentoring initiative.

In his article, *Building Bridges: Strengthening The Principal Induction Process Through Intentional Mentoring*, Hall (2008) cited the common theme in his research was developing the protégé's strengths and abilities by deliberately compelling him or her to engage in accurate and productive self-reflection. The mentor behaviors deemed most effective for cultivating this habit include ask probing questions, provide honest feedback, listen, analyze decisions, propose alternative viewpoints, encourage independence, foster lifelong learning, and offer caring support. Effective, positive mentors understand their mission is to support the protégé's learning, not to help them run their school (Hall, 2008).

Without a doubt, my research findings support the literature about the importance of induction and support for new principals. It is necessary to the level of success a principal experiences in that first year. An induction program is a democratic approach to principals' teaching and learning; it provides a sense of community as principals gain practical competencies of leadership theory. But what is the best way to provide support? What is an effective program design?

Effective professional learning for school principals is long term and planned, focused on student achievement, job-embedded, supportive of reflective practice, and provides opportunities to work, discuss, and problem solve with peers (Sparks, 2002). Plavko and Daresh (1989) asserted that induction will be more effective if it is initiated in conjunction with activities for aspiring leaders who have been identified by the district. Furthermore, a successful induction program is part of a comprehensive, district-wide program designed to encourage professional growth and development for all leaders. Finally, beginning principals have a special need for frequent, specific, and accurate feedback about their performance (Plavko & Daresh, 1989).

Fleck (2007) listed district-level constructs that bridge the gap between theory and practical knowledge. The author suggests that school districts need to:

- Create a new principal induction program;
- Create a quality mentoring program;
- Set goals with new principals and meet to discuss them on a regular basis;
- Create networking opportunities for new principals to meet together regularly;
- Require new principals to visit other principals within their district; and
- Encourage attendance at principal meetings within their region. (p. 26)

My participants' responses support the research. In thinking about a mentoring program, I think the main word is "quality." Based on responses, those participants who had good relationships with their mentors believed it to be beneficial to their success, and those who did not believed their mentor to be a bother and hindrance to their success. Far worse is the untrained mentor and *ad hoc* appointments where nobody knows the program.

My participants also want to meet on a regular basis with their peers and with district leaders. They want input into the agenda and they want meetings to be tailored to their learning needs. Even though the participants did not discuss in detail visiting other principals within their districts, they did make mention of holding monthly meetings at different schools. No participant spoke specifically about the concept of regional principals meetings, but some of them attended similar meetings as a way to find and participate in professional learning opportunities. Because their districts did not provide support through induction, my participants sought out opportunities to learn and develop themselves as leaders. Many take seminars offered by their local Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA). There are also learning opportunities offered through professional organizations like the Georgia Association of Secondary School Principals (GASSP) or the Georgia Association of Educational Leaders (GAEL). Of course, there are also book studies, listservs, journal subscriptions and blogs.

The principalship is a complex and demanding job; the principal's office houses all the responsibility for school operations and student success (Linn et al., 2007). Principals in this 21st century are expected to know more and to do more and yet maintain a balance so that they do not fail to meet those expectations. Even though the specific targets are constantly moving, principals are expected to have the skills set necessary for immediate success; for new principals, there is no time for failure or incompetence.

Recommendations/Implications

One implication for practice in providing a district induction for new principals is the district realizing the necessity of such a program. Regardless of the structure, it will only be as effective as the local belief that it is the professional responsibility of the district to do what it can to help people succeed in their careers (Plavko & Daresh, 1989). Nothing is more important than the district's strong commitment to its leaders' development. If the district is fully committed to nurturing and developing strong principals, its leaders will work to provide the resources necessary to ensure that program implementation is effective.

It is hopeful that this study will inform individuals at the district level who wish to develop induction programs for novice principals. It is important to note that the novice principals interviewed for this study strongly believed that participating in an induction program was imperative to the level of success one achieves during the first year in office. Equally important was the common belief that being in an induction program could have boosted self-confidence. All interviewed principals stated they wanted the opportunity to participate in an induction program. All had specific ideas about the benefits, curriculum, and design of such a program. Participant responses both supported and added to the research in the literature. In

putting together a composite of what the participants call for and what other authors recommend, I suggest the following components:

1. *The various needs of the principals must be effectively intertwined with the needs of the district.* An induction program is an excellent vehicle by which a district can outline its expectations for performance of its new principals. Additionally, a district can give direction to its new leaders about its improvement plan, initiatives, and put into place the action steps leaders are expected to complete in order to improve student achievement throughout the school district. Moreover, a district should make provisions to address the specific learning needs of its new principals. Whether through a needs-assessment survey or one-on-one conversations, district personnel should discover the needs unique to a new cohort of novice principals.

2. *Formal meetings led by the Superintendent should be included.* These meetings can be somewhat regimented and focused on providing district information to new principals. The agenda is determined by the Superintendent and narrow in its focus. The Superintendent talks to the entire group in a lecture format, but there is interaction through a question-and-answer period. It could be that district-level leaders also lecture, providing direction to new principals. Again, this meeting is driven by the Superintendent. This meeting could be a summer leadership institute, perhaps a 2-day seminar at the beginning of each semester, or monthly principals meetings. Agenda topics might most productively be based on district information.

3. *Informal meetings with peers led by a district-level leader should be included.* Another component of an induction program focuses on opportunities for new principals to have work sessions. Novice principals give input on the agenda topics. Even though there is an agenda, this work is more organic in nature. The group discussion is more reflective, with principals sharing their experiences, getting feedback from each other, and working on tasks together. The formal

meetings represent the "what" of the work, these informal meetings represent the "how" of the work. These meetings are used to reflect on the practical competencies of new principals' daily lives.

4. *All novice principals should have a mentor.* Districts must take the time to effectively pair mentors and their protégés. This relationship can become either the greatest help or the greatest hindrance during a new principal's first year. Districts must also provide training for mentors; this relationship cannot be haphazard or random in nature. Mentors meet regularly with their protégés at their schools. The agenda is determined by both parties and based on the previous meeting and the goals set to be achieved between meetings. The relationship is formal in its structure and purpose, but informal in the interaction between mentor and protégé. It is important that the mentor has a great deal of experience as a school leader; it provides credibility in the eyes of the protégé.

5. *A second year of formal support should be considered.* Some participants discussed the importance of a second year of support. One participant stated that a second year should be "visionary" in its purpose in that it is more focused on reflection, long-range planning, and deeper thought processes. Another participant believed that first-year induction should be about performance-based leadership tasks, and the second year is focused on coaching and reflection. In thinking about the model of skill acquisition, a second year could be beneficial in moving advanced beginners to levels of competency and proficiency.

There are many implications for the design of an effective induction program. Again, the needs of both the district and new principals will inform both the curriculum and design of the program. Participants in this research study wanted more support from their districts. They wanted more knowledge, more ideas for practical application, more time to work with their

peers, and time with people who had been where they are now. They felt overwhelmed, unprepared, stressed out, and out of control. They wanted to be successful leaders. School districts need to demonstrate the same investment in their future leaders.

Another implication of this study is districts' philosophies about the purpose of the assistant principal position. Only one participant believed that his tenure as an assistant principal provided him with experiences valuable to becoming a principal. One participant stated that his 4-year tenure did not prepare him to be a principal, and the other five participants never mentioned their experience as assistant principals.

It can be argued that principals would not be novices if they received some instructional training as assistant principals. Should this position be used as a first step in developing the skills necessary for the principalship?

I am fortunate that my tenure as an assistant principal was a different experience than my participants' tenure. My job description was the same--to effectively manage the daily running of the school. My job tasks were designed to maintain order--student discipline, student supervision, testing, facilities repairs, teacher evaluations. However, my principal provided several learning opportunities that prepared me to for this role. In addition to my duties and responsibilities, I wrote the school's professional learning plan and led those meetings. I also led faculty and parent meetings; it was important to my principal that I learn how to present myself and our school to our community. I had a great deal of autonomy in making decisions about the direction of the school. Of course, my principal monitored my performance, taught me to reflect on my work, and provided guidance and support when I made mistakes. Again, my tenure as an assistant principal was a valuable experience in preparing me to take on my own school.

But what about the assistant principals who do not have that kind of relationship with their principals? The nature of the two positions is vastly different; it has been described as the principal sees the forest and the assistant principal sees the individual trees. A day in the life of the principal is fundamentally different than a day in the life of an assistant principal. Knowing that, how can districts effectively use the assistant principalship to both prepare leaders to effectively lead in that position as well as prepare them to become principals? This is a topic worthy of further research.

Further Research

A few questions that developed out of this study warrant further examination:

1. *This study focused on what new principals want in terms of district support. But what do districts want in terms of principal preparation?* I think it is important to gain more insight into districts' perspectives on induction. If it is deemed important, what are the obstacles districts face that limit their implementation? If a district offers any form of novice principal support, what is it and on what principles is it based?

2. *What are the differences between districts that provide induction programs and those that do not?* It would be interesting to know if there are differences and, if so, what they are. I am most interested in differences in student achievement, leader retention, and leader promotion.

3. *Are there differences between the quality of work of principals who participated in an induction program versus those principals who did not? If so, what are they?* It would have been interesting to do a comparison/contrast study of a body of work completed by principals who experienced an induction program and those who did not.

4. *At what point does the induction process end?* There was discussion about whether or not an induction program would be a multiple-year program. I am also interested in knowing more about induction and learning in relation to the Dreyfus model of skill acquisition. At what stage does induction become continuing education and is there really a difference?

Final Thoughts

I am Ruth; I have been a principal for 8 years now. I have served as a principal at all three levels--elementary, middle, and high school. I am an accomplished leader, but I think it has taken me too long to recognize and believe that about myself. Still, I sometimes wonder, would I be a better leader if I had just had some formal support during my first years? Would I know more? Have a deeper understanding of the nuances of being the principal?

This research study has led me to believe so. Had I been in a formal induction program, I think I would know more about my district's fundamental operating philosophies. I think I would have had a greater understanding about the district's expectations for leadership. My theoretical knowledge would have more quickly become practical know-how. That knowledge could have given me permission to be more of a risk-taker. Had I known the rules of the game, I could have played the game with greater intensity and challenged those rules. Instead, I spent time figuring out the rules on my own, sometimes misinterpreting them and losing out on great opportunities for my school. Thank goodness I never broke a rule that cost me my job. Like Principal Jackson, recognizing lost opportunities because I did not know what I did not know is extremely frustrating. It is also disappointing to know that my lack of knowledge hurt my school.

I also think had I been in a formal induction program, I would have stronger, deeper relationships with my peers. Many of us are still in this system, but there is little sense of

community. Some of us are no longer serving in the schools where we started our careers as principals; we have separated into the different grade-levels, and there is no tie that binds us, no sense of belonging to a specific group. Even as I think on it now, I do not remember who was a first-year principal in 2004. I feel an incredible sense of loss, possible friendships that could have stood the test of time.

I now contemplate my future as a result of this study. I learned a great deal about the model of skill acquisition and the relationship between that and theory and practice. There are certain aspects of my position in which I function at an expert level, and there are areas in which I am competent and working toward proficiency. But what about those opportunities to serve at a higher level in the district's hierarchy? In my current position, am I acquiring the skills and experiences necessary to be competent as a district director, assistant superintendent, or even a superintendent? I can make opportunities to get those experiences on my own, but what can my district do to nurture my leadership growth and promotion? Our profession calls for us to be lifelong learners, but our district does not provide the opportunities or situations in which that learning can occur.

I also think I can do more to prepare my assistant principals to become principals. I believe I do a good job in showing and teaching them about the aspects of my job that are different than theirs, but I know it can be more formalized and I can hold them more accountable for learning and practice.

I look forward to sharing the results of this study with my district leaders. As I stated earlier, my hope is to use the results of this study to inform induction program design at the district level. Currently, leadership development is a strong focus in my district. We have a Leadership Advance meeting each summer, first-year principals work with a consultant on a

regular basis, and we attend monthly principals meetings that are designed to keep us focused on our work that drives district initiatives for improved student academic achievement. I think all of those components are a sound foundation for extensive professional learning. But we can do so much more. I would like the district to revive the Aspiring Principals program; it was cut due to funding and a shallow pool of candidates. Additionally, I hope my district will use these results to develop professional learning focused on preparing assistant principals for the principalship and preparing principals for district-level positions.

Even though I am considered a strong leader by my superintendent, I would have enjoyed and appreciated the opportunity of participating in an induction program. My final conclusion as a result of this research project is that I could have benefitted greatly from a support program. Although it would not have solved every problem I faced as a new principal, it would have helped me be a better principal in that first year. While I did not have that opportunity, I sought out opportunities to grow professionally. I have developed into a strong leader by my own will and my own design. It is what successful leaders do. But what of the many potential leaders who have been lost in the struggle?

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